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STORIES FROM THE EDGE

Emergent trends in the peripheries of financial services

Oct 2021



Stories from the edge

There has been a well documented impact on financial behaviours due to the pandemic and lockdown living. From dealing with reduced incomes, to seeing the boon of decreased spending, finances have found a new prominence in people's lines of sight.

These changes got us all thinking, what else can light the fire of change in how people 'do money'? And what's happening out there in the fringes of financial activity that might provide important touchstones for boosting engagement and understanding money from a consumer angle?

Using our online methodology we set out to investigate the human stories in emergent financial spaces across the US and UK. Delving into crypto-currency, the FIRE* philosophy, new

day traders, crowd funding and financial therapy – we wanted to capture the tensions, needs and language at play in these emergent, but not yet completely main-stream financial experiences.

What we've found illustrates the depth of emotion, experience and critically the human needs sitting at the heart of 'doing money' in these worlds. Insights that can be used to inform how we speak about finance, collect our own data and ensure relevancy.

Get in touch for more thinking at info@discover.ai

**Financial independence, retire early*



What we've explored, and where

All our projects start with a curated set of online sources – spanning a range of areas both central to, and adjacent to, the category of interest – to provide stretch and inspiration.



YOUTH AND MONEY
SPECIALISTS



FINANCIAL
THERAPY SITES



CRYPTO FORUMS
AND GROUPS



CULTURAL JOURNALISM
AROUND FINANCES



EMERGENT FINANCIAL
SERVICES BRANDS



FIRE
ENTHUSIASTS

AND
MUCH
MORE!

Three thematic areas emerged from our analysis



Financial wellness is moving on – financial wholeness is where it's at. An emergent expression of financial activity more anchored in the reality of diverse economic experiences



A critical look at the role financial services has to play in making the world a better place



A broad scale desire to operate in a way that suits you, not within the confines of pre-existing structures

And within these thematic areas, a number of key ideas emerge



The Weakest Link

Physical, mental and financial wellness working together – no longer an outcome or a driver, but a key component, financial wellness is increasingly on the radar as a core facet of happiness in the world – but nearly always discussed in negative terms

Financial Drill

A focus on rigour and discipline – the need to investigate, monitor and uphold standards in order to guard yourself against the potential for wild excesses if you don't

Magical Money

Taking everyday financial activity and making it feel fresh and worthwhile, akin to other pleasurable activities in your world



Play your Part

Financial services is increasingly under demand to play their part in making global changes. A simple future-proofing narrative emerges around investment performance, but as awareness around sustainable choices grows, so does cynicism

Radical Language

A change in the language of emergent financial services firms using a new vocabulary of passion and commitment borrowed from grassroots campaigns – a counterpoint to the rising demand for values based thinking from consumers

Build on Solid Ground

Frustration and anger that financial education is not prioritised meaning that harmful cultural norms are continued through generations, and people are continuing to learn through painful loss



Tension at the Heart of Crypto

Crypto is a community affair reliant on a shared sense of understanding, and to a degree a sense of us vs. them. Characterised by an induction into a new world order and a desire to pass on the 'secret', but conflicted by those who know best how to do it pouring scorn on new joiners

Decentralize, Decouple, Empower

An increasingly bleak future is being painted for younger generations. Crypto is the counterpoint – a tool for revolution! A way to live outside the grid, take power back and construct a financial world that works for you – not the system

In this report, we deep dive into the thematic area of Financial Wholeness and consider some of the implications for financial services



What is Financial Wholeness?

Financial wellness is moving on – financial wholeness is where it's at. An emergent expression of financial activity more anchored in the reality of diverse economic experiences

The insight

- In the context of a changed economic landscape – side gigs, freelancing, no jobs for life, increasing debt and low pay – what wealth means is taking on a more holistic dimension that moves beyond the stereotypical associations of wellness (e.g. Goop!).
- Borrowing concepts and language from holistic health and wellness, this is a space where people are re-thinking financial wellness to a concept that has personal relevance to them, and is not just aspirational
- Where emotion is central – either as a force for good or as something dangerous and wanton

FEEL GOOD IN THE LONG RUN

Maybe financial investing come to mind first, or a self-care ritual, or building up your career network, or a diet and exercise regimen that makes you feel your best in the long run

Source

USA

FINANCIAL WELLNESS

Financial wellness is the act of learning about how your personality, environment, and experiences affect your money habits, leading to financial stability

Source

USA

FINANCIAL SELF-CARE

Practicing financial self-care means that we understand that every money move we make is a decision, and we have the power to make that decision a positive, active one

Source

USA

NEVER BE EMOTIONAL

I started only in November and the most important thing I've learnt is never be emotional with money

Social Media

UK

TEMPTATION AND SELFISHNESS

If we do not accept that we are obliged to take responsibility and restrain ourselves in the face of greed, temptation and selfishness, we have to recognise that society, represented by government, will impose constraints upon us

Social Media

USA

MANAGEABLE AND FUN

Part interactive mixology lesson (with both cocktails AND mocktails), part networking opportunity, and part crash course in starting a business, this totally unique event is all about making the (sometimes scary) prospect of building your own business into something manageable and fun

Source

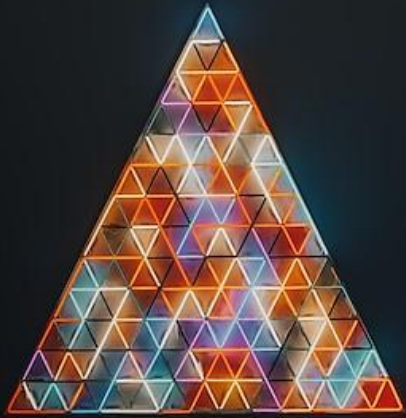
USA

REWired MY BRAIN

As dorky as it may sound, I realized this morning I've rewired my brain to *want* to save rather than *have* to save, if that makes sense

Social Media

OTHER



A crucial theme from the fringes of financial services could be...

The Weakest Link

Physical, mental and financial wellness working together – no longer an outcome or a driver, but a key component, financial wellness is increasingly on the radar as a core facet of happiness in the world – but nearly always discussed in negative terms.

The insight

- A palpable sense that financial health has been folded into more mainstream discussions around wellness – which when discussed online borrows much from the language of holistic health
- Financial health clearly considered as part of the trinity of living a happy life (alongside physical and mental health)

The ideal

- Being happy, healthy and financially sorted is the aspiration

The need

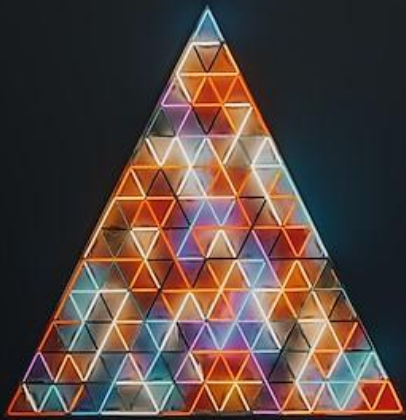
- Much of the conversation highlights financial health as the weakest link. There is a clear focus on the negative side of financial health – uncertainty, grief, anxiety rules, couched in the language of crisis and fear

The implications

- Despite becoming a mainstream pillar, much of the focus still remains on the negative side of financial health – uncertainty, grief, anxiety
- An opportunity to create a more positive language around financial health that recognises the consequences of poor wellbeing, but speaks to the craving people have for financial wellness

Language of the space

- Mindful spending
- Feeling / spiritual
- Stability / centred-ness
- Stress and anxiety
- Money trouble
- Financial anxiety



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HARD TO KNOW THE DIFFERENCE

it's hard to know the difference between anxiety, grief, financial uncertainty and general loneliness lately, i feel them all blending into one ...
Social Media
USA

WASTE OF ENERGY

The biggest lesson that became clear to me as the story of the book came together has to do with how much time, mental energy, and emotional energy we all waste when it comes to our money
Social Media
USA

MINDFUL SPENDING

In addition to creating opportunities to educate consumers on mindful spending and providing them with ways to take action toward climate change, Mastercard and its partners in the Priceless Planet Coalition pledge to plant 100 million trees over five years as part of its commitment to make meaningful investments to preserve the environment
Source
UK

HOW INVESTING MAKES YOU FEEL

Hardly ever do we talk about what we can give by investing, about how it can make you feel about yourself, your family's lives, and your prospects
Source
UK

FEEL RICH

The thing that really makes me feel rich is knowing that we have enough money for food and mortgage and basic necessities of life for the next three years, whether or not he gets a job
Social Media
USA

FINANCIAL SECURITY ANXIETY

lol also i'm thankful cos i really have financial security anxiety so the fact na he's gonna be a doctor makes me feel secure
Social Media
USA

MONEY TROUBLE

Money trouble is 99% of my daily stress and anxiety no joke, just praying for that day where I can be financially independent and debt free
Social Media
UK

FINANCIAL STABILITY FOR MENTAL HEALTH

The biggest thing I've learnt after uni is that financial stability is a lot more helpful for my mental health than struggling for four years in the HOPES of getting a better job
Social Media
UK

TALK ABOUT IT

Money can be a huge stress to our mental health so it's important to feel comfortable talking about our finances, just like the way we have done with mental illnesses
Social Media
UK

FINANCIAL GRIEFS

If you see me literally dissolving from all the financial, emotional, psychological, physical, spiritual griefs I've experienced and absorbed since lockdown began in March manifesting in an actual fall to your knees crying jag no you didn't
Social Media
USA



A crucial theme from the fringes of financial services could be...

Financial Drill

A focus on rigour and discipline – the need to investigate, monitor and uphold standards in order to guard yourself against the potential for wild excesses if you don't

The insight

- An almost obsessive attention to the management and control of emotion when thinking about finances

The ideal

- Rigour in activity, detachment from the outcome allowing smooth sailing around finances

The need

- Financial control as moral behaviour and excess as wickedness
- But even more than excess, allowing emotion into your approach and thinking is dangerous, to be avoided at all costs

The implications

- Trading and investing is something to be scared of – beyond the risk of losing money, there's an element of losing yourself that people are guarding against – leading to the question of how to ensure these activities 'feel' realistic, achievable and part of normal life
- At the same time a view that financial success is only achievable through hard work, monitoring, rigour and planning – while these are important factors, few people feel equipped or have the time to operate in this way
- Planning and consistency is key, continuing a path of action and committing to not 'feeling' the outcome is a priority

Language of the space

- An authoritarian tone
- Don't do this
- Beware / wary
- Control / Plan / Strategy
- Homework / technical analysis



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Financial Drill

A focus on rigour and discipline – the need to investigate, monitor and uphold standards in order to guard yourself against the potential for wild excesses if you don't

DISCIPLINE

The only way to make money trading is by having a trading strategy, making a trading plan from it and having the discipline and mental strength to stick to it over a long enough period of time to let your winning trades offset your losers

Source
USA

OUT OF SHAPE

If you are someone who is very disorganized, physically very out of shape or otherwise lacking in major forms of self-control, you will need to fix this if you want to make money trading

Source
USA

YOU SHOULD

That's why you should ONLY trade money you can afford to lose

Source
USA

REAL MONEY TRADING

I do not believe that demo is the best way to learn how to trade because it doesn't give you the same anxiety of real money trading

Social Media
USA

BETTERING OURSELVES

We know 2020 is canceled so let's all just focus on saving money, investing, creating a healthy lifestyle, focus on our mental health and bettering ourselves for 2021

Social Media
USA

GONE WILD

It turns out that I had been so good about pinching pennies for years that being debt free meant I had gone kind of wild with my spending

Source
USA

LEAD BY EXAMPLE

I'm going to keep things as simple as possible and lead by example, explain the benefits of living below your means and how to save money so you have the freedom to choose your life rather than make decisions based on your debt

Source
USA

MOST IMPORTANT

Saving money is the most important investment decision you can make, especially at a young age when you have the wind at your back in terms of human capital and compound interest

Source
USA

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Obviously, when making the decision about who to trust with your hard-earned money it makes sense to do your homework

Source
USA

TECHNICAL ANALYSIS

I've put forth the reasons why I think that studying technical analysis is a vital part of anyone's education when they seek to make money trading in the crypto market

Source
OTHER



A crucial theme from the fringes of financial services could be...

Magical Money

Taking everyday financial activity and making it feel fresh and worthwhile, akin to other pleasurable activities in your world

The insight

- A re-framing of mundane activities – to encourage your own engagement and appreciation of the outcomes using language that feels approachable, important and interesting

The ideal

- A community working together to reach financial comfort, using techniques and tools that feel fun and joyful

The need

- Starting can be scary, people want to know about bitesize steps with big positive consequences.
- Building a sense of fun and joy, making finance and financial behaviour something that's important, but not frightening or unachievable

The implications

- There is a growing narrative that is about bringing financial behaviour into a lighter realm of action without trading off the importance of doing so
- Central to this idea are the ways that people are pulling together, learning together and sharing joy, tips and tricks to help them re-frame the meaning of doing money
- People are creating a sense of betterment and ease via the recognition of starting small

Language of the space

- State of the union
- Rewire / rethink
- Intentional spending
- Feel good
- Demystify
- Commitment device



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JUST A NAMING CHANGE

"I'm investing money into the relationship with my friends by getting this sandwich and beer." Additionally, Spending Plans (...just a budget but the naming change helps) can be freeing by allocating to areas you want to push to grow

Source
USA

SPENDING INTENTIONALLY

Having savings goals makes your spending more intentional and you'll enjoy the treat even more, knowing you've already paid for it

Source
UK

GROUP RELATIONSHIPS

When combined with savings triggers such as goal-setting, commitment devices, and tracking of deposits, these group relationships can be powerful in generating the confidence, capacity, and motivation required to build and sustain new savings habits

Source
USA

#MONEYCONSCIOUS

The mission of the Debt Free Guys is to help each person become #MoneyConscious resulting in eliminating their debt, living a debt free life and empowering them to achieve financial success by virtue of the universal principles discovered by us through our own financial mistakes, victories and professional training

Source
USA

LIKE SHOPPING AT A FARMERS MARKET

Just like shopping at a farmer's market or riding a bike makes you feel good through helping the world, socially responsible investing gives many investors the same feeling

Source
USA

DEMYSTIFYING

Undoubtedly, fintech is having an impact on this age group: demystifying a number of areas of retail finance for young people and creating an environment that feels more native to them

Source
USA

EXTREME LIFESTYLE CHANGES

Inside I found stories of families like mine making extreme changes to their lifestyles and even getting second jobs or earning extra money from home, all for the goal of becoming debt free

Source
USA

NATIONAL FINANCIAL AWARENESS DAY

National Financial Awareness Day is August 14 2021, a day dedicated to helping people understand finances and improve financial stability

Source
USA

FINANCE BUDDY

@user @user Also, if it's use, two things that have helped me are having a clear budget, and having a 'finance buddy' to talk through spending decisions with to make sure they're not impulsive or dangerous

Social Media
UK

STATE OF THE UNION

Two of the most important things you must do after college are: Conduct a State of the Union for your finances, sign-up (sic) for an online money management system Develop sound saving habits from the start and we couldn't agree more

Source
USA



What does this mean for financial services?

- Financial health and wellbeing is a clear point to extend an emotional relationship to customers.
- But what this means varies – from the desire for a holistic approach, to the need for discipline to a light and pleasurable activity
- Reflecting these needs in the ways that financial brands communicate, position services and products or even present visually information is a clear opportunity
- These conversations highlight the ways that financial choices and behaviours don't sit in isolation. They can be fully brought into people's identities and outlooks and importantly be balanced with language, products and services that make sense in this context
- And in this instance a recognition that the trends, shifts and pushback against wellness more directly is at play here, as it is in other aspects of people's lives





Which leaves us with 4 key questions we'd love to discuss

1. *How can continue to discuss financial wellness in a way that's ahead of the pushback against 'wellness' more generally in culture?*
2. *How can we capture the need for consistency and discipline with finances, without authoritarian overtones?*
3. *How can we support and build out beyond wellness for customers and prospects? How can we capture the emergent sense of financial wholeness?*
4. *How can we create joy rather than 'admin'? How do we move the experience of interacting with us out of the 'necessary evil' space?*





This is an extract from a longer paper that covers two further thematic areas discovered in the fringes. And within those a further 5 rich Springboards designed to push our thinking forward.

If you'd like to see this additional detail, do just drop us a line – we'd be happy to share this with you.





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