



MW TruthCentral

**THE TRUTH
ABOUT**

Escapism

A fundamental human behavior that has shaped our world for centuries

Escapism is a fundamental human behavior that has shaped our world for centuries, from ancient Greek theater to the immersive virtual realities of today. It is not just a coping mechanism but a source of creativity, innovation, and imagination.

In today's fast-paced world, escapism offers a crucial emotional release, **with 91% of people globally affirming the need to escape occasionally**. This universal desire has given rise to the **"Escape Economy", valued at \$9.7 trillion and expected to grow to \$13.9 trillion by 2028**. From travel and tourism to entertainment and gaming, escape-related industries underpin much of the global economy.

Escapism exists on a spectrum of human behavior, encompassing everything from fleeting emotional distractions to profound physical disconnection. It is not merely about seeking leisure; it reflects a deeper need to detach or "break free" from the pressures of modern life. **Globally, 84% of people view distractions as a healthy way to manage stress**, while others use escapism to confront or reimagine their realities.

Far from being just a consumer behavior, escapism represents a powerful way for building emotional connections and fostering brand loyalty. By understanding the spectrum of escapes, brands can position themselves as essential partners in their consumers' journeys, whether small or life-changing. We explore the Escape Economy through the following areas:

1. **Escape Mode**
What escape looks like today
2. **Escape Decoded**
How and why people escape
3. **Escape Frontiers**
What's new in escape
4. **Escape Designed**
The secret ingredients to a great escape

ESCAPE MODE

Escapism is no longer confined to annual holidays or major events; the ideal escape can range from big things like immersive travel experiences to small things that permeate daily life.

Whether it's scrolling social media, meditating, or daydreaming, people effortlessly slip into "Escape Mode" throughout the day. This creates a unique consumer mindset where every moment presents a potential brand opportunity. If "escape" was once seen primarily as an opportunity for travel brands, "escape mode" is an opportunity for all brands.

Truth: Escape used to be more a destination, now it's a 'mode'.

Brand Provocation: If your audience isn't escaping with you, they are escaping with someone else.

"Instead of one big trip this year, we focused on spending more time with family locally."

– CANADA, WOMAN, 38

"It's relaxing at home, maybe on the Internet, maybe just doing nothing."

– GERMANY, MAN, 16

"A pre-programmed coffee at 7am"

"Listening to music on the way to work"

"Booking a weekend getaway with credit card points"

"Dinner party at friend's house"

"Backyard games with nephews"

ESCAPE DECODED

Why do we even escape to begin with? As the common saying goes, “Money can’t buy happiness” but it can buy you an escape. An escape from your kids, your work, or even yourself. Escapes today come in all shapes and sizes, as people are seeking relief not just from their external environment (36%) but often from their inner selves, with 35% identifying the urge to escape from their own minds.

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Our research sees this rich cultural tapestry of escapism unfolding across the globe. For example, while people in the U.S. often seek to escape the “State of the World,” those in France are more likely to disconnect from “the news.” In China, the focus shifts to escaping “parents and older relatives,” whereas in India, it’s about stepping away from “social media.”

To organize and illustrate the evolving landscape of escapism, we mapped a variety of escape types along two axes:

- **Micro to Macro:** Representing the scale and impact of an escape, from small, everyday activities like scrolling social media to significant, life-changing experiences like taking a career break.
- **Relief to Renewal:** Capturing the shift from immediate rest and relaxation to deeper forms of recharge, personal growth, fulfillment, and even reinvention.

Truth: The desire to escape is an expansive and growing human need state.

Brand Provocation: How can your brand flex across this new landscape of escape?

ESCAPE FRONTIERS

Innovative forms of escapism are rapidly emerging, offering new ways for people to disconnect, recharge, and reinvent themselves.

While technology unsurprisingly plays a central role—1 in 2 people globally report they go online to escape the real world—we're also witnessing exciting new trends that redefine how we disconnect.

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Trends such as “sleep tourism,” offering luxury sleep-enhancing experiences; “day gisting,” providing quick, local retreats at hotels and spas; and “psychedelic reinvention,” leveraging psychedelics for personal growth and identity exploration, are redefining how we disconnect. For younger generations, mainstream fantasy—through cosplay, fantasy fiction, and daydreaming—has become a prominent and imaginative form of escape.

There's a whole new world of landscapes of escapes that brands can start to tap into and leverage in this economy because ultimately every brand is in the business of escape.

Truth: Escape is a breeding ground for innovation and creativity, and consumer expectations are higher than ever.

Brand Provocation: How can brands offer people new and exciting things in the world of escape?

ESCAPE DESIGNED



How can brands tap into the escape mode mindset and make escapism a key driver of growth? While brands can invest in any shape and size of escape, we've identified three guiding principles for brands to leverage escape mode effectively:

Enjoyment in Anticipation

Harness the excitement of planning and looking forward to an escape—because sometimes, the build-up is as rewarding as the experience itself.

82% say sometimes looking forward to an experience can be as good as the experience itself.

Shifting Perspectives

Help people step outside their routines and gain fresh viewpoints. Whether physical or emotional, a change in scenery can redefine how they see their lives.

“Escapism can be a way to remove a feeling but it can also be a way to be really intentional with who you aspire to be.” – Bookclub Organizer, UK

Choice of Freedoms

Deliver experiences that provide a sense of joyous liberation—where “airport rules” apply, and people feel free to break routines and embrace spontaneity.

2 in 3 say “buying myself things even when I shouldn’t, makes me happy.”

By understanding and activating these principles, brands can unlock escapism’s role as both an emotional necessity and a purchase driver. Escape mode is more than just a trend—it’s a lucrative opportunity to connect with consumers in ways that inspire, delight, and endure.

Truth: The benefits of escapism extend from the desire to escape till the afterglow.

Brand Provocation: What will your brand do to unlock the transformative power of escape? It’s time to press ‘ESC’—to create moments that transport, liberate, and inspire.

EVERY BRAND IS IN THE BUSINESS OF ESCAPE

Escapism is no longer a niche consumer behavior, it's a powerful framework for **innovation and engagement**. Brands that address the full spectrum of escapist needs will build enduring connections with their audience. The demand is clear: **44% of people globally want brands to understand their frustrations, while 56% want brands to provide them with dreams**. Escapism answers both, across four key dimensions:

- ◆ **Micro Relief:** Offer accessible, low effort ways to unwind
- ◆ **Macro Relief:** Provide immersive experiences that help consumers recharge
- ◆ **Micro Renewal:** Inspire moments of self-discovery or small-scale growth and aspiration
- ◆ **Macro Renewal:** Enable transformative experiences that foster long-term fulfillment

For brands already rooted in escapism, the challenge is clear: Are they harnessing the full range of escape opportunities consumers crave? How can they reimagine category norms?

For brands not traditionally associated with escapism, this is your invitation to start: Where can they address the evolving consumer need for escape? How can brands innovate to create moments of relief, renewal, or transformation?

In this rapidly growing Escape Economy—projected to reach \$13.9 trillion in 2028—brands that align their activities and positioning across the escapism landscape will win.

By fulfilling this universal and deeply human need, brands have the opportunity to create meaningful connections, driving loyalty, growth, and engagement in an economy increasingly defined by the pursuit of escape.

Methodology

The Truth About Escapism is a global mixed-method research study, that included:

- ◆ A global quantitative survey of 16,112 respondents across 16 markets conducted in April/May 2024. [Brazil, Canada, Chile, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Japan, Mexico, Peru, Spain, Thailand, UAE, UK, USA]
- ◆ Social listening analysis in partnership with Pulsar's Narrative AI tool, that covered 39 billion social and news posts utilizing an "escapism" taxonomy of over 150 phrases and words, clustered into narratives
- ◆ Over 50 sources of academic literature review
- ◆ Interviews with 15 experts across 10 disciplines spanning psychology, gaming, tourism, etc.
- ◆ The study also features industry valuations that have been provided by GlobalData

About MW Truth Central

Founded in 2011, MW Truth Central is McCann Worldgroup's brand intelligence unit, dedicated to unearthing the macro level truths that drive people's attitudes and behaviors about life, brands and marketing.

With over a decade of research, the unit has over 56 million proprietary data points and is our revolutionary resource, turbocharging our ability to understand humans around the world.

MW Truth Central's team of experts have been awarded and shortlisted by the Market Research Society and Effie's, and their work has been presented at conferences across the globe and covered by the Wall Street Journal, BBC, Time, Campaign, Adweek, and many others. Our award-winning intelligence enables our partners to build future forward businesses, enduring brands, and path-breaking creativity.

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