

SHAPING OUR INNER WORLD. CORPORATE BRANDS AND CULTURE.



After a short preface the book you're about to read opens with the unique story of Patagonia and Yves Chouinard, its founder, and a courageous surfer and climber.

He gave away the family company to help save our planet. Today, 87 years of age, he is a passionate fly fisher, enjoying the sport and the impressive silence at Tierra del Fuego, the most southern spot of Patagonia country, where he got the brand-name. Patagonia illustrates the intertwinement between brands and culture, and how this shapes the world, that we create for ourselves.

A direct trigger to write this book is Giep Franzen's work. He was co-founder of the iconic agency brand FHV BBDO in the Netherlands, professor of communications and my mentor and friend.

A number of years ago he gave me the manuscript 'Branding the Organization'. His meticulous work inspired me to write this book.

I have updated literature, found new concepts, researched the influence of AI on brands and culture. Broadly outlined context, including the threat to our democratic values, puts it into present-day's perspective. Text in comprehensive tables. Text is illustrated with brand stories with strong links to culture. The choice of some stories reflects my life as an advertising man.

This is not a textbook. It is a reading book, in which I jump from one topic to another within a broader framework. I hope you can follow me.

Jan Lantink MSc.
Spring 2026.

Preface.

We live in a world where corporate brands are not merely present but threaded through the fabric of our days and the quiet spaces of our minds. They do more than shape the society around us; they seep inward, touching how we feel, what we long for, and who we imagine ourselves to be. The interchangement between brands and ourselves.

Brands echo in our conversations about heritage, authenticity and activism, gently colouring our emotions, our identities, our sense of belonging. In subtle and often unseen ways, brands become part of our culture. Modern corporate brands, physical and digital have crossed an invisible threshold. They inhabit our inner worlds, shaping narratives we live by: our personal myths, cultural stories, and mental frameworks that structure our identity, purpose and actions. Acting as the architecture of human consciousness. These narratives inhibited in brands and culture help us make sense of our life, and connect past, present and future. They shape the future by influencing social trends, political attitudes, and human rights.

This book emerges from my desire to explore the dimensions of branding. What does it mean for corporate brands to influence our lives as a citizen, a customer or an employee? How do brands come to carry emotional weight, personal meaning, and even moral and ethical significance in this time where AI is a paramount trend?

I cannot provide definitive answers. Rather, I offer inspiration for reflection on the complex relationship between corporate brand-power and human experience.

Drawing on cultural analysis and critical perspectives, I examine how brands shape values and self-perception, at the same time being shaped by the individuals and societies that engage with them. The interchangement.

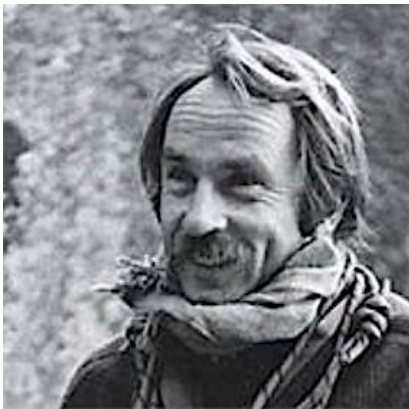
At its heart, this work is an invitation to look inward with greater awareness and self-reflection. By recognizing how deeply corporate brands as belief systems are woven into our inner world, we may better understand how these brands must behave to survive. And we may also better grasp and redefine the influences that help shape who we are.

Corporate brands are woven into our inner world,



In Patagonia brand and culture are intertwined.

Yvon Chouinard's life and the rise of Patagonia form one of the most unusual stories in modern business. A dirtbag climber and surfer, who lived in his car, when he went out for an adventure. He rejected materialism, never wanted to be a businessman, ending up creating one of the world's most respected brands. And ultimately gave it away to help save the planet.



Yvon Chouinard was born in 1938 in Maine and grew up in Southern California, where he fell in love with surfing and climbing.

He taught himself blacksmithing so he could make better climbing gear, forging pitons in his parents' backyard and selling them from the trunk of his car. This became *Chouinard Equipment*, which by the 1960s was the largest climbing hardware company in the U.S. But Chouinard hated the idea of being a traditional businessman. He preferred long climbing trips, surfing, and living simply.

From gear to clothing: the birth of Patagonia.

Patagonia began almost accidentally.

Climbers needed durable clothing, so Chouinard started importing rugby shirts from Scotland and experimenting with new fabrics.

In 1973, he launched Patagonia, named after the wild region at the bottom of South America, symbolizing adventure and untouched nature.

Patagonia quickly became known for rugged, colourful outdoor clothing and innovative materials, like early fleece made from toilet-seat-cover fabric. *The corporate culture encouraged employees to surf when the waves were good.*

Environmental awakening.

Chouinard realized that his own company was harming the environment he loved. This sparked Patagonia's transformation into a pioneer of sustainable business:

1985: launch of *1% for the Planet*, donating 1% of sales to environmental causes.

1990's: switch to *organic cotton* after discovering the environmental damage of conventional cotton.



In 2011 Patagonia launched the famous 'Don't Buy This Jacket' campaign, urging customers to consume less.

Patagonia became a model for how a company could be profitable while actively reducing its environmental footprint.

Despite Patagonia's success, Chouinard never wanted to be rich. He lived simply, drove old cars, and avoided corporate culture.

Earth is now our only shareholder.

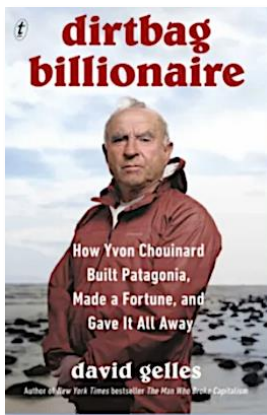
If we have any hope of a thriving planet— much less a business— it is going to take all of us doing what we can with the resources we have. This is what we can do.

In 2022, he made his most radical move: he gave Patagonia away.

Ownership was transferred to a trust and a non-profit.

All profits, around \$100 million per year, are used to fight climate change and protect nature.

This act cemented his legacy as one of the most unconventional founders in business history.



In a biography he was called the dirtbag billionaire.

Yvon Chouinard represents with Patagonia a rare alignment of purpose, profit, environmental responsibility and authenticity. His journey challenges the idea that business must prioritize growth at all costs.

Instead, Patagonia shows that a company can thrive by standing for something deeper and by being willing to sacrifice for it.¹

¹ Like with Patagonia, the corporate brand and the product brand share the same values. In this book I have taken a practical point-of-view, not a formal academic one on the distinction between corporate brand and product brand.

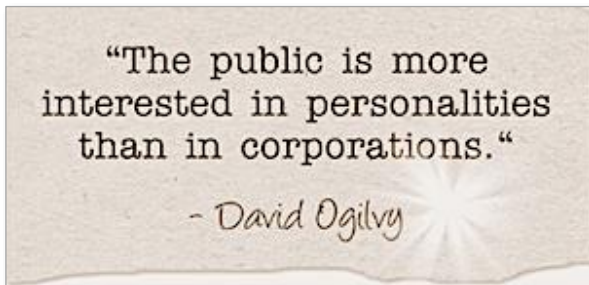
Corporate branding and culture are shaping our inner world, and our society.

Writing a book about corporate brands and culture is not just a creative project. Companies influence how we work, communicate, innovate, and how we think about cultural identity: *the sense of belonging to a specific group, sharing language, religion, ethnicity, traditions, and values.*

It is fluid, evolving and often multifaceted. It shapes how people view their inner world, their place on the planet and at the workplace. Cultural identity provides a *sense of community*, and it influences behaviours.

This book unpacks this influence and helps you as reader to reflect and understand some forces shaping your daily live.

Corporate brands are becoming *belief systems*.²



They become personalities, buy into narratives.

Brands like Patagonia, Apple, IKEA, Meta and Instagram are functioning like cultural institutions.

This book explores how and why this happens and taps into global conversations about meaning, trust and loyalty.

Books or articles on corporate culture can be too academic or too woolly. I try to bridge the gap with grounded insight and clarity with the help of experts. I will end this book with a blueprint of valuable concepts and a practical Your Brand Selftest.

Timing seems perfect. Our world is being reshaped by AI, remote and hybrid work, generational shifts, a new format of globalization because of the recent pandemic. And because of Trump.

² I will present a model further on in the book.

There are social expectations around ethics and purpose. (Brand)leaders, HR directors, marketing professionals and communications specialists want to know about how brands and cultures evolve in this new landscape.

Well-argued books can inspire them to rethink their assumptions and help shape more human, more resilient and active corporate branding and culture.

Olympics, Milano and Giorgio Armani.

There is a place on earth where the mixture between brands and culture can be shown in its strongest form. It is Italy.



The opening ceremony of the Milano Cortina 2026 Winter Olympics.

The late designer *Giorgio Armani* was posthumously honoured with a special tribute. At the famous San Siro Stadium, sixty models formed a human flag by walking down the catwalk in three rows of red, white, and green Armani suits.

Top model *Vittoria Ceretti* wore a white *Armani Privé* dress, specially designed for the occasion as she carried the Italian flag into the stadium.

The choreography of the ceremony was based on one of Armani's last designs before his death in September 2025 at the age of 91. Armani's brand EA7 is the official outfitter for the Italian team, for which he had designed the white uniforms.

The ceremony marked an emotional moment for Milan, the city inextricably linked to Armani's career and legacy.³

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen.

This is another remarkable story from Milan.

Lucas Pinheiro Braathen, born on April 19, 2000 is a historically successful alpine skier who has competed for Brazil since 2024.



On February 14, 2026, he made history by winning the gold medal in the giant slalom at the 2026 Winter Olympics in Milan-Cortina, becoming the *first-ever athlete from a South American country* to win a medal at the Winter Games. He is the son of a Norwegian father and a Brazilian mother and grew up in both Oslo and Brazil.

On November 16, 2025, he also achieved Brazil's first-ever World Cup victory in alpine skiing in Levi, Finland.

He skied for Norway until 2023. In October of that year, at the age of 23, he unexpectedly announced his retirement after a dispute with the Norwegian Ski Federation, but he returned a year later to ski for his mother's country. Braathen is known as a colourful and eccentric personality in the ski world. Besides being a skier, he is also active as a model and DJ, and has a great passion for fashion and football.

³ One of the last stories in this book is about another iconic Italian brand: designer *Valentino Garavani*.

Corporate brands and culture: two sides of the same coin?

Many scholars argue that brands and culture are two expressions of the same underlying organizational identity. However, they operate in different domains, serve different functions, and obey different logics.

Exploring brand and culture side by side reveals why organizations treat them as *mutually reinforcing forces*.

Both answer the same fundamental question: 'who are we as an organization?' Corporate brand expresses this *externally* through symbols, brand promises, and reputation. Corporate culture expresses this *internally* through workplace behaviour, shared values and codes of conduct.

P&G.

New employees at *Procter & Gamble (P&G)* are trained through a rigorous '*Build from Within*' strategy that emphasizes immediate responsibility.

This approach ensures that brand and culture immersion start on day one through high-impact work rather than a lengthy, passive process.



P&G +Me Onboarding is a comprehensive program for new employees.

The new hires are introduced to the company's *Purpose, Values and Principles*, history and brands. *Doing the Right Thing Series* is a mandatory training, focused on *integrity, respect, and stewardship*, reinforcing the *Worldwide Business Conduct Manual*. Senior leaders and managers undergo workshops in *Inclusive Leadership* like *MARC (Men Advocating Real Change)* to foster a culture of *equality and inclusion*, which is then cascaded down to new hires through mentoring.⁴

⁴ You may ask, like I did, if these established P&G programs are influenced by Trump's anti-DEI measures. The short answer is no.

The 70-20-10 Learning Framework.

P&G structures all employee development around three pillars:

70% Experiential Learning. New hires are given meaningful assignments immediately, such as leading a product launch strategy or managing customer relationships. This learning by doing is the primary way they absorb P&G's brand-building standards.

20% Mentorship & Social Learning. Every new employee is typically assigned a mentor or "buddy" to help navigate company culture and provide career guidance.

10% Structured Training is a formal instruction, delivered through the P&G Leadership Academy, which offers a suite of best-in-class programs for all career stages.

The involvement of P&G people with society is expressed in P&G's highly successful corporate campaign '*Thank You, Mom*'



Launched for the 2010 Winter Olympics and continued for subsequent games, aiming to honour mothers of athletes for their support.

The campaign positions P&G as the '*Proud Sponsor of Moms*', driving roughly \$ 500 million in sales by linking products like Tide, Pampers, and Gillette to the nurturing, heroic role of mothers. It highlights the sacrifices mothers make, featuring the journeys of athletes and their mothers, with a focus on themes like resilience and, in later years, overcoming bias.

'Love Over Bias' in 2018 refers to the prejudices, stereotypes, and judgments that limit human potential and create inequality.

The campaign highlights that people often face a bias based on race, gender, religion, disability, sexual orientation, or social class, which can act as *obstacles to success*, especially in sports.

Considered one of P&G's most successful campaigns, it generated massive engagement, including over 74 million views for its initial video and over 370 million Twitter interactions.

The *P&G Family Home* for athletes and their families was created. The initiative was linked to \$ 25 million fundraising to support local youth sports programs.⁵



.100 days to go before the 2012 London Olympics, co-sponsored by P&G.

⁵ The 'brand-and-culture' campaign earned numerous awards, including a *Gold Effie* award for effectiveness

Brand and culture shape expectations and trust.

P&G is a great example how employees rely on culture to understand *'how things are done here.'*

Customers and other stakeholders rely on a brand to understand *'what this company stands for.'* It is why multi-products companies like P&G and Unilever put their corporate logo on all packaging.

Both influence behaviour.

The corporate brand guides *societal and market-facing behaviour*: tone of voice, service style, product choices and partnering.

The corporate culture guides *employee behaviour*.

When aligned, they reinforce each other; when misaligned, they create cognitive dissonance. Which is a kiss-of-death for a brand.

Both are long-term systems.

Neither can be changed overnight. They require investment in money and leadership attention. As systems they evolve through repeated actions, stories, and decisions, not through slogans or campaigns.

Both are strategic assets.

A strong brand improves loyalty, pricing power and differentiation. Oil company *Shell* sets as a market leader prizes for gasoline at the pump. (although a local gas station can influence local market-share by its price-setting).

A strong culture improves performance, retention, and innovation. Together, they form the organization's 'identity capital.'

Both create predictability, the foundation of trust.

Trust is a central value for brands. It determines *reputation, brand loyalty, performance at the stock exchange*.

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Corporate Culture</i>	<i>Corporate Brand</i>
<i>Audience</i>	Internal (employees)	External (customers, partners, society)
<i>Medium of expression</i>	Behaviours, rituals, norms, leadership style	Visual identity, messaging, customer experience
<i>Time horizon</i>	Emergent, slow changing	Can be repositioned more quickly
<i>Source of truth</i>	What people actually do	What the company claims and shows
<i>Governance</i>	HR, leadership, informal networks	Marketing, communications, design
<i>Measurement</i>	Engagement, retention, internal surveys	Awareness, preference, NPS, market share
<i>Failure mode</i>	Toxicity, disengagement, inconsistency	Confusion, irrelevance, distrust

Jesse Lyn Stoner (Seapoint Center of Collaborative Leadership, in San Francisco) about trust in general:

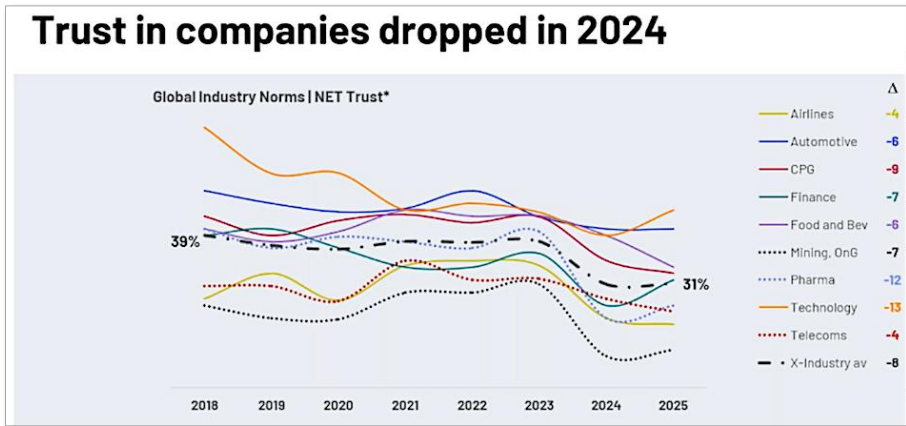
‘All relationships depend on a foundation of trust. There is a direct relationship between employees trust and performance. Customer trust is a key factor in decisions on purchases. And in our personal lives, friendships are built on trust and one of the biggest causes of destroyed marriage is lack of trust.’



This is Stoner’s model.

Trust in companies is dropping.

A key societal trend is *pervasive distrust* across almost all industrial sectors according to research consultancy Ipsos.



Trust in companies (not necessarily in brands) drops from 39% in 2018 to 31% in 2025, an average of 8%.

Drops are largest in *technology* with a drop of 13% and *pharma* 12%: mistrust in big tech and big pharma.

The other trends are:

- uncertainty is the new normal,
- globalization fractures,
- inequality and value conflicts.

The state of play

This is not just turbulence.
This is **persistent turbulence**.
The seatbelt sign is permanently switched on.

“I’ve been doing this for a handful of decades now... and I’ve just never seen anything so chaotic... From month to month, week to week, day-to-day, everything changes... It’s just unlike anything we’ve seen before.”



83%

of Council Members report that their organisations have **formalised plans to monitor and quantify geopolitical risk**

© Ipsos | KPMG | February 2025

28



The foundations of trust are predictability and reliability.

Fernando Lelo de Larrea⁶ writes:

‘Trust is not sentimental. It is systemic. It is the invisible architecture that enables cooperation, markets, diplomacy, and innovation. When trust breaks down, everything else follows: investment freezes, alliances fracture, public discourse decays.

Francis Fukuyama, philosopher and political scientist in his book ‘*Trust*’, argued that high-trust societies are not only more cohesive, they are more prosperous. Trust, he wrote, is what allows individuals and institutions to take risks, plan long-term, and cooperate beyond immediate self-interest. It is a form of social capital that sustains innovation, entrepreneurship, and resilience. Institutions are where trust becomes operational. They store it, transmit it, and protect it. When they fail, we don’t just lose governance. We lose the ability to coordinate meaningfully.



Rebuilding trust means designing institutions that are transparent, adaptive, participatory, and competent. This is not a communications exercise. It is a structural one.’

And that is exactly the issue of corporate brands today. Trust, predictability and reliability are problems in today’s world, with Tintin in the White House as a shining example. There are great uncertainties in society and constant changes in the corporate world.

⁶ Venture capitalist, entrepreneur, economist (London School of Economics.).

Paul Polman, former Unilever ceo and author of 'Net Profit' reports:

'Kraft Heinz has paused its proposed breakup, stepping back from dismantling the 2015 megamerger engineered by Warren Buffett and 3G Capital. The decision follows collapsing quarterly profits, declining sales, and a Berkshire Hathaway filing that would allow it to sell down its roughly 27.5% stake, a potential exit from a decade-long investment. It is the latest chapter in a years-long decline that many do attribute to 'portfolio problems': old brands, too much processed cheese, sugary ketchup out of step with modern tastes. But that mistakes the symptom for the cause. Stale products didn't sink Kraft Heinz. The real question is why they went stale in the first place.

From its 2013 Heinz buyout to the 2015 merger with Kraft, the strategy was *financial engineering over value creation*: leverage up, merge fast, cut deep. Research budgets were gutted, marketing hollowed out, suppliers squeezed. Sustainability and innovation were treated as distractions, not drivers. The 3G model boosted margins early. But it cut into muscle, not fat. The 3G model, largely associated with 3G Capital's investment playbook, is a corporate management approach centered on *intense operational excellence, meritocracy, and extreme cost discipline*.

The scoreboard doesn't lie. Since the 2015 merger, Kraft Heinz shares have fallen roughly 65–70%. Over the same period, the S&P 500 has more than doubled!

Maybe because my early background is in textile industry (more about the rise and fall of this industry in the Netherlands later), I share a story with you about the damaging 'yo-yo' effect, created by Trump.

'U.S. tariffs have hit *handwoven Indian rug imports* extremely hard: costs have doubled, orders have collapsed, and many Indian exporters report that shipments to the U.S. have nearly stopped. The 50% tariff increase has created a sharp 'yo-yo' effect in pricing and demand, destabilizing the entire supply chain.

It means that a rug that previously landed at \$1,000 now costs roughly \$1,500 before it even reaches the warehouse. Many U.S. distributors cannot absorb this increase, so retail prices rise sharply.

India's exports to the U.S. fell 37.5% between May and September 2025, dropping from \$8.8 billion to \$5.5 billion.



Indian exporters report no consignments going to the U.S. at all since the tariff hike. Exporters in Bhadohi, India's carpet hub, say business has come to a 'screeching halt.'

Some US brands try to absorb part of the cost to avoid shocking consumers. Others add temporary surcharges or shift sourcing to Turkey, Nepal, or machine-made alternatives.

*The 'yo-yo effect.'*⁷

The tariffs create a volatile cycle: tariff announcement → sudden price spike → demand collapse. Importers pause orders → exporters cut production → U.S. retailers face shortages.

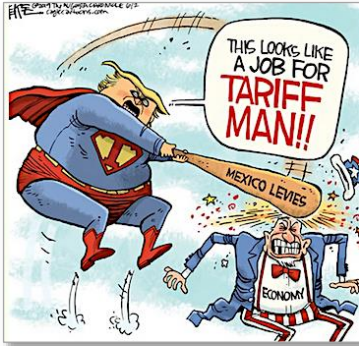
If tariffs are adjusted again, the cycle repeats, creating instability for both sides.

This volatility is especially damaging for handwoven rugs because production cycles are long (months per rug), artisans depend on steady orders and inventory risk is high for importers.'

Trade today: Trump's import tariffs.

We have seen that the import of handwoven Indian rugs suffers under Trump's import tariffs.

⁷ In a historic ruling on February 20, 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled 6-3 that President Trump exceeded his authority in imposing large-scale import tariffs. Trump is ignoring this ruling and imposed a 15% tariff.



Source:
Daily News.

It seems that the effect on the US economy is not as predicted, or still ahead of us, according to *OECD* (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

‘Negative effects are real and growing, especially for growth, prices, and consumer behaviour. The full impact is still ahead, not behind us. Some resilience remains, but the outlook is fragile and subject to significant risks.’

Research from the *Federal Reserve Bank of New York* (NY Fed), published on February 12, 2026, concludes ‘that the economic burden of the Trump administration’s trade tariffs falls almost entirely on American businesses and consumers.’



According to the analysis, approximately 90% of the costs of the tariffs implemented in 2025 fell on the shoulders of the US, not foreign exporters.

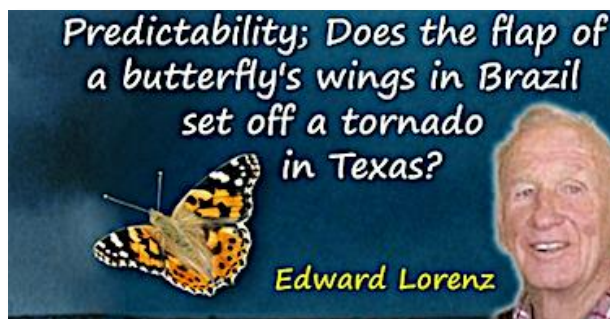
Why are economies hard to predict?

Even without the yo-yo policy of Trump, economies can be forecasted only to some extent and imperfectly.

As an economist I know that forecasts often miss turning points because of the often-used extrapolation. Well-constructed models struggle because economies reflect billions of decisions, shocks, and uncertainties.⁸

Human behaviour is complex and not fully measurable.

In old economy theories the *rational* homo sapiens was the hero. However, economic outcomes emerge from countless individual choices, some rational, many irrational or emotional, making precise prediction inherently difficult. The economy *'is not a lab experiment, and that makes forming accurate forecasts challenging.'*



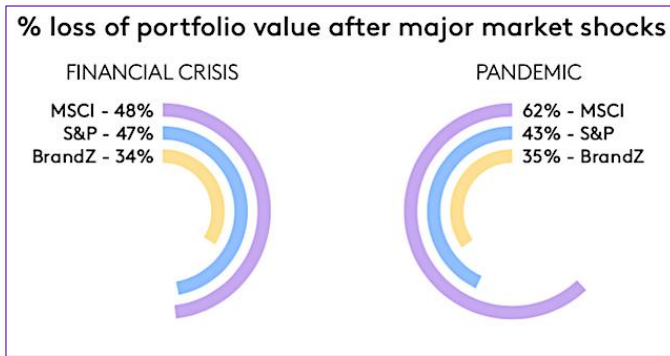
It is like the weather. In 1972, meteorologist Edward Lorenz famously posed the question.

This concept, known as the *butterfly effect*, illustrates that tiny, seemingly insignificant changes in a complex system can lead to vastly different outcomes over time.

Mixed accuracy, especially in volatile periods.

Economists have significant influence, but history shows that many forecasts miss the mark, especially around inflation, crises, and unexpected shocks. Covid-19 was a hard break with the past. Forecasts for GDP can be off significantly. Even without these shocks the year-ahead projections often diverge sharply from actual outcomes.

⁸ AI is already improving forecasting models, and it will likely keep doing so. But the way it helps is more interesting than just 'AI replaces old models.' It's more like 'AI + traditional physics working together'.



Strong brands (BrandZ) are more resilient to shocks than MSCI performance or S&P index.⁹

Unemployment tends to be forecasted more accurately than GDP, which is more sensitive to shocks. Behavioural economics shows that certain patterns in consumer decision-making are predictable, but these insights have limits and exceptions.

Forecast accuracy is an active research field.

Economists continuously evaluate and refine forecasting methods, acknowledging systematic errors and seeking better models. Economists don't claim to predict the future with precision. Instead, they provide probabilistic forecasts. Useful for planning but always subject to uncertainty. The consensus is that short-term trends can often be estimated reasonably well.

Turning points, crises, and shocks remain extremely hard to foresee. Forecasts are tools, not guarantees, and should be interpreted with humility. *Which is not a strong point of many economists!*



What happens today with IKEA in China's economy is a case.

⁹ data from Kantar Consultancy

IKEA has announced it will close seven large stores across mainland China starting 2 February 2026 in cities including Shanghai, Guangzhou, Tianjin, Ningbo, Xuzhou, Nantong and Harbin.

The closures are part of a major reshaping of its China operations.

Many *customers* prefer online shopping and smaller, convenient urban retail formats rather than traditional large suburban malls. Big destination stores require long trips, while city-centre formats align better with frequent and shorter shopping behaviours.

A sluggish *property market* in China has reduced demand for home furnishings. New-home purchases and renovations, major drivers of furniture sales, have weakened, hurting IKEA's large-store sales.

With lower traffic and weaker demand, maintaining profitability on sprawling megastores has become harder.

IKEA has stressed that this is not a withdrawal from China.

China remains a strategic market for the company. IKEA plans to open more than 10 smaller-format stores in strategic urban centres like Beijing, Shenzhen and Dongguan over the next two years. It is also boosting its online sales presence including partnerships with major e-commerce platforms.

The world is currently facing a mess.

It is defined by interconnected crises, including severe climate change, ongoing geopolitical wars, economic instability.



*And
inequality is
rising.*

Climate change is driving extreme weather, rising sea levels, and food insecurity.

High inflation, soaring energy prices, and mounting debt are causing significant financial stress.

These issues are often rooted in human behaviour, such as the destructive use of scientific advancements, unsustainable consumption, and systemic inequality.

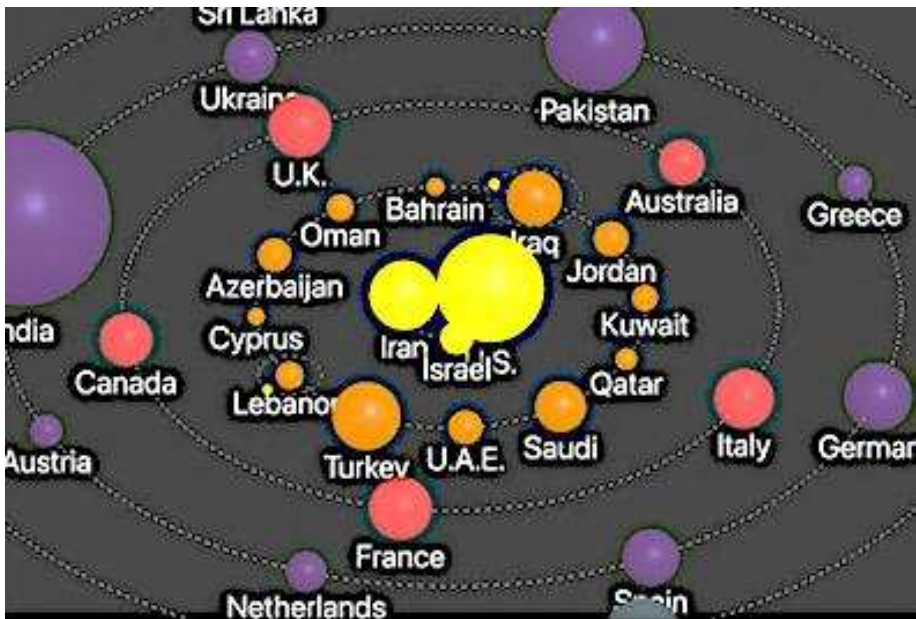
Wars, such as the conflicts in the Middle East and Ukraine coupled with political polarization and human rights violations, are fueling global anxiety.

Middle East.

In military theory, the *Center of Gravity* is a concept introduced by *Carl von Clausewitz* in his seminal work *On War*. It is defined as the ‘hub of all power and movement, on which everything depends’ and serves as the primary point at which military energy should be directed to defeat an adversary.

In the Middle East, with so many actors already involved, the war could quickly unfold in other directions. ‘Tehran does not have control over the escalation dynamics — no one has control.’¹⁰

¹⁰ The New York Times, March 21, 2026. In the press also: ‘Is this the start of WW III?’



Despite this, some perspectives suggest that, while the world is in a mess, it is also, in many ways, the best time to be alive due to rapid advancements in health and technology, though these, too, bring their own challenges.

People focus on community-level help, volunteering, and ethical consumption. They combat feelings of hopelessness by managing information intake, practicing self-care and connecting with friends and family.

More and more people recognize that personal choices, such as reducing plastic consumption and being an ethical consumer, can have a cumulative impact.

Still, some stories about people’s involvement are exceptional.

Ukraine. The ‘Friet Guys.’

The initiative by Dutch guys *Franky van Hintum* and *Coen van Oosten*, has grown from a one-time gesture to a comprehensive humanitarian mission in Ukraine called *‘Franky and Coen Into the Breach’*



The duo regularly travels with their fries van to dangerous frontline cities like Kherson, Kramatorsk, and Bakhmut.

They distribute free french fries and snacks to refugees and soldiers.

They have now distributed more than 150,000 portions.

In the city of Dnipro, they run their own shelter, The Holland House, where approximately 70 refugees from frontline areas receive shelter, medical care, and psychological support.

In addition to frying fries, they evacuate people from besieged villages using armored vehicles, often beyond the reach of other aid organizations.

In October 2025, two of their regular Ukrainian team members and close friends, cameraman Ghenja and journalist Alyona, were killed in a Russian drone attack. Despite this great loss, Franky and Coen decided to continue their work.

Branding and communication in this confusing world.

While I am writing this book, it is March 2026 and I observe a paradox situation in the Middle East concerning branding. *Influencers* obviously see themselves as brands. In Dubai today they do not behave as responsible brands. They are telling fake stories about the life in Dubai, while at the same time Iran is attacking Dubai.

It is a complicated situation, and a lot of emotions are mixed together right now. Let's separate a few things.

The attacks and the real situation.

Right now there is a military escalation in the Gulf. Iran has targeted infrastructure and shipping in the region and drones struck near Dubai International Airport, injuring several people and causing disruption.



Since late February 2026, hundreds of missiles and drones were launched toward the country, with several casualties and damage from debris in parts of Dubai.