

Men are back

Once considered an American cliché, pick-up trucks are now experiencing an unexpected and rapidly growing degree of success among European consumers. The automotive world has found a new narrative to pursue.

Seen on the roads

Long gone is the time when the car market could be summed up in three categories: saloons, coupés and estates. After MPVs, 4x4s and urban SUVs with cool names, each of which has altered both the shape of cars and our relationship with them, the pick-up, America's favourite vehicle, is the latest segment to gain popularity. Its market remains small in Europe but it has grown steadily over the last two years, supported by consumer demand for a workhorse vehicle that bucks trends and whose appeal is not just confined to the business world (farmers, tradesmen, private and public sector companies, etc.), which has long been its target market. Mercedes was the first premium brand to launch a pick-up, quickly followed by Volvo.



What to think of it?

Examining the automotive market teaches us as much about our fantasies and aspirations as it does about the technological and stylistic evolution of cars. **Should we really be surprised to see pick-ups appearing on our roads?** Are they not just the motorized equivalent of today's boot camps, CrossFit programs, forest survival courses and strength challenges, where virility seems to be everything? Built to go off-road, do they not simply confirm **the importance people now place on communing with a nature that is wild**, real, authentic and, most of all, sheltered from the excesses of our world? After plaid lumberjack shirts matched with hiking boots, high-tech jackets and full beards, here come tough and rugged pick-ups. We will ignore the fact that they now offer the comfort of a large saloon car, given that most come with four doors. **What counts is aesthetics and thrills.** Their image is virile and sturdy, authentic and "rough and ready". The polar opposite of sophisticated flowing lines and technological excesses. They stand as proof that **products that flirt with extremes will always have their fans**, especially at a time when the general outlook is somewhat bleak.

Why should the issue of product returns only concern e-commerce sites?

All e-commerce sites take responsibility for returns in the event that a customer is dissatisfied. Shouldn't real-world retailers be offering the same service?

Seen in Strasbourg

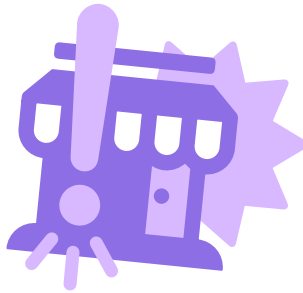
Etam's underwear brand for younger buyers, Undiz, continues to shake up habits. After the Undiz Machine concept, where products were transferred from a shop's store room to its shelves via coloured pipes, a new (free) service is being offered to further enrich the shopping experience. The retailer's customers will no longer have to visit a shop to return a product. All they will need to do is place the item in their own letter box and notify the seller using the Undiz application. It will then be picked up by parcel firm Colissimo. This return system, which is currently only available in Strasbourg, will soon be deployed across France. In Paris, meanwhile, German e-retailer Zalando is trialling a 30-minute express parcel return service in partnership with courier network Stuart.



What to think of it?

Although seemingly anecdotal, the "easy return" system dreamt up by Undiz is clearly **original and inspirational**. While many high-street retailers are adding more and more screens and tablets to their stores, it is rare to see them harness the new behaviours prompted by e-commerce, despite the fact that the two models are crossing over more and more, **generating complementarity rather than contradiction**. Here, Undiz is proving that it has taken notice of the fact that young shoppers no longer have the inclination (or time?) to try on clothes before buying them and just want to **reduce to a minimum anything that might interrupt the buying process** (see the initiative by Topshop Australia covered in the November edition of L'œil). Thanks to the partnership signed with Colissimo, they no longer need to go back to the store to return unwanted items and can instead place them in their own letter box for collection. Here, Undiz provides us with an important reminder that **"small service innovations" that make life easier** can help a retailer build a reputation as an innovative company. Not only is this a way for them to stand apart from their competitors, it also **helps them to establish a closer relationship with customers, so as to ultimately become their preferred choice**. Indeed, by giving consumers a reason to view their brand in a favourable light and offering them positive experiences, retailers strengthen their connection with them. **A loyalty-building strategy** that is at least as effective as offering them store cards.

Appearing in a new light: the current obsession of (almost) all companies



All brands are convinced that they need to reinvent themselves a little more each day to meet the latest expectations of consumers and face up to fierce competition. But how far should they go?

<https://lieu.maifsocialclub.fr>

Seen in Paris

At the end of 2016, Maif opened the Maif Social Club's first location in the Marais district of Paris: a 1,000-square-meter space that is open to all free of charge and which is a cross between an art gallery, a library, a meeting place and a conference centre. This experimental venue offers a blend of culture, innovation and proximity, the aim being to highlight the changes taking place in society and how they are embraced by culture. Its inaugural exhibition, *Iconomania* (until 31 March), ponders the role and treatment of images in contemporary society. The Maif Social Club was already up and running on the internet in the form of a discussion platform and was primarily aimed at the insurer's policyholders. With this new site, Maif demonstrates that it is also keen to provide the neighbourhood with a community space, where locals can collect shopping they have ordered from the "La Ruche qui dit Oui !" website, flick through magazines and books, and take advantage of wifi access.

What to think of it?

Having traditionally been associated with mutual insurance and solidarity, Maif's image bears no obvious relation to that of a location devoted to art and urban social interaction, which is how the Maif Social Club venue could be perceived. Or does it? This new approach reveals a great deal about the way in which brands and companies wish to be perceived today, **by popping up in the most unexpected places, far removed from their roots**. A way of forging relationships by shifting away from an all-digital rationale, but also (and most importantly) a way of **prompting surprise** (one of today's key consumer expectations) and **reinventing oneself**. Such is their new communication challenge. Hence the appearance of more and more cool and offbeat living spaces, where **brands avoid directly mentioning their line of business and the preoccupations of their customers**, preferring instead to attract new populations using broad themes that enable them to break away from their strictly commercial purpose and convey the idea that they **understand and can adapt to a changing society**. Appearing in unexpected guises, initiating new forms of relationship and taking on different identities must now be the hallmarks of any brand that seeks to innovate. **Chameleonic brands are already among us.**

The internet and social media are not alone in fuelling the community spirit

Who still believes that paper has little future due to the rise of digital? A number of web players are now thinking that talk of paper's demise may have been a little premature.

<https://skift.com/2016/11/20/airbnbs-new-magazine-and-the-evolution-of-old-school-content-marketing>

 Emmanuelle S. / Marketing Digital

Seen in Los Angeles

Airbnb recently announced the launch of a paper magazine. It will be available this year from the platform's accommodation providers. In this post-digital era, Airbnb is shifting away from online communication and focusing on paper as a point of contact. Airbnb Mag will be published at a rate of two issues a year and is intended to be much more than a "Travel Guidebook", because its content will be comprised mainly of experiences and advice shared by Airbnb hosts. An initial version of the magazine has been trialled in the Los Angeles area.



What to think of it?

After community houses designed by its own architects (see L'Œil from December) and its City Hosts (see L'Œil from February), Airbnb is launching another fresh initiative, demonstrating that the website is still very keen to polish its image and to do everything it can to **promote its community focus**, an essence of their offering and will instead **need to concentrate on the relationship they are able to build with their customers**. To achieve this goal, a paper catalogue appears to be the perfect solution for Airbnb, despite apparently running counter to the mass-digitalisation trend. Indeed, it **integrates quite naturally** into its hosts' environment, **usually on a coffee table in front of the sofa**, a feature found in all the dwellings it advertises and one that is generally vacant or covered in tourist leaflets. So **as much through its location as through its content**, which includes testimonies, suggestions and recommendations, the magazine will champion the website's fun and friendly values and reinforce the sense of community that so appeals to its members. Placing the emphasis on the customer experience means more than simply observing and capitalising on the habits of consumers, **it also means understanding their environment and lifestyle**.

And also

In 2012, the average commercial vacancy rate in French town centres was 7.2%. In 2015, the figure reached 9.5%. More alarming still is the fact that **in almost half the towns in France the rate exceeds the critical 10% mark**, according to Procos, the Associated Trade Federation. However, in major cities the average rate is a relatively low 7%. Town centres are shifting away from a logic of proximity (the catering trade) and instead embracing national retail brands focused on shopping, culture and leisure. Popular tourist towns are doing better than the rest, with a rate of less than 7%, a high density of independent traders and a lower proportion of nationwide retailers.



In 2016, e-commerce accounted for 8% of French trade, a rise of one point compared to 2015. **This growth can be explained by a 12% increase in the number of shopping websites, but also by the fact that the French are buying online more frequently than ever before.** Online purchasing frequency increased at a record rate in 2016: up 21% compared with 2015. Last year, French connected buyers performed an average of 28 online transactions, totalling around €2,000. Purchases made using a mobile or tablet continue to gain ground, due primarily to smartphone shopping, which grew by 30% in 2016, after an increase of 39% in 2015. (Source: Fevad janvier 2017)



According to a Harris Interactive survey for the Mutualité Française health insurance association, **more than 6 out of 10 French citizens believe that their country's health system works well (61%),** but more than two-thirds (68%) are pessimistic about its future. (The online survey was carried out between 30 January and 07 February 2017)



According to the first Zoom survey conducted by L'Observatoire Cetelem on the theme of housing, **58% of French people are in favour of teleworking** and 37% engage or have engaged in the practice from their own home. Meanwhile, 54% of respondents believe that tomorrow's homes will be places of work. (Survey conducted by Harris Interactive from 14 to 16 February 2017 on a sample of 1,014 people.)



Summing up

Two receptionists who were working for a Paris hotel have set up the Trocotel website, which allows consumers to sell their non-refundable hotel stays to other private individuals.

www.trocotel.com

 *Véronique B. / Marque, Communication et Publicité*

Adidas has teamed up with Parley Ocean Plastic to produce a technical fibre from marine plastic waste, which will be used in the manufacture of high-end swimsuits.

www.adidas.fr/parley

 *Patricia B. / L'Observatoire Cetelem*

To enable drivers of "older" cars to take advantage of connected services, Ford has developed the SmartLink key, which plugs into the vehicle's diagnostic socket and equips it with functions that can be controlled via a smartphone, such as locking, unlocking and starting the car remotely, providing passengers with a wifi connection and geolocation.



In the United States, crisp brand Tostitos has come up with breathalyzer packaging. All the user has to do is blow into a slot in the packet. If the indicator turns red, a code appears granting a \$10 discount on an Uber journey. In addition, thanks to an NFC chip incorporated into the packaging, the user can simply touch it with their smartphone to call a taxi.

 *Marshal S. / Marque, Communication & Publicité*

Péligourmet is the first ride-sharing site for local produce. Pélicabs seek out quality local products and Péligourmets order them online. The Pélicabs then bring these products back to the city when they make their return journey, in exchange for payment of their transport costs, if they so wish.

 *Damien S. / Stratégie Retail*

After launching its e-commerce site in May 2014, The Good Life magazine, published by Ideat, inaugurated an 80-square-metre concept store at the beginning of February on the 3rd floor of Printemps Hommes in Paris.

 *Patricia B. / L'Observatoire Cetelem*



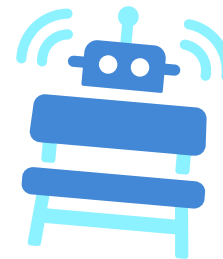
San Francisco recently became home to the first fully-automated coffee kiosk. Customers can order their beverage remotely via a mobile app and drinks are prepared and served by a robotic arm developed by Mitsubishi.

 *Loïc M. / Echangeur*

More and more Chinese insurance companies are developing so-called "Love Insurance" that hinges on the duration of marriages and rewards insured couples who can prove that they are still together after a vvvvertain period of time.

 *Emmanuelle S. / Stratégie Retail*

In New York, Uber offers unlimited journeys through Uber Plus: \$59 for two weeks, \$89 for four weeks. This only includes weekday journeys in Manhattan made between 6 am and 8 pm.




Word of the month



Office Soulmate: an American concept that describes the colleague with whom employees have the closest relationship. This is the person who will listen to their day-to-day frustrations, problems and anxieties.

Employees of BNP Paribas Personal Finance help to uncover the micro-facts reported in L'Œil by L'Observatoire Cetelem.

 *means that the fact or the news in brief was spotted by one of them.*

L'Œil de L'Observatoire Cetelem analyses micro-facts on consumption, revealing the emergence of new manners of spending.

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