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CONVERGENCE OF DIVERSE INTELLECTS

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DISCOVERING
THE HIDDEN GEMS OF ECONOMICS

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LETTER

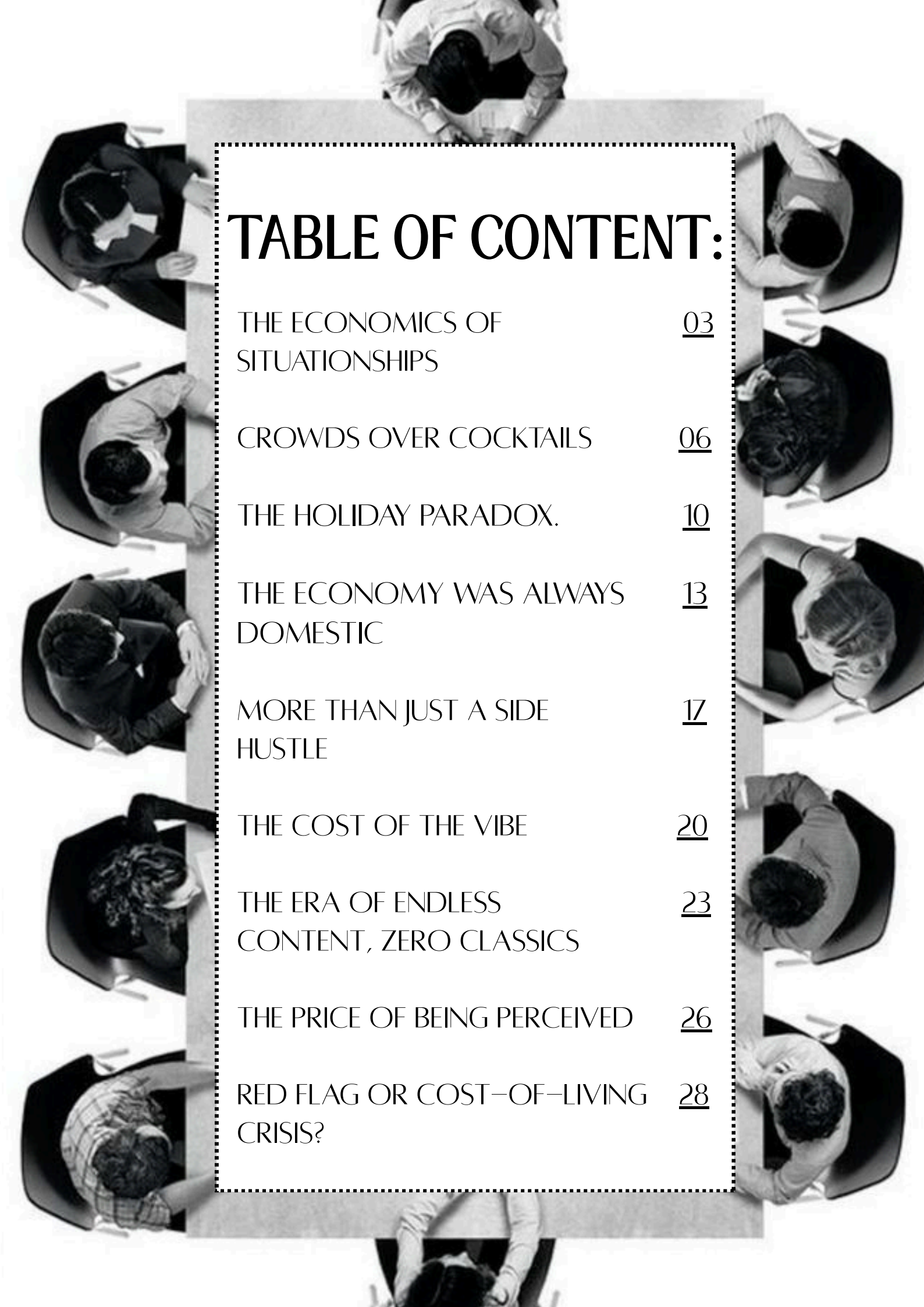

TABLE OF CONTENT:

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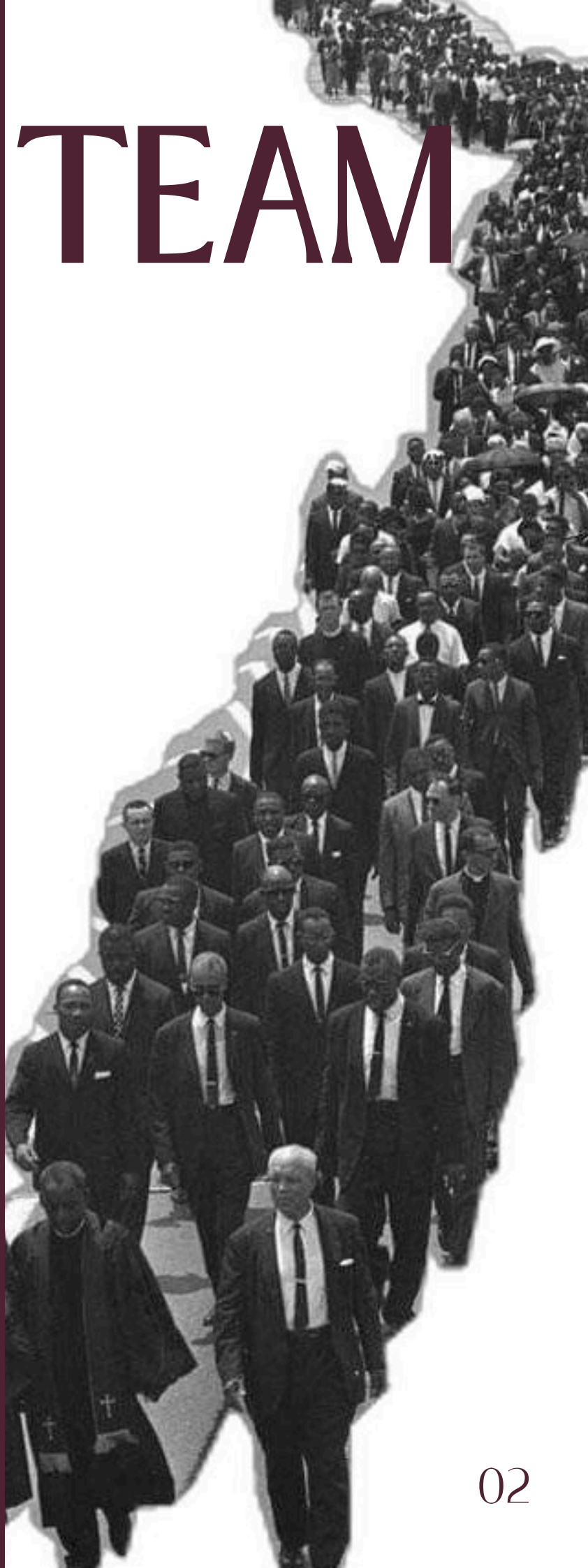
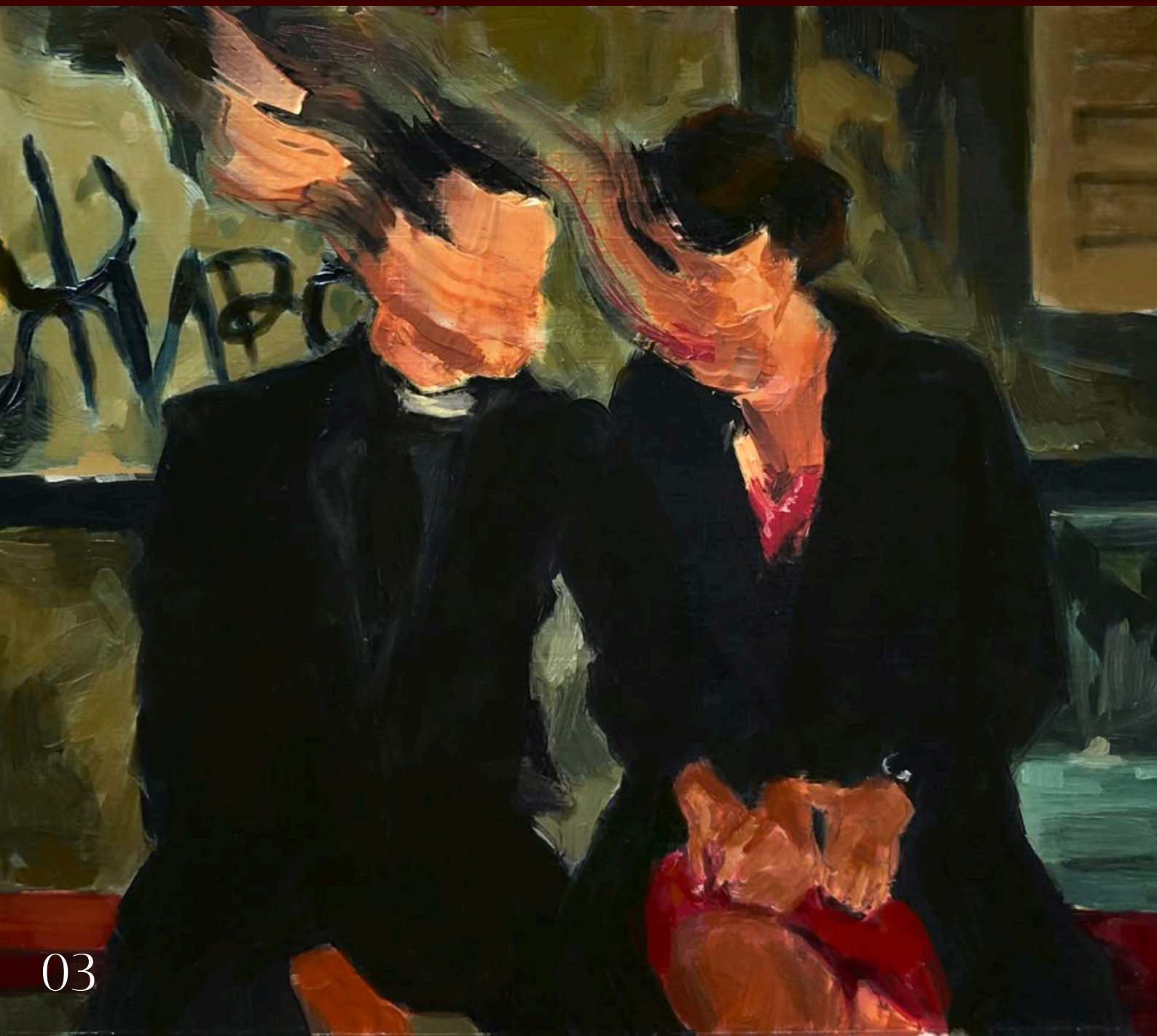


THE ECONOMICS OF *Situationships*

By Anaaya Wahi
Edited by Meera Shyam Sundar



Although Gen-Z's dating terminology, such as "red flags," "beige flags," and "situationships," may sound frivolous or internet-driven, it reflects a deeper social and economic effect on the younger generation. The concept and practice of commitment have changed significantly as a result of delayed financial independence, rising housing costs, student debt and, fluctuating income paths. Modern dating habits are a reflection of rational responses to economic uncertainties rather than emotional immaturity.

This change is mainly backed up by empirical patterns. Gen-Z is getting married later than earlier generations in every country. The average age for marriage has surpassed 30 in many developed nations and Urban India is showing similar trends. Whereas, entry-level wages have failed to keep up with inflation, especially in cities where real estate prices have skyrocketed. While real pay growth for young workers remained steady, rents in major Indian cities increased by approximately 15–25% between 2022 and 2025. These factors make long-term commitment more financially risky by postponing the typical indicators of adulthood, such as cohabitation, moving out, and marriage. In this case, situationships are a reflection of more general economic uncertainty.

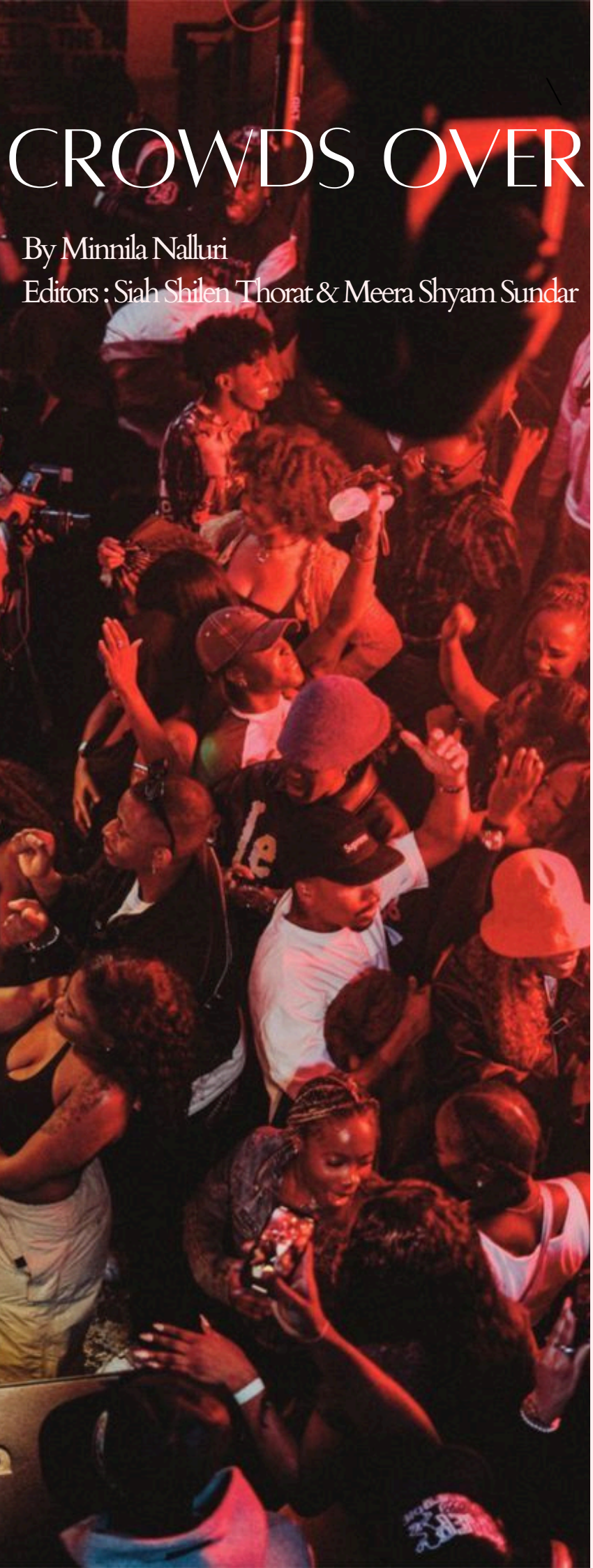
They function as low-risk arrangements in an environment where future income and stability are uncertain because of their minimum long-term duty, low commitment and flexible expectations. These relationships reduce sunk costs, both emotional and monetary, from an economic point of view. A popular idea in economic theory, "decision-making under uncertainty," states that when predicted future benefits are uncertain, people delay making irreversible commitments. This reasoning is closely mirrored in contemporary dating behaviour.

These dynamics become more apparent when dating is interpreted as a sequence of micro-economic agreements. Without the presence of formal contracts, people trade time, money and emotional labour and they constantly evaluate the advantages and disadvantages. Behaviours that are often referred to as "red flags" like, avoiding pricey dates, putting work ahead of availability or postponing independence might, in reality, be the result of time constraints and financial limitations. People who work multiple jobs or side gigs exhibit lower emotional bandwidth and social involvement, according to research on time poverty. Surveys reveal that over 60% of Gen-Z workers worldwide work a side gig, mainly out of need rather than choice.

By promoting intimacy, dating apps worsen these economic characteristics. Algorithm-driven platforms increase choice overload, decrease switching costs and turn attention into a limited resource. According to some economic models, individuals postpone making legally binding decisions when there are plenty of choices and low exit costs. Long-term uncertainty becomes a logical result in these markets. Hence, dating apps strengthen situationships through altering incentives surrounding commitment instead of weakening it.

Additionally, this approach does not acknowledge the existence of real warning signs like disrespect or manipulation. Instead, it warns against viewing financial hardship as an indication of personal failure. In the current volatile economic environment, so-called “beige flags” represent traits that are neither ideal nor deal-breaking, but instead signal a higher degree of risk assessment under uncertainty.

When viewed from an economic perspective, Gen-Z's dating culture is logical rather than anti commitment. In a world when long-term professional and financial security seems increasingly impractical, it is an optimization of emotional investment. Modern dating is as much an economic trend as much as a cultural one since incentives are influenced by economic conditions, which in turn dictate intimacy. So, the next time you call someone’s behaviour a red flag, maybe give it a second thought.



CROWDS OVER *Cocktails*

By Minnila Nalluri
Editors : Siah Shilen Thorat & Meera Shyam Sundar

If your Instagram feed over the last few months looks suspiciously repetitive - dim lights, crowded dance floors and the same location tag do not blame campus trends just yet, instead start with economics. Over the past few months, Sumosh, the newly opened club near our campus, has gone from being just another nightlife option to becoming a phenomenon students felt compelled to experience at least once.

What makes this rise particularly interesting is that the club scene around Jindal has never been scarce, with established popular spots such as DeJour, Jannat, Green Square and others already operating near campus, Sumosh's blow-up cannot be explained by a lack of alternatives and definitely not by a lack of a party scene at Jindal. Instead, it reflects on how experience economics and behavioural economics quietly shape student consumption, even in something as seemingly casual as a night out.

To understand this better, it is important to first look at the concept of “experience economics”.

It refers to an economy where consumers derive value not merely from goods or services, but from experiences, memories, emotions and the stories attached to the consumption. Sumosh did not market itself as just a place to drink and party, instead, it marketed itself as a Gen Z experience, with its tagline on Google being “Best Bar near Delhi” and its Instagram Bio being “The Elite’s Playground. A new era of nightlife.”

Going to Sumosh was framed more as the ultimate college party experience, something every student “had to do at least once.” This shift transformed the club from a normal functional service into a symbolic experience, increasing its perceived value without significantly changing the actual product being offered. Behavioral economics also helps explain why this strategy worked so effectively. Traditional economic theory assumes that rational consumers make decisions based on price and utility, however, behavioural economics recognizes that consumers are influenced by social cues, emotions, and cognitive biases. One such bias is “herd behaviour”, where individuals follow the actions of others rather than making independent decisions. As more students began visiting Sumosh and posting about it in their stories, labelling it as “the party spot”, others followed, assuming that the sudden popularity indicated superior quality or a “once in a lifetime experience.”

Social media intensified this through "network effects", a concept where the value of a product or experience increases as more people use it. Every Instagram story about Sumosh increased its visibility, making it appear more desirable. From its well-market opening night, promising that the city's nightlife will never be the same again to branding itself as a "gateway to wild nights reserved for the elite" which ended up gaining a lot of attention and a new label as the latest new attraction and the ultimate party spot the students would miss the most when they go home for semester break. Over time, this created something called an "information cascade", which is a behavioral phenomenon where individuals make the same decision by observing others' actions, ignoring their own private information. This is seen here as students chose to go to Sumosh not necessarily because they preferred it for what it uniquely offered, but because everyone else was going and missing out on the experience began to feel costly, giving rise to what we popularly call, "FOMO", the fear of missing out which acted as a powerful behavioural driver of demand. Sumosh further strengthened this demand by hosting themed events like Halloween parties which it labeled as "One Hell of a Halloween" and other special nights.

They once again strongly emphasized on curating an experience, not just a party whilst maintaining their selling point that these parties were for the "elite." From an economic perspective, these events and marketing strategy introduced "artificial scarcity", the act of intentionally limiting the supply of a product or resource, even when more could be produced, to drive up demand, perceived value, and prices. Behavioural economics also shows that consumers place higher value on experiences that are limited in time or availability. So, when an event is framed as "one night only" or "exclusive," students think it has higher value, even if similar experiences are easily available, and have been for years. Hence, students are more willing to spend money and prioritize attendance and stories, reinforcing Sumosh's position as an exclusive party destination. Over time, this strategy altered Jindal's established party culture. Thursdays, which once primarily revolved around De Jour, Green Square and other such places, now increasingly revolve around a single revenue, showing us how experience-based branding can reshape consumer expectations.

If the night out was socially relevant and made for a good Instagram story, that's all that mattered. Money, affordability and enjoyment became secondary. However, Sumosh's success was not isolated. It also benefitted significantly from the "cluster economy", also known as "agglomeration economics." Businesses often choose to locate themselves near their competitors which seems counter intuitive. However, having multiple similar sellers in the same place creates a cluster. In Jindal, this cluster of clubs creates a nightlife, attracting students to a new competitor in a known location. Rather than creating new demand, Sumosh redistributed existing demand within this cluster. Students were already going out and Sumosh knew just how to become the preferred option. This is also a characteristic of "destination markets", where consumers travel to an area for a range of options but end up gravitating toward one standout experience. Here, competition from other clubs did not weaken Sumosh's position. Instead, it indirectly strengthened it by sustaining the overall nightlife ecosystem around the campus. The fact that previously existing and established competition did not prevent Sumosh's dominance shows that in markets driven by experiences, consumers are not maximizing value based purely on price or functionality, they are maximizing emotional utility and social capital. Paying to enter Sumosh was not just paying for music or drinks, but it was paying for inclusion in a shared campus narrative which explains why students were willing to queue, spend, and repeatedly return despite having other equally enjoyable alternatives.

When viewed more broadly, Sumosh's rise reflects a wider Gen Z consumption pattern where young consumers increasingly prioritize experiences that are memorable, socially validated, and identity-forming. Hence, businesses who understand this become more powerful, particularly in a college setting, where social belonging plays a central role in daily life. Ultimately, Sumosh did more than open a new nightclub near campus; it demonstrated how economic concepts we often study in textbooks play out in everyday student life. Sumosh reveals how value today is often created not through tangible differences, but through perception, psychology, and experience. So, the next time you find yourself scrolling through more Sumosh stories, it might be worth pausing to recognise the quiet economic lesson behind it. What looks like a popular club is, in reality, experience economics, behavioural economics, and cluster economies working together right outside our campus gates. Sumosh's story shows that economics is not just about the stereotypical prices and markets but also about behaviour, identity, and the subtle forces that shape how we choose to spend our money, and our Thursdays.

The Holiday Paradox: Gen Z Wellbeing and the Economics of Seasonal Celebration

By Siah Shilen Thorat
Edited By : Vidya Karthik & Shreya Prashanth

The holiday season is often treated as an emotional constant, a period people plan meticulously to secure a sense of joy. This makes happiness less a feeling and more a social obligation reinforced by advertising, family rituals, and workplace culture. From Secret Santa exchanges to family dinners, festive practices create a narrative of cheer and contentment.

Yet, beneath this narrative lies a contradiction. For many, particularly younger people, the pressure to "perform" happiness during the holidays replaces joy with heightened anxiety, worsening mental health, and increased reliance on substances as coping mechanisms. While this is often framed as a cultural or psychological issue, it also produces tangible economic consequences, visible in consumption patterns, healthcare demand, and seasonal labour markets.

Happiness, in this context, functions almost like a seasonal norm, the deviation from which carries a social cost. Younger generations, especially Gen Z, report experiencing this pressure more intensely than their elders, in part due to greater social visibility and comparison. A 2025 study on holiday-related social anxiety found that individuals aged 18 to 34 were significantly more likely to experience elevated stress around holiday gatherings, citingfinancial strain, interpersonal tensions, and exhaustion from sustained emotional performance.

Nearly 70 per cent of respondents reported feeling compelled to appear happier than they actually were during the holiday season, with Gen Z reporting the highest levels of this emotional dissonance.

This pressure rarely operates in isolation. Instead, it compounds vulnerabilities that already tend to worsen during the winter months, including loneliness, depressive symptoms, and seasonal affective patterns driven by reduced daylight and disrupted routines. Surveys conducted by mental health organisations consistently indicate a rise in anxiety and depressive symptoms during the holiday period. One such survey found that nearly one in three adults experienced heightened mental health challenges during the holidays compared to other times of the year, suggesting that the season amplifies psychological strain rather than alleviating it.

For young people, these effects are often intensified by structural uncertainty. Students returning home may be forced to confront unresolved family dynamics, while young professionals navigate financial insecurity and social comparison at a time when fulfilment is expected to be publicly displayed. The insistence that the holidays represent a universally joyful period leaves little space to acknowledge the emotional fatigue that accompanies it, creating a gap between lived experience and socially acceptable emotion. It is within this gap that unhealthy coping mechanisms often emerge in this gap, most visibly in patterns of substance use.

The holiday season has long been associated with increased alcohol consumption, but recent data suggests that this rise is particularly pronounced among Gen Z. While some raise a glass in the festive spirit, many others use alcohol as a coping mechanism, an escape. Generation Z is often described as drinking less overall; however, studies indicate that their consumption spikes sharply during the holidays. One report found that approximately 65 per cent of Gen Z drinkers consume more alcohol during the holiday season than at other times, often in settings where abstention is socially discouraged. Another study reported that over half of Gen Z respondents experienced increased cravings for alcohol or other substances during the holidays, with social pressure and emotional stress cited as key contributors.

Economically, these behaviours translate into demand patterns that are visible but rarely interrogated. Alcohol sales rise sharply in December, contributing to short-term growth in retail and hospitality. At the same time, therapists, treatment centres, and crisis services report increased demand during and immediately after the holiday season, accompanied by increased spending on mental health apps and wellness platforms. These trends reflect not only increased awareness, but the growing tendency to manage emotional strain through market-based solutions. Seasonal labour markets further complicate this picture. A seemingly positive effect is that retail and hospitality industries expand hiring to meet holiday demand, temporarily boosting employment figures. However, these jobs often involve long hours, high emotional labour, and limited security, with younger workers expected to project holiday cheer while managing high workloads. As a result, the economic gains of seasonal employment coexist with heightened stress, reinforcing the pressures that drive holiday distress in the first place. Taken together, these patterns challenge the conventional framing of the holidays as an unqualified economic boom. While spending increases and employment expands, these gains are connected to emotional costs that manifest in healthcare demand, substance use, andcoping-driven consumption. A fuller understanding of holiday economics requires moving beyond sales figures to account for mental health, emotional labour, and the quieter costs of compulsory cheer.

The Economy Was Always Domestic:

How Women's Household Labour Went Platform-Scale

By Keya Bisht
Edited by Minnila Nalluri & Meera Shyam Sundar

I. Household Labour and Its Fiction

There is a misconception that modern economies were built in just factories, offices and markets; they were also built in homes. Feminist economists have long argued that the separation between productive labour and domestic labour is not natural but constructed. They argue that acts such as cooking, cleaning, sewing, caring, mending and organising were treated as instinctive expressions of femininity rather than skilled work, precisely so that they could remain unpaid and invisible. By morphing household labour as a stereotypical and natural characteristic of the identity of femininity this chunk of the workforce has gone unseen for generations. Framing this labour as one of love and duty has allowed economic systems to extract value without acknowledging cost.

Barbara Ehrenreich and Deirdre English trace this erasure historically, showing how women's work was progressively stripped of legitimacy with the emergence of the capitalistic society, which reorganised production.

However, even as industrialisation pulled visible manufacturing out of the home, women did not stop working. Instead, their labour was redefined as support rather than production. Housework expanded rather than contracted, acquiring new standards of cleanliness, care and moral responsibility. The labour remained essential, but it was no longer recognised as economic activity. Further with the emergence of experts, domestic scientists and medical authorities, knowledge that women held and passed on for centuries was branded as unscientific and homely. These viable skills were delegitimised in favour of professionalised systems which were dominated by men.

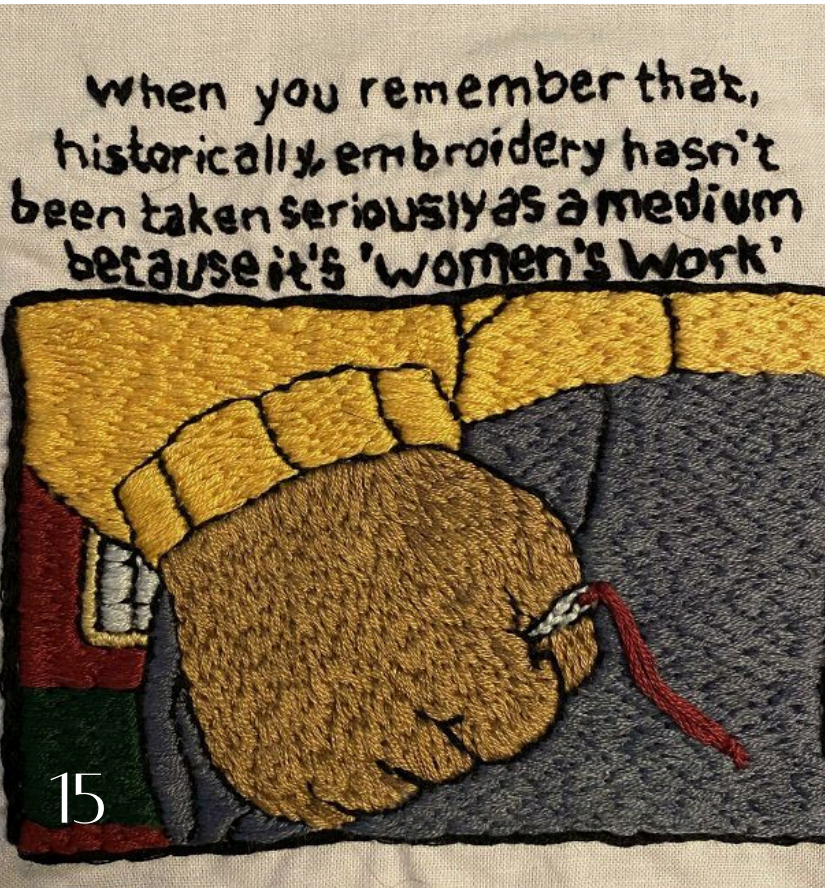
This resulted in healthy workers, and social stability while remaining excluded from wages, contracts, and legal protection. Women were never absent from the economy; their work was simply absorbed without recognition.

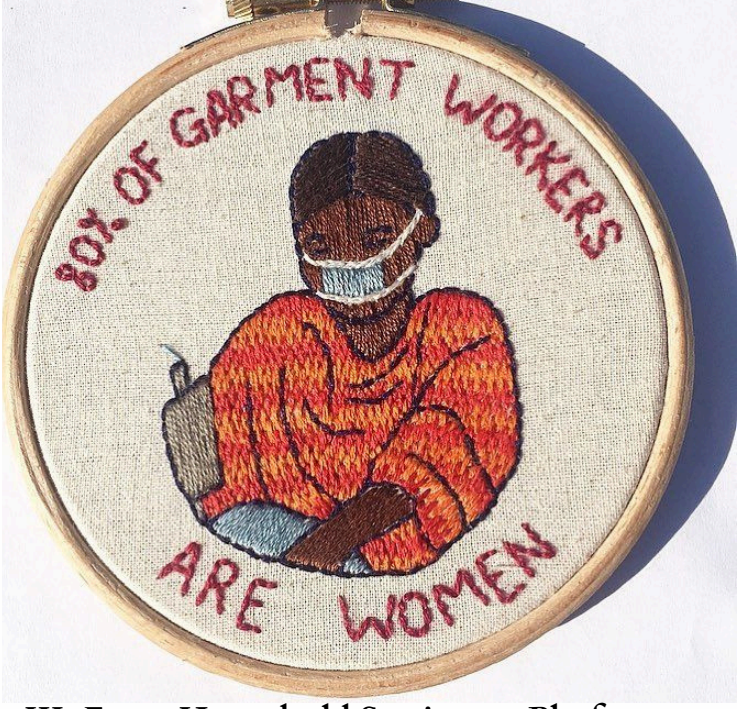
II. Sewing as Survival, Skill and Knowledge

Sewing is among the most enduring forms of this labour and historically this was not a creative act but more of a survival skill. As the economies changed and fell, clothes were more expensive and in order to make them more long lasting, women learned to mend, alter and repurpose garments to account for wear and tear, changing bodies and everyday use. However, this required technical awareness and knowledge of fabrics, movement, even anatomy. Decisions made on colour, cut and use were not purely for aesthetic purposes but were of scientific and practical importance.

Even so, sewing continued to be deemed a womanly hobby, only taught as home education. Then as tailoring and fashion design became professionalised and male-dominated, domestic sewing was further feminised and devalued. Ehrenreich and English show that even when women's skills were formalised through domestic science, the aim has always been control, not empowerment. Housework was praised in theory while remaining unpaid in practice.

This history is important because contemporary fashion entrepreneurship does not appear out of thin air. Thrift stores, upcycling brands, and slow fashion initiatives are framed as new or even disruptive, when they are really reactivations of skills women have long held and practised. What has changed is not the labour itself, but the visibility of the space of practice.





III. From Household Sewing to Platform Economies

Through the emergence of digital development, social media platforms have allowed such domestic skills to re-enter the market under newer conditions. Instagram thrift stores, Pinterest-inspired styling pages, and community fashion accounts turn household knowledge into content and commerce. A private practice, unrecognised and forgotten is now translating into a medium of capitalism that the majority recognises and speaks. Therefore, through such platforms and hustle culture, which reward constant output and aesthetic consistency, capitalistic consuming culture, such work can finally be of economic benefit.

The tension of requiring labour that resembles domestic maintenance, this work being continuous, feminised and majorly unprotected is captured by *Girlsdontdressforboys*. A small business run on Instagram, which challenges the male gaze on women's clothing and fashion. This page forwards an empowering, encouraging message for women to dress for themselves and to hone and honour self-expression rather than desirability. The reason why this page works is because of the platform and space that a very domestic and household chore fits into,

suddenly now becoming economically valuable and rebranded simply because of it being produced in a different space.

IV. Designing for Women as Lived Experience

Another gap in economic and traditional thinking is exposed through the rise of women led brands which design explicitly for women. Blogilates is the best example for this, unlike conventional activewear by companies driven by general and abstract market research, Blogilates chose to build on lived experiences and the ongoing complaints of women, taking and creating from an embodied knowledge of movement, discomfort, sizing, and everyday use. This mirrors household labour, where women have long understood what clothes need to do because they live in them. Blogilates succeeds not despite this feminised knowledge, but because of it, showing how experiential insight can outperform top-down design, even as the labour remains intensive and ongoing.

V. Nishorama and the Politics of Craft

Nishorama's work sits at the intersection of craft, care and resistance centring sewing as intentional labour rather than disposable trend. This is rooted in slow, intentional handiwork and builds on aesthetics and trends that were once used to oppress women like bodices and corsets that are now redesigned in a more empowering manner. This approach also directly challenges fast fashion's logic of speed and imitation. This outlook also risks vulnerability within existing legal and economic frameworks, due to weak intellectual property protections which render originality difficult to achieve, it is challenging to shift from trends of fast fashion to layered and crafted work. However, by prioritising this, Nishorama echoes historical domestic labour values which find their foundations in care and skill more than anything else.

VI. Conclusion: Continuity, Recognition and the Future

These examples collectively reveal a structural failure, where women's household labour has become visible and monetizable, but not fully recognised or protected. Furthermore, one must ask whether the space of capitalism which allows such recognition is a recognition to begin with. Such platforms extract value without stability and neglect true recognition and change.

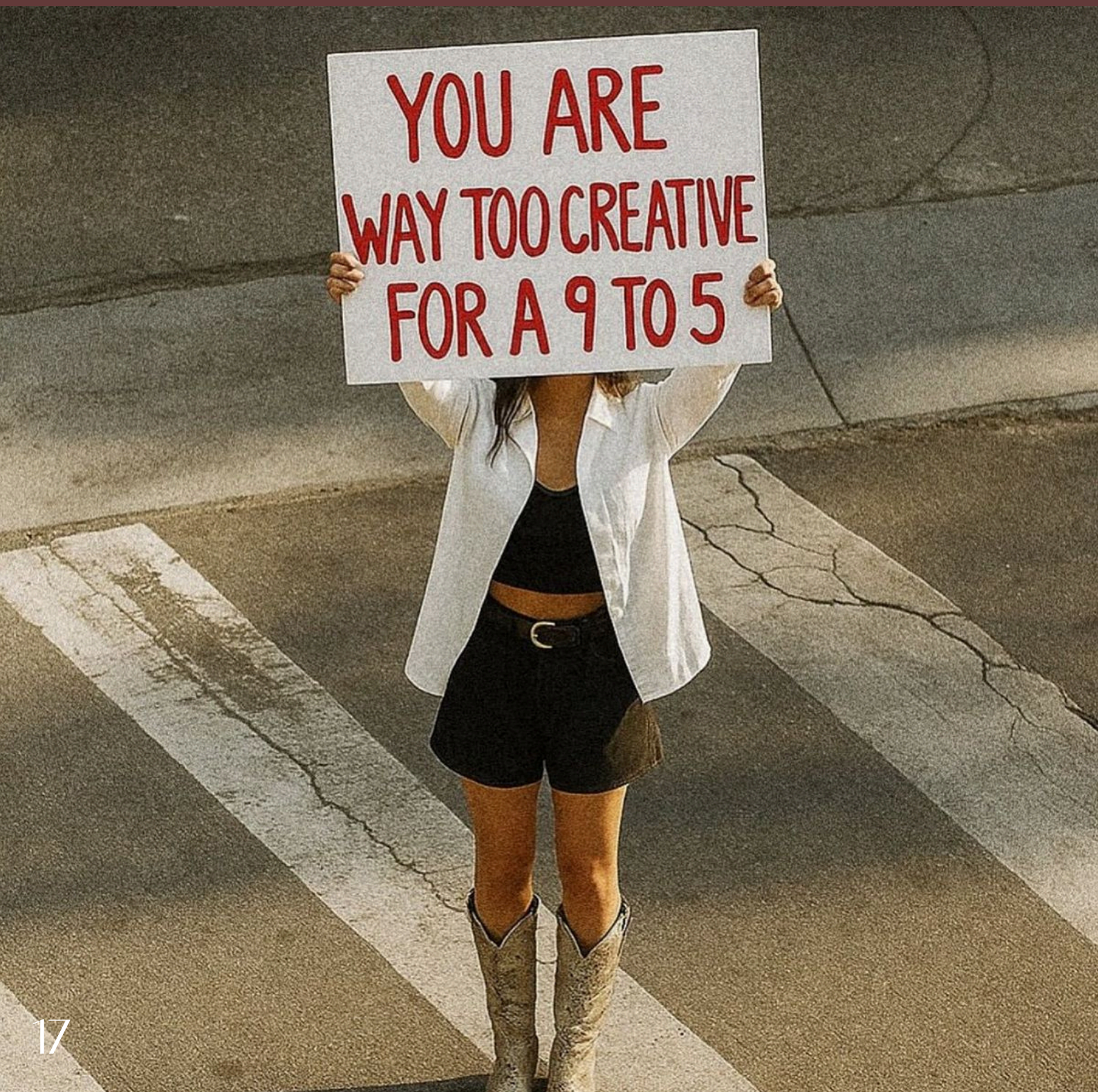
Ehrenreich and English remind us that visibility should not be mistaken for liberation. Thesame systems that once confined women to domesticity now draw on their skills without addressing underlying inequities. Women are not newly entering the market; the household was always a site of production and care was always work.

What has changed is scale and site, not substance. To recognise this continuity will require more than celebration, but a rethinking on how labour is defined, valued and protected.

Until household labour, whether performed at home or online, is treated as economically legitimate, women will continue to build markets that profit others more than themselves. The economy was always domestic. The question is whether it will finally admit it.

MORE THAN JUST A "Side Hustle"

BY VIDYA SB KARTHIK
EDITED BIPUL KUMAR & SHREYA PRASHANTH



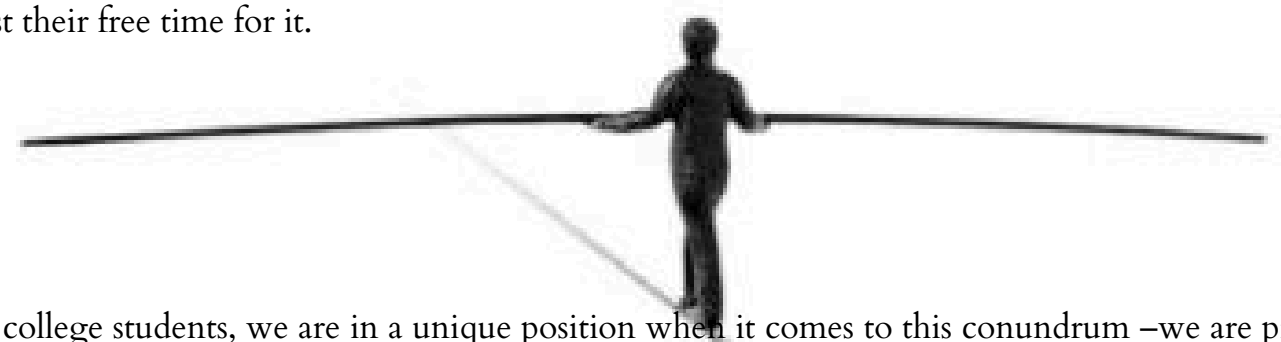
"A straw in the wind" is an idiom frequently used in business and economic contexts. It refers to a small or seemingly trivial event that signals a larger trend, shift in public opinion, or future development. Observing such small happenings –the "straw"– can help you understand the broader economic or social shifts –the "wind". (collunsdictionary, n.d.) This article examines student-run businesses at Jindal and how they showcase a unique aspect of Gen Z's attitude towards work, money, and culture. Most readers must be quite familiar with the term "hustle culture", which emphasises working hard and making as much money as possible. Since most students are not engaged in full-time employment, the term doesn't technically apply to us. However, the concept of a "side hustle", which has steadily been gaining popularity, resonates far more with students.

Living in a hostel often feels like a trial run at being at adulthood. You get to live away from home, manage your own expenses, make your own schedules, and even handle the mundane task of getting ready for class. Most relevant here how this experience teaches financial management. Almost all of us live on a budget, some tighter than others, but a budget nonetheless. I know most students can relate to the experience of overspending in the first week, only to hold back cravings for the rest of the month.. This is because college is the first time that we are almost completely in charge of where we spend the money we get. The abundance of food courts, trucks, and stalls makes it hard to resist, especially when mess food starts to feel monotonous and we crave something tastier or more familiar. However, the prices, while lowered compared to regular outlets, still prove high for most college students. Even though prices are lower than outside outlets, they remain high for most students.

All this leads to something interesting I have noticed about the businesses run by students in Jindal – most of them are food-related. These student entrepreneurs know what it is like to have to pay double for a brownie, or settle for instant noodles to satisfy your midnight cravings because the monthly budget is already blown.. Wouldn't it be great to be able to enjoy good food at a reasonable price, and not have to get up and walk to the pantry in the dead of night to make your noodles?. So, why not come up with solutions for these problems? Necessity breeds innovation, and students with a passion for cooking and an entrepreneurial spirit are seizing this opportunity to solve a shared problem while making a profit.. This applies to not just food - related businesses, but to most student enterprises.. At first glance, student businesses may seem like side hustles to help with an increased spending capacity for college life. But conversations with student entrepreneurs reveal a deeper motivation. Their driving force is not money, but rather an outlet for passion, talent, and creative expression. That's not to say they don't earn money, it just wasn't the initial reason they set up in the first place.

College offers something of a safety net for students in terms of trying new things and taking on new responsibilities. It's a time to explore new paths without the full pressure of financial self- reliance. This means that even something like a business, which is traditionally a means of livelihood, instead becomes more of a profitable hobby.

This reflects a broader trend I've noticed, from friends, peers and from interacting with people at various internships. Having spent a couple of years in complete lockdown and social isolation due to COVID-19, I think we have come to realise the importance of finding a workplace environment where you can interact with your colleagues, not just at work but also as friends. There seems to be an increased emphasis on not simply finding a satisfactory work-life balance, but also on actually enjoying the work in the first place. (Carnegie, 2023) While the cash inflow that comes with hustle culture might be tempting, it loses its allure once people realise that they are sacrificing more than just their free time for it.

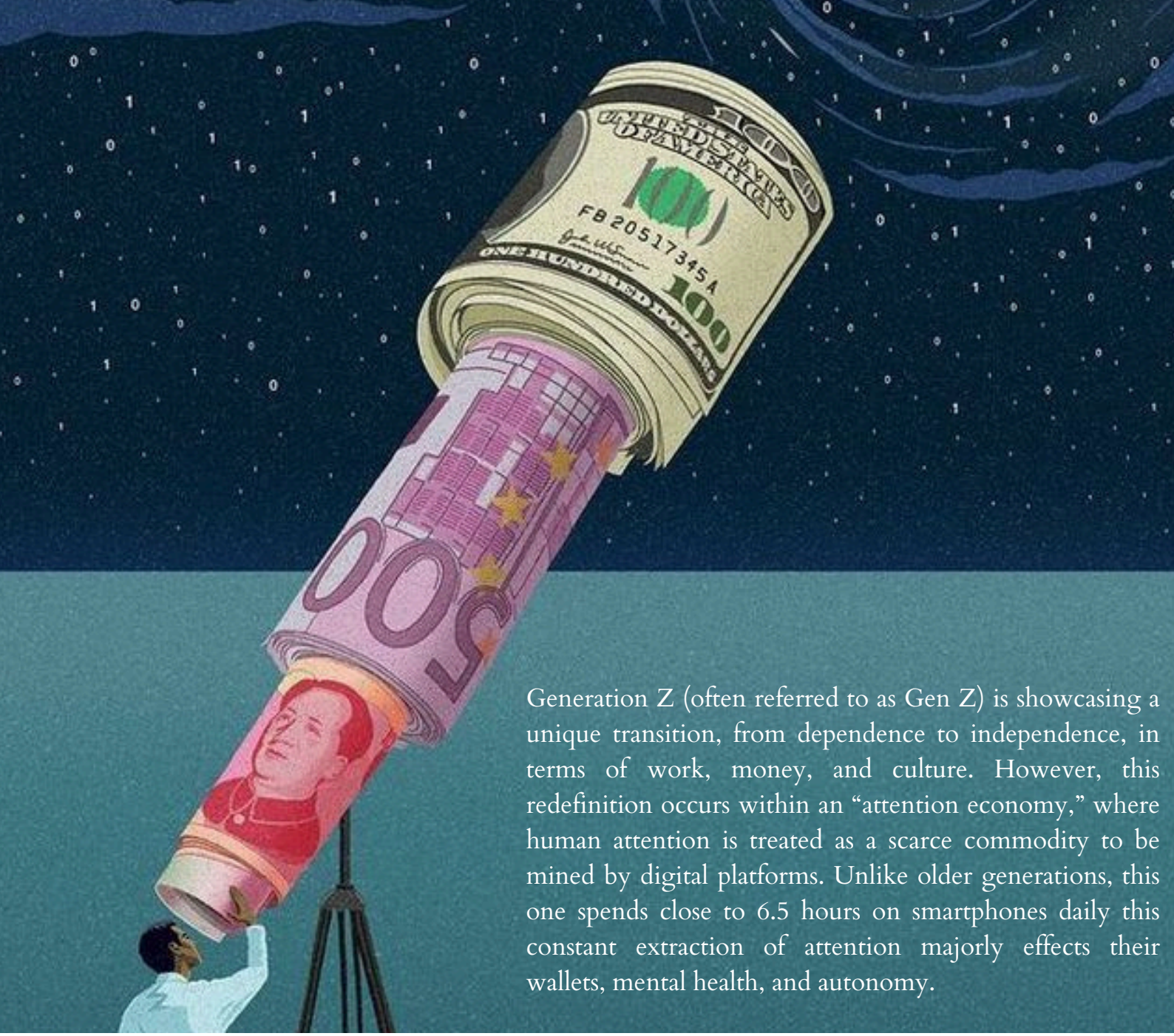


As college students, we are in a unique position when it comes to this conundrum –we are privileged enough not to have to worry about taking up jobs to pay our fees. This means that any business started is not because the students behind it need the money, but because it comes from a place of passion and an understanding of the needs of fellow students. Hustle culture began as a response to the breakdown of financial security. People began using the youth to earn early, hoping to enjoy the fruits of their labour later. To put it simply, think of Hritik Roshan's character in Zindagi Na Milegi Dobara. Hustling rests on the promise of a delayed life – work now, live freely later. Or even work now, so that you do not have to worry about your spending limits (Future of Work, 2020). However, this mindset does not align with the reason why students are starting businesses in Jindal. While I do believe college businesses may emerge from budget constraints, they're less about earning money to be able to spend more, and more about recognising the existence of a limited budget and creatively navigating them.

THE COST OF THE VIBE

– BY BIPUL KUMAR

EDITED BY KEYA BISHT & MEERA SHYAM SUNDAR



Generation Z (often referred to as Gen Z) is showcasing a unique transition, from dependence to independence, in terms of work, money, and culture. However, this redefinition occurs within an "attention economy," where human attention is treated as a scarce commodity to be mined by digital platforms. Unlike older generations, this one spends close to 6.5 hours on smartphones daily this constant extraction of attention majorly effects their wallets, mental health, and autonomy.

The Scarcity of Attention

In this digital ecosystem, attention is the rarest currency. Platforms, using AI and Big Data attempt to create a cycle of "participation-extraction-tuning" via which they succeed to attract users and distract their focus. This has led to a transition from "deep attention" to "hyperattention", a cognitive style adapted for rapidly changing digital environments but detrimental to sustained concentration. Short time framed content such as Instagram reels or YouTube shorts has led to reduction in attention spans, leading to subsequent low academic performance.

The High Cost of Aesthetics

This fragmented attention results to a chaotic economic reality where the "creator economy" pushes influencers to monetise attention, which subsequently impact Gen Z's spending habits. The pressure to curate an "Instagrammable" life means that aesthetics often dictates financial decisions. Statistics show that in the $130 billion Indian wedding industry, 38.5% of couples now prioritise the overall "vibe" and look of the event over tradition, with over half opting for destination weddings. Moreover, Gen Z is also prone to impulsive spending because of social media advertising and "finfluencers" who promote practices like crypto trading, without cautioning about its high-risk behaviour. Due to the trend of keeping up with internet aesthetics, from "Cottagecore" to "Dark Academia", Gen Z creates a cycle of consumption largely based on "Buy Now, Pay Later", an option where excess use can lead to debt trap.

Redefining Work and Relationships

There has been a significant rise in freelance and flexible work among this generation; for instance, between 2014 and 2024, the number of self-employed individuals aged 20-24 in the Netherlands more than tripled, rising from 35,000 to approximately 124,000. This move toward self-employment and flexible contracts allows Gen Z to demand employment conditions that suit their lives, specifically prioritizing a healthy work-life balance. They utilize “quiet quitting” and flexible work arrangements as mechanisms to prevent emotional breakdowns and prioritize their well-being over corporate expectations.”

There has been a significant rise in freelance and flexible work among this generation; for instance, between 2014 and 2024, the number of self-employed individuals aged 20-24 in the Netherlands more than tripled, rising from 35,000 to approximately 124,000. This move toward self- employment and flexible contracts allows Gen Z to demand employment conditions that suit their lives, specifically prioritizing a healthy work-life balance. They utilize “quiet quitting” and flexible work arrangements as mechanisms to prevent emotional breakdowns and prioritize their well- being over corporate expectations.

This recalibration extends to relationships. The social media discourse around the “bare minimum” reflects a generation questioning why basic decency, like a text back, is celebrated as a triumph. While internet aesthetics frame romance as a performance, many in Gen Z are opting out of emotional negotiation altogether, prioritizing self-preservation over performative connections.

Ultimately, Gen Z’s chaotic blend of high-consumption aesthetics and boundary-setting at work is a reaction to a system designed to privatise their minds. As attention becomes increasingly scarce, the fight for this generation is not just for financial stability, but for the autonomy to think deeply in a distracted world.

The Era of Endless Content, Zero Classics

– BY SHREYA VAKKALERI
EDITED BY MEERA SHYAM SUNDAR

Gen Z's watching habits are a study in contradictions—despite living in an era of seemingly endless content, yet not a single piece of media produced in recent years has acquired the status of a "classic". The popularity of streaming culture has made content easily accessible and fast-paced, but it has come at the cost of forgettability. Unlike Gen Z, previous generations can point to films and TV shows that have shaped collective memory and influenced the creation of trends. For instance, Friends shaped adulthood expectations, friendships and romance for a large group of millennials. In contrast, media trends among Gen Z are like stars—they burn bright and fast, only to be extinguished in an exceedingly short time. This article examines this contradiction, exploring whether today's media landscape is incapable of producing "classics", or whether the very idea of what constitutes a classic needs to be redefined.

Before understanding why the current era of media has not produced a "classic", it is imperative to understand what constitutes a "classic" film, or any other piece of media. Ben Mankiewicz, host of the cable TV network Turner Classic Movies, states that, beyond withstanding the test of time, a film becomes a "classic" if it constitutes two main elements—cinematic importance and an emotional resonance beyond the immediate viewing of the movie. For example, Michael Cutiz' Casablanca is one of the earliest examples of high-grade studio filmmaking, with three screenwriters narrating an emotionally moving tale through the finest stars of the 50s. Furthermore, these movies were played repeatedly across the same few channels, allowing them to cement in collective memory. As a result, filmmakers also wrote and directed films that they hoped would withstand the test of time, thereby investing effort, time, labour and capital into the same.

Fast-forwarding to today's era, which is marked by various streaming sites, we can witness a radical change in filmmakers' attitudes. The focus has shifted from quality to quantity since streaming platforms reward media that generates more views over artistic quality—a direct result of algorithm-driven greenlighting. The highest viewed series maintains its position for a few weeks before it is pushed aside for something else that has exceeded its view count; as a result, its memory is short-lived. Since the opportunity to let a film/ TV series cement in the memory of Gen Z has never withstood the test of time, nor the remaining two elements that mark a "classic" in modern cinema.

This begs the question—what prevents modern-day writers and filmmakers from spending time and effort to produce "classics"? There is no shortage of available labour, nor capital. The answer is one plain, simple word: economics. The streaming model makes it unprofitable for writers to create quality films and shows; instead, it incentivises them to produce as much media as possible to generate the views needed to bring in profits. A prime example illustrating this occurrence would be the Emmy-nominated Riot Games Arcane series—despite being a massive critical success, the show made a loss of approximately 88 million USD, having spent 250 million USD on production and receiving 3 million USD per episode from Netflix and Riot's parent company Tencent. Riot's co-founder Marc Merill admittedly stated that Riot had deviated from the norm of traditional in-studio production with tight deadlines, highlighting how most writers prefer to stick to safer and repeated formats to deliver short-term hikes in viewership at a lower risk. As a result, most media nowadays feels like a repetition of something we've seen before—similar plotlines, method of storytelling, recycled actors, and so on. Under these circumstances, artistic works are economically irrational.

Therefore, the current crop of writers and filmmakers have not been able to produce "classics" simply because it is not profitable. However, it would be rather hasty to judge whether a piece of media has withstood the test of time after a mere five or so years after its release; classic films take years to acquire this status. For the time being, we can contend ourselves with trying to establish a new meaning to what makes a film/ TV series/ limited series a "classic" in this era of seemingly endless content.

THE *Price* OF BEING PERCEIVED

–BY MERISSA BIJOY
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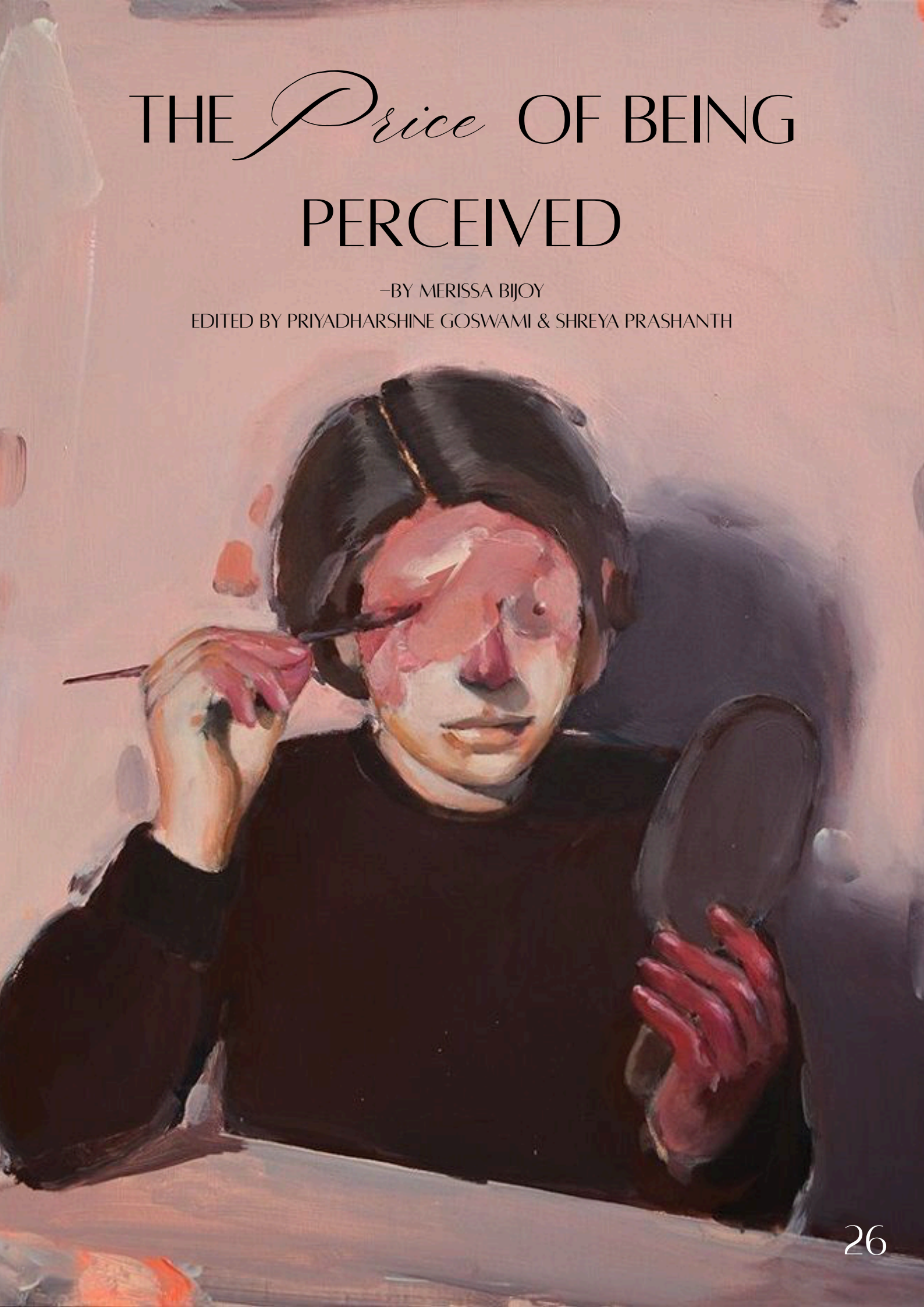


Gen Z's consumption patterns prioritize visibility on social media, where shareable experiences and micro-trends serve as social currency over long-term utility. This attention economy rewards rapid adoption of fleeting aesthetics, blending consumption with content creation. Research confirms these choices are not careless; rather, they reflect strategic adaptations to digital platforms, which constantly shape social and economic opportunities.

Micro-Trends Dynamics

Micro-trends in fashion, cafes, and travel rise and fall quickly, signalling cultural relevance. Participation brings high visibility rewards, even when trends lack longevity, as seen in Gen Z's embrace of Instagram-worthy spaces. This performative consumption builds social capital through timely posts. At first glance, such fleeting trends appear irrational or wasteful. However, their ephemerality is precisely what makes them valuable. Their rapid visibility is central to their value.

Participation signals cultural literacy and temporal relevance. Though fleeting, being “on trend” functions as a form of social capital, rewarding those who can quickly recognise and adopt emerging aesthetics. The cost of entry is often high relative to durability, but the
payoff lies in visibility and relevance rather than longevity.

Visibility as Economic Driver

Social platforms turn attention into a scarce and monetizable resource, with algorithms amplifying shareable goods. Gen Z invests in photogenic products to craft narratives of individuality and belonging, blurring the line between consumer and creator. Mobile shopping and influencer endorsements further entrench this loop. A café with average coffee but strong visual identity may outperform a technically superior competitor because it aligns with the grammar of social media platforms. Value is increasingly determined by how well a product acts as a prop, fits an online aesthetic, and integrates into a personal narrative. The traditional distinction between consumption and production collapses, as consumers actively produce images, stories, and identities through what they buy.

Strategic Adaptations

These habits represent rational responses a where online presence affects jobs and social networks. Documented experiences act as credentials for creativity and connectivity. Yet selectivity emerges, with cuts to everyday spending funding "high-value" indulgences. Algorithms reward engagement, and engagement rewards conformity to visual norms. Goods that are more “shareable” gain disproportionate visibility, which in turn enhances their perceived value. This creates a feedback loop ensures that attention generates value, which in turn attracts more attention. For Gen Z, consumption becomes a means of self-assertion within this cycle. Spending choices are shaped by how effectively they communicate individuality, taste, and belonging to an imagined audience. Therefore, spending becomes a key for individuals to distinguish themselves in digital spaces.

Hidden Costs

Constant trend-chasing fosters overconsumption, anxiety, and obsolescence fears. Perceptions of superficiality and homogenization arise from chasing instant gratification. Gen Z navigates this knowingly, prioritizing perception within a noticeability-driven
economy.

Thus one could infer that the the economy Gen Z inhabits is not limited to material goods or even experiences. It is an economy organised around noticeability itself. To be perceived is to exist meaningfully within it, and the price paid is not merely monetary but emotional, temporal, and social.

Red Flag or Cost-of-Living Crisis?

How to play: Read each situation and decide whether this is a Red Flag 🚩 or a Cost of Living Crisis 💸?
(There are no wrong answers, just economic context)

1. They avoid dinner dates and always suggest long walks.
(Romantic minimalism or inflation talking? 🚩 / 💸)

2. They refuse to move out of their parents' home even after graduating.
(Comfort zone or rising rent? 🚩 / 💸)

3. They take days to reply but say they're "just really busy lately."
(Emotional unavailability or juggling too much? 🚩 / 💸)

4. They always suggest free or low-effort plans.
(Lack of effort or budgeting era? 🚩 / 💸)

5. They hesitate to commit to long-term plans like trips, leases, relationships.
(Fear of commitment or financial uncertainty? 🚩 / 💸)

6. They work multiple gigs and are constantly exhausted.
(Ambition or survival mode? 🚩 / 💸)

7. They say they can't afford therapy but spend on small treats instead.
(Bad priorities or coping under pressure? 🚩 / 💸)

8. They avoid travelling even when they say they want to.
(No interest or cost anxiety? 🚩 / 💸)

9. They are always stressed about money but never talk about savings.
(Financial avoidance or systemic stress? 🚩 / 💸)

10. They don't want to celebrate birthdays or milestones "in a big way."
(Low effort or opting out of expensive traditions? 🚩 / 💸)

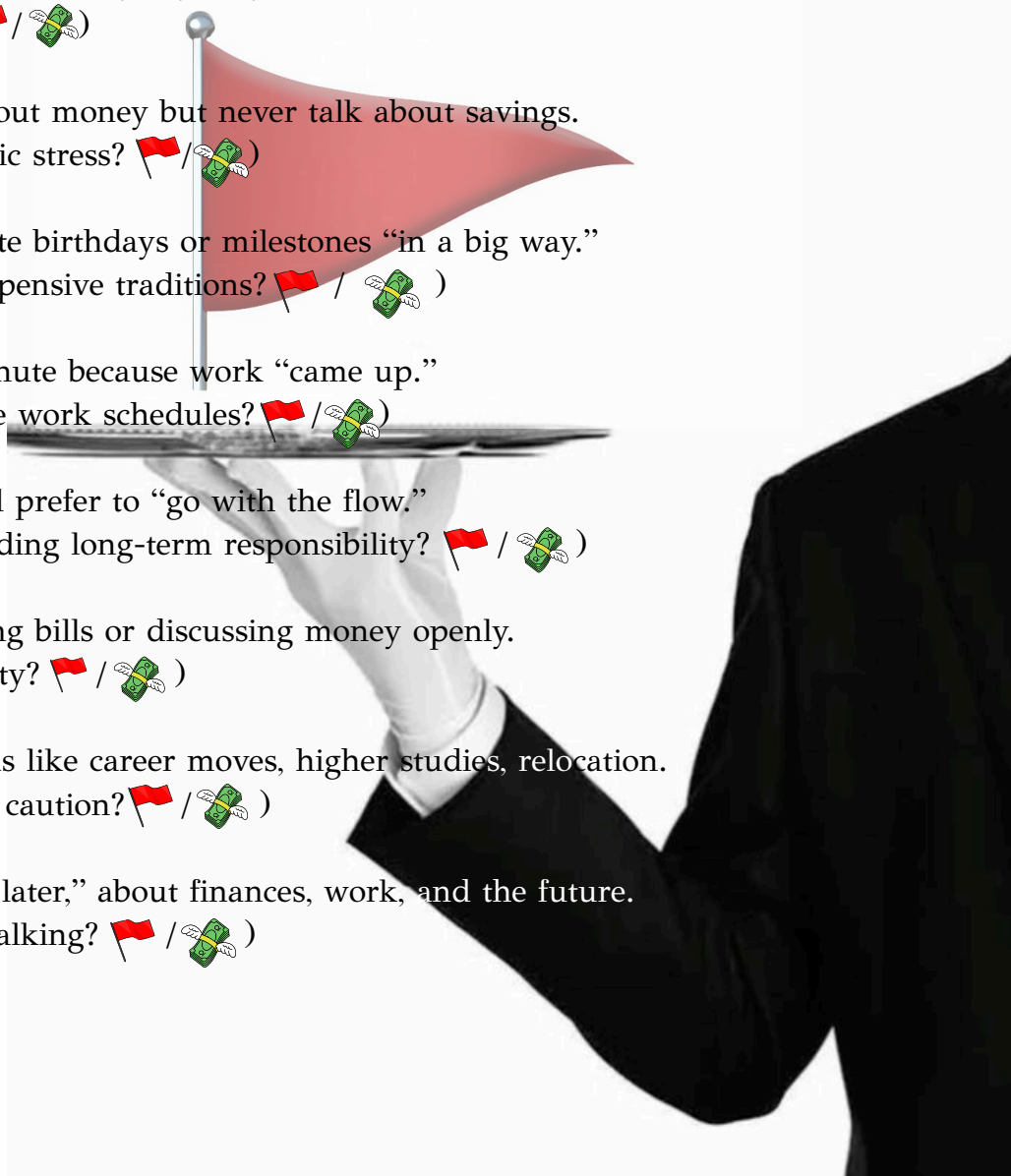
11. They cancel plans - last minute because work "came up."
(Disrespect for time or unstable work schedules? 🚩 / 💸)

12. They don't want labels and prefer to "go with the flow."
(Emotional immaturity or avoiding long-term responsibility? 🚩 / 💸)

13. They hesitate before splitting bills or discussing money openly.
(Awkwardness or money anxiety? 🚩 / 💸)

14. They delay big life decisions like career moves, higher studies, relocation.
(Lack of direction or economic caution? 🚩 / 💸)

15. They say, "I'll figure it out later," about finances, work, and the future.
(Carefree mindset or burnout talking? 🚩 / 💸)



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CONVERGENCE OF DIVERSE INTELLECTS

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