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THE BOARDROOM BRIEF

Here's What's Next In
AI, Mass Media/
Entertainment, and
Pop Culture

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Putting this brief into perspective.

I have worked within some form of mass media for a few decades and have a unique skillset that includes expertise in television/digital production, print/digital journalism, music branding, light computer coding, corporate employment, and entrepreneurship both U.S. domestically and internationally. The thru-line has always been a focus on the 18-24/34 year-old demo. I have not only built my own successful businesses for this arena but have also helped create multimillions for clients projects for Snoop Dogg, Microsoft, Ice Cube, 20th Century Fox, Jay-Z, and others.

What I have learned is that the biggest winners in the mass media/entertainment/communications world always anticipate what's next.

Right now too many senior leaders are focusing solely on AI in terms of enterprise usage and time/cost efficiency savings. It's all about Large Language Models (LLM) and force-feeding AI adoption. No doubt, there are many powerful benefits and great leaps that will be made as a result of such focus. But this is not the only AI frontier to be conquered.

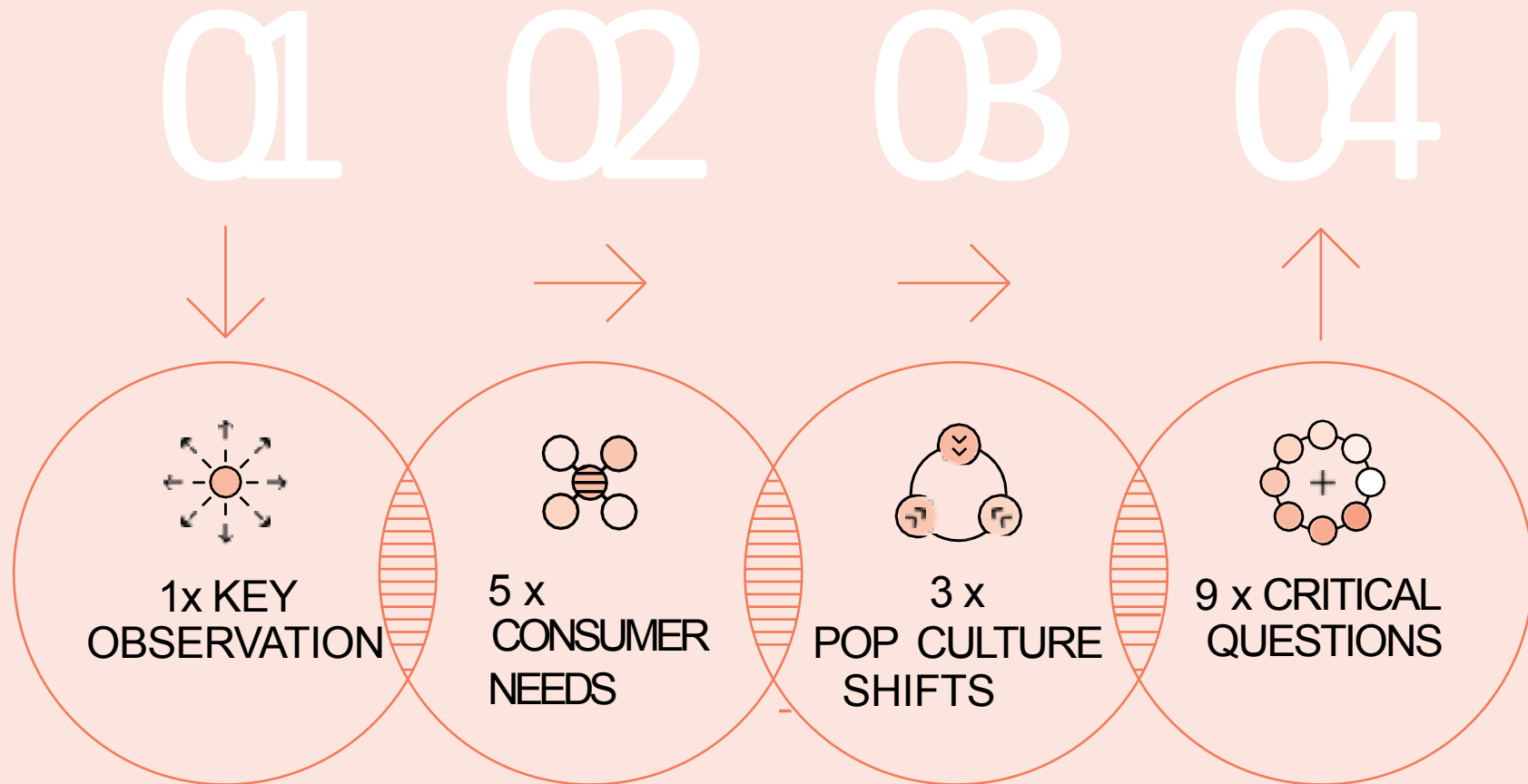
The intersection of AI and pop culture/mass media is going to be absolutely massive. The business opportunity is

about far more than just using AI to summarize meetings, craft resumes, or even create visuals. This next wave in AI will focus on Small Language Models (SLM) and how they will be leveraged to power various consumer applications and platforms crafted in a way that respects perfectly, staged introduction.

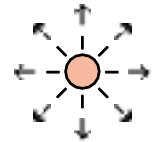
Indeed, a recent study by Pew Research showed that while AI "experts" believed most people used some form of AI multiple times per day, most people actually said they rarely interacted even with chatbots let alone any other levels of AI. Thus, don't be fooled. We're still in the very early stages of AI immersion. While the enterprise side of AI unfolds, another, more subtle yet equally game-changing side of AI-powered worlds is an area that will become explosive in terms of pop culture. AI will re-shape pop culture and pop culture will, in turn, re-shape AI.

Here's what I know for sure: The way in which AI will **power** the next level of popular culture and media will not only enable new ways to create community around information and entertainment; it will absolutely shift power dynamics and norms.

Preparing now creates competitive advantages for the next several years.



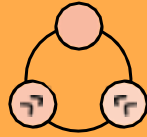
State of the AI landscape.



Believe it or not, there is more to the AI landscape than Sam Altman and OpenAI and more to the story than Elon Musk's plan for Grok. Focus only on those with the loudest megaphones, and you will miss the full scope of the next big wave in AI. Case in point? Look no further than how DeepSeek caught nearly everyone off guard and changed the parameters of the AI game itself. Similarly, most people are concentrating solely on the power of Large Language Models. However, there is more to AI than this, and the next wave is about to break.

Small Language Models (SLMs) and Consumer Applications Are What's Next

SLMs are simply language models trained only on specific types of data that produce customized outputs. Translation? As opposed to a model that need to eat the world and spit it back to you at your command, SLM usage is specific to a particular project's needs and can scale quickly with less computing power. Think: deep, rather than wide. It's about specifics rather than the kitchen sink approach. And as SLMs converge with consumer applications and popular culture; cool, new offerings will be born.



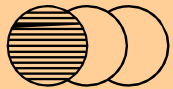
Pop Culture X Emerging Tech

Popular culture helps shape our idea of technology and vice versa. Tech is usually depicted in film and/or lyrics in only one of two ways: man conquering tech or the other way around. But what if the truth of this paradigm were actually somewhere in the middle. Ponder this: a new narrative, new solutions, and new opportunities. Indeed, SLMs will soon give way to a new level of exchange, creativity, information, and entertainment. Leave AI eating the world and summarizing your meetings to Perplexity and Microsoft. Think more about how, for example, hip hop is leading the way for legal precedents and more in the pop culture space.

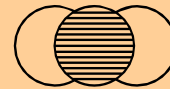
Watch for the rise of new companies and innovative individuals to leverage AI in edgy ways that create buzz, sizzle, and trends. SLMs won't be overt. They will hum in the background giving way to new avenues that will help us stay informed, be entertained, and tap in sentiment for the sake of developing new types of communities and hubs. This will cause shifts in social structures and blurring of social roles within pop culture.

These three areas will be key to track:

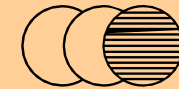
AI x Pop Culture: Celebrity



It has been said, particularly after the strategies and ensuing results of the 2024 U.S. presidential election, that the power of celebrity influence is waning. But, this shift had already kicked off for 18-24/34 a while ago. Sure celebs are looked to for fashion, music, lifestyle aspirations; but the focus on more one's own notoriety, followers, virtual and IRL social capital. The notion of celebrity is still there, it's just redefined - and wider. The list includes fashion, music, film, politics, technorati, and more. Yet it's the demo that decides who makes the cut, not a traditional, "authoritative" source or agenda. If such is detected, there will be push back.

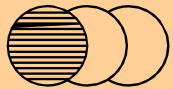


Notables may now also include indie, synthetic "stars." Look no further than the 3.4M TikTok followers of L'il Miquela who already has deals with BMW and others. Watch for new levels of synthetic "it" people. But be aware, there are zero legal guardrails in place for AI influencers with brand endorsements so it could be a very interesting and bumpy ride ahead. Indeed, studies show that that consumers felt 2x as much negativity toward a brand if problem or issue occurred where the consumer was lured in by an AI influencer. Just sayin'.

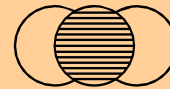


The recording industry has been pushing a "No Fakes Act," but that ship has already been sailing. Music fans have been leveraging self-created AI-inspired tracks as fill-in, inspired-by tracks when their fave rap artist is taking what seems to be too long drop a new release (see: Playboi Cart). It's created in fun, is very entertaining, and not driven by profit. Inspired by innovation by fans, companies and artists will start to discover powerful, AI-powered opportunities to collaborate with fans and create new business models. Early explorers in this space will be tomorrow's titans.

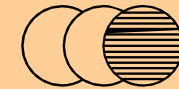
AI x Pop Culture: Mass Media



One of biggest changes is how and from whom we get our information. New voices are rising as legacy ones diminish. Traditional news media is basically dead. For most outlets, ratings plummet further every week. However, 18-24/34 knew there were issues with credibility, bias and more years ago and had basically abandoned most “media of record” long ago. Now the rest of the demos have caught up to this way of thinking. Watch for the addition of even more independent sources and alternative platforms that will shake up the power dynamics.

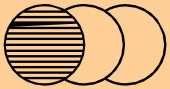


At the same time, interest in current events as never, ever been higher. Similarly, sources for said information have never been more fragmented. This dichotomy will expand even further not only with fake info but via deepfakes that will challenge even the best AI police to identify them. With just a slight adjustment of a certain facial feature or characteristics, the latest deepfakes are flying under the proverbial radar. Fasten your seatbelts because distinguishing what is accurate in an already uncertain world is about to become even more intriguing.



Indeed, AI has yet to be used in a truly a meaningful way when it comes to news and information. Watch for new platforms that fill gaps and voids in a manner that uses SLMs to provide new solutions.

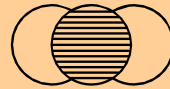
AI x Entertainment



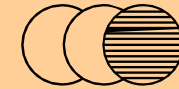
An entertainment CEO recently said that Hollywood is not center of gravity for Gen Z and Millennials. What gave that away? LOL Given the centralizing culture of

Hollywood productions, massive budgets, and layers of hierarchical approvals; it's no wonder that legacy entertainment companies continue lag behind when it comes to satisfying let alone anticipating content for those at the edge of pop culture.

This fact will become even problematic for big entertainment companies given the need to connect with the spending power of demos driving pop culture.



Watch for hip hop-related entertainment to continue to take the lead, though it never gets the credit. Its alluring force coupled with AI is captivating. Indeed, Elon Musk's baby mama Grimes invited fans to leverage AI and her work, but it was not until the AI Drake and The Weeknd track dropped that AI voice cloning became a national narrative. Hip Hop x AI is also setting legal precedents. The "BBL Drizzy" legal case is leading the way in law and human x AI-powered creativity. Watch this particular part of pop culture for true innovation and trend shifts.



New forms, new voices, new platforms are currently being created. However, they aren't focused on using AI as the ubiquitous lead for the business model but instead using the technology to actually power new companies, partnerships, and collaborations. This creativity will give way to new shows and even new forms of entertainment that feed pop culture in real time and vice versa. Those who will win in this space will remember that it's never about being obvious and evangelizing about AI. It's about allowing discovery to unfold on its own.

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Know Your Consumer/ Audience!

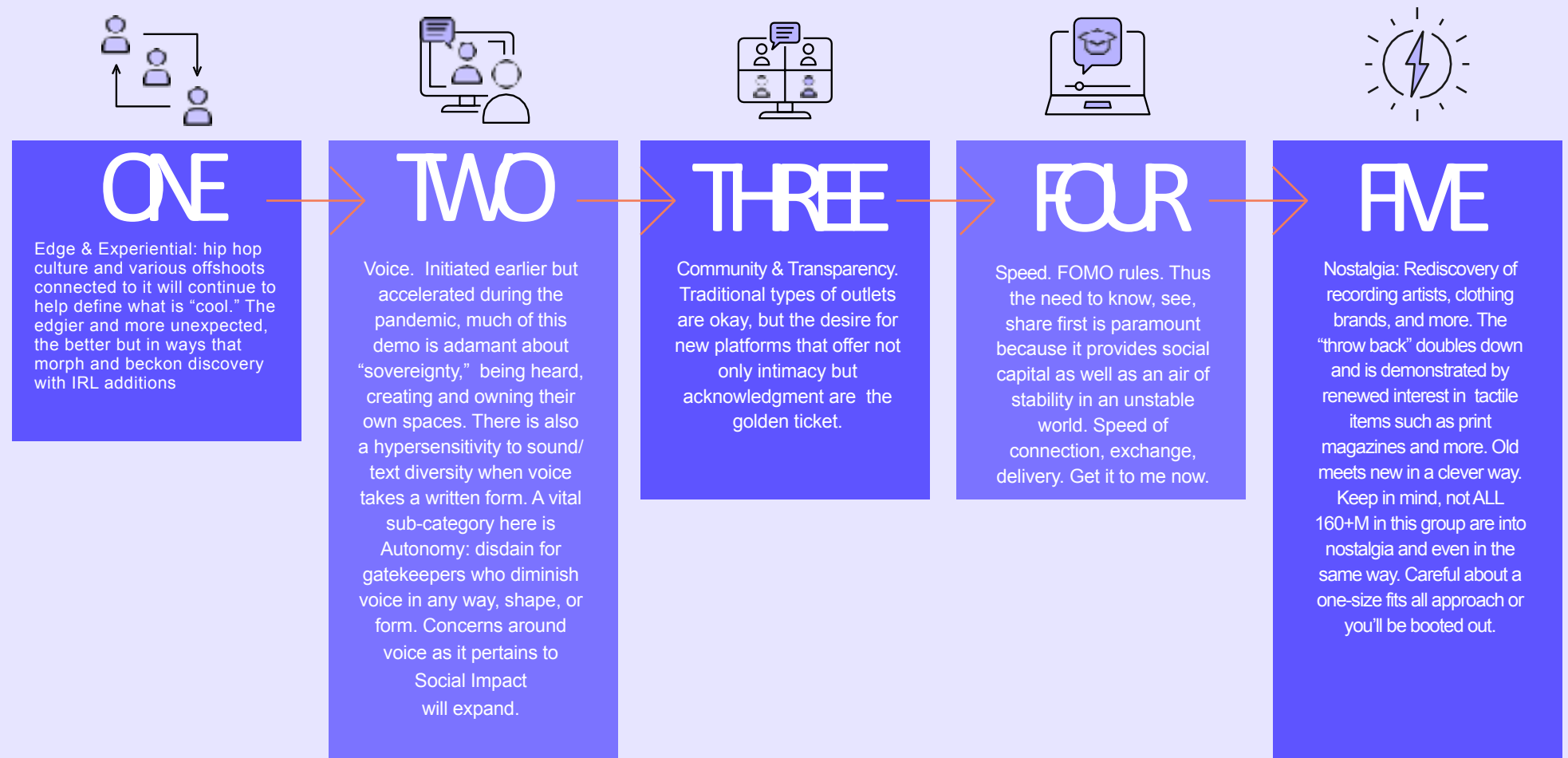
AI-powered cultural messages will impact public perception, values, and norms. Experts in this space will create platforms that are edgier, cooler, and more than the “big boys” in tech. There will be massive opportunity for those who really know their target pop culture audience and defeat for those who do not.

As noted a bit earlier in this brief, AI “experts” were recently asked how often they thought Americans used AI in their daily lives. Well, here are some data deets on that. A whopping 79% of “experts” were “totally sure” that people were using AI several times a day. But in fact, less than one-third of survey respondents said they used AI that frequently, and about **one-third of the respondents had never even used a chatbot let alone any other element of AI.**

What will separate winners in the space is not only how adept they will be at using AI to power ventures but also how sharp their own critical thinking will become in knowledge of their audience. Understanding and anticipating trends and behavior particularly of the 18-24/34 demographic will be even more essential as the Information Age expands!

Here are the top 5 of many key insights about your target demographic that you may have missed to date ...

What Gen Z/Millennial mass media consumers want in 2025/2026 ...



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What do you need to do differently in 2025/26?

The said battle is to be over information. This is only partially true. The real battle will be over *how* the information is packaged, delivered, and shaped. Here are 9 questions for you to ponder as we move even deeper into the new era ...

1. What is **company's strategy** to creatively leverage AI-powered video to better serve a pop culture audience?
2. How are you organizing your teams, market research, partners, and insights across multiple **disconnected departments** to be more nimble in meeting today's pop culture drive?
3. Do you need to re-evaluate your **inter-departmental collaboration** to develop better ways to test and pilot content?
4. How is your team tracking and engaging cutting edge **youth culture trends & behavior** authentically to ensure you remain ahead of the curve?
5. What **resources** are you relying upon to vet emerging technology developments and partnerships?
6. How are you ensuring that forecasts from such resources are **reliable**?
7. Are you prepared for partnerships, relationships with various **brands** that may intersect with your product/content?
8. How are you testing your emerging tech **strategy** against the larger cultural narratives and fast-changing norms here & abroad?
9. How are you vetting potential **investment and strategic alliance opportunities** so that you create a true competitive advantage?

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The Take-Away.

The good news is, there is opportunity everywhere, but in order to

stay ahead of the curve in today's marketplace, innovators in the pop culture innovation economy are going to need a powerful roadmap.

Whether you're a creative, investors, marketer, or founder, success means understanding how the industry is changing nano-second by nano second. It's about ensuring a broader view and adapting one's business model and product offerings accordingly. It's about creating a strategy that ensures relevancy and profitable in the years to come.

Again, prepare for concepts that leverage Small Language Models that leverage and shake up the pop culture & mass media arena.

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About the author, Lauren deLisa Coleman, Future Media Innovationist.

Lauren deLisa Coleman has become a leading voice in Future Media. In the past 20 years Lauren has become a successful tech-media entrepreneur, journalist, author, and professional speaker. A graduate of Columbia University, Lauren's started her first company not long after her tenure at MTV Networks. Over a successful 10-year period, Lauren created Punch Media which had offices in New York, Los Angeles, and Paris, France. When projects for clients from Snoop Dogg to Ice Cube to 20th Century Fox to Microsoft sought to leverage emerging tech at that time to connect with youth markets and drive sales, Lauren was there. Indeed, her strategy out of the company's Paris office for Jay Z's Rocawear helped lead to its sale to Iconix Brand for a record \$200M. Her book "Rise of the Smartpower Class" was selected as one of Amazon's Best New Media studies when it was first released. The book's most recent update, "America's Most Wanted: How to Quad Decode And Trend Forecast" has achieved critical acclaim. She has also successfully completed the Management Development for Entrepreneurs Program at UCLA's Anderson School of Business.

Lauren has captured editorial merit with her perspective on Innovation for outlets from Forbes to cnbc.com. As an international keynote, she has spoken at such organizations as Nokia and the NASDAQ Foundation. She has appeared on MSNBC, Cheddar. Lauren is a new member of the Recording Academy and a new Innovation contributor for NASDAQ News and Markets. She recently created GameChange a 501c3 social impact initiative to support underserved women in Future Media. Currently she is developing an AI-driven media startup with a blockchain component concept as she runs her strategy company [Lnk Agency](#) and is completing study at Harvard Business School. More about Lauren at [ultralauren.com](#)

Lauren helps senior executives in media/entertainment/communications do 3 things:

-  Leverage their current assets to generate new revenue streams.
-  Decipher cultural intelligence trends
-  deepen product experience and market share
-  Decode authentic D2C applications of emerging technology

Whenever you are ready, there are 5 ways to sync with Lauren...)

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