

The Weekly Listen: Is the internet getting worse, a new device for genAI, and are we sure about self-checkout?

Audio



On today's podcast episode, we discuss why the internet might be getting worse, what a new device designed for generative AI (genAI) might look like, whether we're sure about self-checkout, why a new online safety bill matters, what consumers expect from brands on social issues, where the ultra-rich spend their holidays, and more. Tune in to the discussion with our forecasting writer Ethan Cramer-Flood and analysts Bill Fisher and Carina Perkins.

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Episode Transcript:

Marcus Johnson:

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Hello, everyone, and thanks for hanging out with us for the Behind the Numbers Weekly Listen, an emarketer podcast made possible by Intuit Mailchimp, and this is the Friday show, that is feeling very British today. We've got almost all English people. Ethan, you're the odd man out, sorry about that. We'll let you stay though, if you can answer this question. Who was the very first king of England? And in what year?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Arthur, for sure.

Marcus Johnson:

Nope, he's off the show, and it's just the three of us. Carina or Bill, don't let me down.

Bill Fisher:

I don't know.

Marcus Johnson:

Bill, we've got to cut that out, we can't have people thinking we don't know this. The only reason I know this is because I watched the Last Kingdom on Netflix. Athelstan, 1927 AD, great series. Shout out to Uhtred. I'm your host Marcus Johnson, in today's show do we finally have proof that the internet is worse?

Carina Perkins:

If Amazon's experience becomes something that's not as good as a rival, then perhaps they'll stop shopping at Amazon. But I don't think they'll do it just because they feel they're being manipulated.

Marcus Johnson:

Does generative AI need a new device?

Bill Fisher:

Generative AI as an accelerant to this next form factor conversation is interesting, but smart glasses in AI? That's just creepy, man.

Marcus Johnson:

Are we sure about self-checkout?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

All of our experiences in brick and mortar will be improved if these companies go back to hiring actual human beings, right? We need people there. I'm sure there's a happy middle ground.

Marcus Johnson:

Why a new UK Online Safety Bill matters, what consumers expect from brands on social issues, and where do the ultra-rich spend their holidays? Join me for this episode, we have three people, let's meet them. For crying out loud, we start with one of our senior analysts covering retail and ecommerce, based on the South Coast of England, it's Carina Perkins.

Carina Perkins:

Well, hi there.

Marcus Johnson:

Hello, hello. If you move a little further down the coast, you might run into principle analyst who covers things that happen in the UK, and is also host at one of our other shows Around the World, it's Bill Fisher.

Bill Fisher:

Hey, how are you doing?

Marcus Johnson:

Hello, fellow. You're going to have to go across the Atlantic to hang out with this next chap, he's based in New York City and he is our principle forecasting writing, it's Ethan Cramer-Flood.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Shout out to Uhtred, first king of England.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes. No, Uhtred wasn't the first ...

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Wait, what did you say?

Marcus Johnson:

Athelstan. I can't.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I heard Uhtred in there.

Marcus Johnson:

Well, he was the star of the show, he was the star of the Last ... Has anyone seen the Last Kingdom?

Bill Fisher:

No.

Carina Perkins:

No.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, for crying out loud. Victoria, help me out.

Bill Fisher:

That's why I didn't know the answer.

Victoria:

Yeah.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Athelstan?

Marcus Johnson:

Athelstan was the king.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

All right.

Marcus Johnson:

Uhtred was the best warrior that he had. Listeners know what I'm talking about.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Shout out to him anyway.

Bill Fisher:

I've heard of Ethelred, Ethelred the Unready, right? He was a king at some point.

Marcus Johnson:

Don't try and save yourself, Bill. Moment's over. Go on, V.

Victoria:

Oh, I was just going to say I love that guy.

Marcus Johnson:

Yes, I knew you'd come through. Let's just be me and you, V. I don't know why we invite other people on the show. Anyway, let's talk to these other people who know nothing of Uhtred. We start with the Story of the Week, do we finally have proof the internet is worse? We'll see. We then move to the Game of the Week, our panel, we're trying to win a pretend championship belt, and that's pretty much it. Then we have Dinner Party Data, that's where we talk about random trivia. Let's start at the beginning, with of course it's the Story of the Week.

Do we finally have proof the internet is worse? Charlie Warzel of the Atlantic suggests that high profile lawsuits against Google and Amazon have revealed Silicon Valley's vice grip on

our lives. He writes that, "Living online means never quite understanding what's happening to you at a given moment. Why these results, why this product recommendation? There is a feeling, often warranted, sometimes conspiracy minded, that we are constantly manipulated by platforms and websites." Things basically, what he's talking about is making one button brighter can encourage a click over the other options, algorithms that know us too well can pull us deeper into social platforms. Mr. Warzel writes that, "Google is constantly tweaking and ranking what we see, while injecting ads and proprietary widgets into our feed, thereby altering our experience."

These big tech giants also being investigated, Google by the DOJ for anti-competitive practices like paying Apple to be the default search engine on its iPhones, and Amazon is also being taken to court by the FTC for anti-competitive behavior. Mr. Warzel continues by saying that, "We end up saying the Google search is less useful now, or that shopping on Amazon has gotten worse. These tools are so embedded in our lives that we feel acutely that something is off, even if we can't put our finger on the technical problem." So that's the summary of the piece, what do we think, folks? Do we finally have proof the internet is worse?

Carina Perkins:

The first thing that really upset me was the headline.

Marcus Johnson:

Talk to me.

Carina Perkins:

Worse than what?

Marcus Johnson:

Before.

Carina Perkins:

Before.

Marcus Johnson:

You know before, you know that time.

Carina Perkins:

That time before the internet.

Marcus Johnson:

Early internet maybe, I don't know. Maybe early internet when we had more choice I think is what he's getting at.

Carina Perkins:

But I think this kind of choice editing has been going on forever, before these big internet corporations even existed. In fact, probably since the time of Athelstan.

Marcus Johnson:

Don't try and make up for it, you don't know who he is.

Bill Fisher:

I don't know who he is.

Carina Perkins:

But definitely it's part of capitalism, right? You look at any, you look at supermarkets, essentially they're choice editing, aren't they, what we can and can not buy. They've got promotional aisles which put things that they want us to buy in front of us. So I think it is alarming, as he says, but it's perhaps not a surprise or any huge divergent from what's been happening forever. I think the thing is that people are aware of this and they might not be able to put their finger on exactly what makes them uncomfortable, but they also aren't necessarily going to act even if they know they are being manipulated, because I think what people really care about, especially when shopping, I'm going to give you a retail perspective, is their two big priorities, which is price and convenience. So if Amazon's experience becomes something that's not as good as a rival, then perhaps they'll stop shopping at Amazon. But I don't think they'll do it just because they feel they're being manipulated.

Bill Fisher:

Yeah. I'll give you the marketing example as well, it's the same, anything that's driven by market forces. If the status quo doesn't deliver, people will go looking for better alternatives and looking at search, as an example, the stranglehold that Google's had over search and it's

allegedly abusing that stranglehold. It's fairly well documented that younger age groups are becoming less reliant on Google, because it's not as good. My kids, every podcast I've got to mention TikTok, because I love it, my kids do, every search that they begin they're beginning on TikTok now, that's why Google's so interesting in partnering with them. Which might make my point moot I guess, but people aren't mugs and they will vote with their feet or eyeballs if things get particular bad, eventually.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. So the question that gets brought up is, "Okay, well, if these platforms are dominating your life, why don't you just switch?" But I feel it's interesting, Carina, because you were saying that you don't think people would switch even if you could prove that something was going on. Because I feel like if you had proof that you were being manipulated by a platform, you might feel differently. There was a quote from Mr. Warzel saying, "We have the sense that we're being manipulated because, well, we are." It's a bit like feeling vaguely sick, going to the doctor and receiving a blood test result confirming that yes, the malaise you experienced isn't actually an iron deficiency, it is the catharsis of at long last receiving the diagnosis. So I wonder if there is something to that.

If we think something's up, but having it being pointed out by maybe one of these regulators could make you think, "Oh, okay, they are doing something which is unlawful. I am actually going to switch platforms, even if it is a bit more expensive or a bit less convenient." Maybe I have too much faith in people.

Carina Perkins:

I'm going to bring it back to the supermarket example, or the retail perspective. So we've had a few scandals over the years with supermarkets involved, I don't know if you guys in the US heard much about the horse meat scandal, but that was a big one. Horse meat found its way into several meat products in British supermarkets, and there was a lot of press at the time around supermarket sourcing policies and a lot of upset around the fact that we weren't eating British. They did change their sourcing policies as a result, but the supermarkets didn't really see a huge dent in sales. We didn't see everyone suddenly go, "Oh, we're going to stop going to the supermarket and we're going to our local butcher instead." Certainly not in the long run, because for people, although they were upset by this, the supermarket is still the cheapest, the most convenient place for them to shop.

So we've had this big four stranglehold in the UK for years and years with the supermarkets, and the only thing that's affected that stranglehold is when the discounters Aldi and Lidl have come in and offered them just as good a shopping experience for cheaper.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I think that's exactly what's going to happen here in the US, or maybe even all over the world, in terms of the results of these lawsuits and these anti-monopoly legislation and these investigations. My sense is really that the average person is not on pins and needles paying super close attention to these outcomes, or even these preliminary revelations, like was discussed in this article about so-called proof that everything is worse. My sense is that the average consumer already assumes that nefarious things are going on, already assumes the worst about most of these tech companies, and they just go about their daily business anyway. Regardless of the outcome of these lawsuits, people are going to continue to behave, basically to Carina's point, as long as the service is good, as long as you can get what you want for a price that you consider to be competitive, or you can find a search result better than you can somewhere else, they're going to keep right on going.

The results, even within this article that was phrased, do we now have "proof" that the internet is worse, or Marcus, the way that you phrased this segment on the pod, it's not really about proof that anything really particularly is going wrong that we didn't know about anyway. The worst of the accusation in the article was actually disproven, and the rest of it is just a feeling that we all already have. We already know. You don't need the courtroom to reveal proof that it feels unpleasant to go shopping on Amazon.com. We already know that. We already know that it has become a stressful and difficult process, as compared to what it used to be. Whether or not the government proves that is irrelevant.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. I think you guys have convinced me, to be honest, because there was a line in this piece where it says, "Whether or not any of these lawsuits result in corporate breakups or lasting change, they are effectively an MRI of our sprawling digital economy. A forensic look at what these larger than life tech companies are really doing and how they're exerting their influence and causing damage is confirmation of what so many of us have felt. The platforms are dictating our online experiences, or behaving unnaturally and manipulative, is not merely a paranoid delusion, but the effect of an asymmetrical relationship between the giants of scale and us, the users." To your point, Ethan, most people won't be paying attention to the details

of these cases from the DOJ with Google, or the FTC of Amazon, let alone paying attention to the details, they may not even know the cases are going on.

Carina Perkins:

I think Ethan's point as well that people are already assuming the worst is a really good one. I think people do assume the worst of these companies, but it's convenient and so they keep doing it.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. We're already there, we're just waiting for the government to catch up. That's all we've got time for for the Story of the Week. Time for the Game of the Week, today's game, what is the point? Where I read out four stories and have contestants Ethan, Bill and Carina tell us what they think is the main takeaway of the story. Okay answers get one point, good answers get two, and answers that give you the same feeling as peeling off the protective film from new electronics, you know the feeling, just me? No one else? Bill's not happy about it. Nothing?

Bill Fisher:

I leave it on.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, you maniac. You leave it on? All your electronics?

Bill Fisher:

To preserve it for as long as possible.

Marcus Johnson:

The rest of us do too, who are we kidding? Answers that ... Carina, you disagree?

Carina Perkins:

What, with leaving it on?

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah.

Carina Perkins:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

It has to come off, Bill.

Carina Perkins:

But I'm the kind of person that doesn't take good enough care of things like phones.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, okay. Ethan?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I wasn't listening. What are we doing?

Marcus Johnson:

Moving on. Answers that leave you with good feelings, they get you three points each. Each person gets 20 seconds to answer before they hear this noise. It's a bell. If you run long, it's a yellow card and minus two points. Two yellows gets you a red, and a sending off. Most points wins, gets the last word. We start of course with round one. Carina's up first, does generative AI need a new device? So long, iPhone. "Generative AI needs a new device, is this the twilight of the screen age?" Questions a recent article from the Economist. It notes, "Meta and Ray-Ban will soon launch smart glasses with an AI virtual assistant allowing the specs to see, hear and answer questions." The Economist points out that, "It's easy to just dismiss smart glasses, given what we've seen thus far, but these glasses come within a week of ChatGPT updates that let ChatGPT see, hear and speak."

It's maker, OpenAI is also reportedly talking to Sir Jony Ive, Apple's former designer, to create a new AI gadget as the industry debates the best form factor for the chatbot era. But Carina, does generative AI need a new device? What's the point?

Carina Perkins:

So I think the point here is that we're going to see lots of really interesting R&D around AI, and it's going to inspire lots of new devices and have a major transformative impact on our lives.

But it's not going to happen really quickly, in my opinion. As the article points out, the iPhone or the two-dimensional screen is not headed for the scrapheap yet, because techies are getting very excited about this tech, but consumers can be much slower to catch on. I think you just need to look at the example of smartphones, they've been around forever, but mcommerce has been much slower to catch on, despite the fact that we've all got these phones in our hands and use them on a daily basis. We're still doing a lot of our shopping via desktops. So that's my thought.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah. I can't wait until I'm walking down the street with a \$5000 AI lapel pin giving me hallucinated fake answers to questions that I'm apparently going to be shouting out at it as I'm crossing the street. This whole thing, I don't understand the value proposition to a lot of these ideas. They all sound very cool, but it makes me think of the perpetual effort at VR headsets that these tech companies are putting so much money into, even though no one seems to want them. Now, the overall question about creating an AI specific device could be interesting, I could certainly see it as a computer. If they want to compete on laptop, desktop for a work environment, if OpenAI thinks this is a direction they could seriously monetize. I don't know, I have no desire and I don't understand what I'm going to be doing with an AI device on my person. This does not seem like it's likely to be an existential threat to the iPhone.

Google and Samsung and Microsoft can't even get us to get rid of our iPhones with their more competitively priced products, why are we going to get rid of our iPhones to have this incomprehensible value proposition for an AI device?

Marcus Johnson:

I would give you a yellow card, because you went very long, but it was a brilliant answer, so I can't do it quite yet. I'll give you a warning, I'll give you a warning. But Ethan is describing Humane's AI Pin that's fastened to his lapel, that's what he was describing I believe. Bill?

Bill Fisher:

Yeah, I agree with a lot of what Ethan just said. I think that generative AI is an accelerant to this next form factor conversation is interesting, but smart glasses and AI, that's just creepy, man. We're already someway down the road to the surveillance society, I think people wear glasses that will see, hear and respond to the environment around it is just creepy. So I'm enthused about the next device, but less so about the involvement of AI in the conversation, even though it's interesting fuel to that conversation.

Marcus Johnson:

For me, the idea of Meta being at the forefront of this revolution may concern folks so much so that they don't want to be part of it. Because I think if someone like Apple did this, they might have more trust in the privacy element. Maybe glasses don't need to see in people in general, so maybe take that away and that might make people a little bit less hesitant. But the fact that Meta's doing it I think is a bit of a problem, and I think it was anyone but Meta it could really help. Mark Shmulik of investment firm Bernstein says, "Investors will not want Meta to move quickly, because the last thing they need is another negative PR event."

According to the Axios Harris Poll, which I went and looked at, Meta has the fourth-worst reputation among the top 100 brands. It's like their Portal device, it was the smart speaker with the screen, it would look around the room and see who's in the room, and if you were trying to video chat with someone it would zoom in and out based on who was in the room. So you could walk around and have a video conversation without having to sit in front of the camera, great idea, but I think because Meta was the brand on the package people may have tried to steer clearer than if it was someone like Apple.

Round two, we start with Ethan. Are we sure about self-checkout? "Target is the latest retailer to rethink self-checkout," writes Insider Intelligence retail briefings' analyst Rachel Wolff. Local radio station WCYY reports that Target is implementing a 10-item limit for self-checkout purchases at its Maine stores, M-A-I-N-E the state, to try and shorten wait times. Rachel notes that, "More retailers have rolled back self-checkout investments in part due to concerns over fraud and retail theft." But Ethan, are we sure about self-checkout? What's the point?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah, no. I'm shocked that the honor system has not worked out. Do you guys have that five-finger discount? Do you guys say that in the UK, the old five-finger discount? This era of spiraling inflation and resentment and distrust, I can't believe that some people are just

walking right past those machines and stealing stuff. No, this is good news that it's a rethink, because all of our experiences in brick and mortar will be improved if these companies go back to hiring actual human beings. We need people there. I'm sure there's a happy middle ground, some use of these self-checkouts with people around is probably the way to go in the future, and that's probably for the best.

Marcus Johnson:

There was a comedian who when these first came out was talking about trying to put a large screen TV through self-checkout as butter mushrooms, and I think that's still a concern for some retailers. Bill?

Bill Fisher:

No, I think Ethan's talking nonsense. I'm absolutely sure about them, they're hugely abundant in the UK, we've had them for years. When you get used to them, they're incredibly efficient. There are issues, there are always going to be issues, but I think they're outweighed by the benefits for consumers, and ultimately the retailers. You're going to get more people through the stores, make more money. There's a learning curve to using them, there will be teething pains, but I think self-checkouts are here to stay. The critics are going to be here to stay as well, people still complain about them in the UK, but I do agree with Ethan ultimately though, giving shoppers a choice is key. So have a bunch of self-checkouts, but you need people as well.

Marcus Johnson:

Carina?

Carina Perkins:

I think that the people developing AI glasses should have a look at self-checkout and what's happening, and take some lessons from it. Because I think they're a classic example of what could go wrong when companies adopt tech thinking about the future shopper, rather than the people that are actually shopping with them at the moment. So yes, they're great, Gen-Z love them because they don't have to talk to anyone, and they're quite convenient if you know your way around a computer. But for older generations who make up quite a large customer base of some of the retailers that are adopting them, they're an absolute nightmare. They have to scan their own checkout, they don't get to talk to anyone, which they quite like, one of

the reasons they go to the supermarket, they have to wait for hours while their machine's beeping at them because they've made an error.

Now, because people are so worried about theft, they have to queue to show their receipt to someone to prove that they're not stealing from the company. So something that was introduced for convenience has literally made the shopping experience as inconvenient as possible. So I'm not convinced they're great right now, I'm sure they will be the future, but as Bill and Ethan have both said, you need to offer a choice because not everyone wants to use them.

Bill Fisher:

This is why I like them, because I appeal to Gen-Z, I'm like a Gen-Zer.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

As we know from your eight hours of TikTok per weekend.

Carina Perkins:

Is it more that you just don't like talking to people?

Bill Fisher:

There is that as well, yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

You're the worst, Bill. Yeah. Two things for me, one, options are important, as Bill mentioned and Ethan said as well I believe. Half of folks prefer to only use man's checkout lanes, according to data from insights' firm Catalina, that was in Rachel's article, and then second point here is self-checkout is just where a lot of stealing happens. Around 40% of all grocery thefts occur at self-checkout, according to retail loss prevention firm Auror. At the halfway mark, Carina is out in front, five points, Bill and Ethan tied for second place with three. Round three, we start with Bill, why a new UK Online Safety Bill matters.

"A few weeks ago, Britain passed a sweeping law to regulate online content introducing age verification requirements for adult sites, and other rules to reduce hate speech, harassment, and other illicit material," writes Adam Satariano of the New York Times. He outlines that, "The Online Safety Bill, as it's called, which also applies to online fraud and child safety, is one of the

most far-reaching attempts by a Western democracy to regulate online speech." The new rules took over five years to develop, as folks debated how to balance free expression and privacy against barring harmful content particularly targeted at kids. But Bill, why this new UK Online Safety Bill matters, what's the point?

Bill Fisher:

It matters because it could have unintended consequences, which in fact go against online safety. There's another cause behind the bill of course, but in making sure harmful content isn't made available across certain environments, the regulator, which will be OFCOM, will need to have access to encrypted content. Which for all intents and purposes is a massive breach of privacy. Then there's another thing, protections to help keep children safe online could muddy the waters and have a significant impact on freedom of speech. There's no great clarity, for example, on what "harmful content" actually means. So this has been in the works for years and years, and even though the bill has been passed, I'm still slightly pessimistic about it and how it will be enforced.

Marcus Johnson:

Carina?

Carina Perkins:

Yeah. I'm actually going to go with a lot of Bill's sentiments on this one, I'm sorry I don't have a hugely original response of my own, because I think that it is a classic case of regulators wanting to push something through, but it's an extraordinarily complicated area and they're trying to placate some people, but in doing so they might make mistakes that actually make things worse.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah. I would defer to my UK colleagues on the specifics of this particular bill, but just the view from across the pond of both what's going on in London and in Brussels is the EU works its way through this type of these regulatory attempts to update for the modern world. My instinct, I have no idea if any of these are the right way to go, I have no idea if any of them are

going to work, if they're going to end up better or make things worse, but my instinct is that it's good that folks are trying. In the US, we're not really doing anything, so maybe this bill will overshoot and will need to be adjusted. Maybe what some of the stuff the EU is doing is too much, whatever, but it's good that they're out there trying so that we can start to learn and maybe eventually hit on something that does get the job done.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Other folks that are trying as well, Europe Union, the Digital Services Act, it's the EU's law recently began taking effect and requires companies to more aggressively police their platforms for illicit material. A finer point on this, the consequences. What are the consequences here? Well, if you don't comply with this Online Safety Bill, companies may face fines of tens-of-millions of dollars, or up to 10% of global revenue, whichever is higher. Also, company executives could face criminal action for not providing information during regulators' investigations, or comply with rules related to child safety. All right, folks, let's move to round four. Bill and Carina now tied on six, Ethan just behind on five. There's more to play for and double points, round four, we start with Carina. What consumers expect from brands on social issues?

Patrick Coffee of the Wall Street Journal writes that, "Consumers are less interested in brands taking stances on sociopolitical issues." According to a recent Bentley University and Gallup survey people expected companies to act on pay equity, healthcare and climate change, but have decreased interest in sociopolitical stands. The share went from 48% to 41 and was down across age and ethnic groups as well. But Carina, what consumers expect from brands on social issues, what's the point?

Carina Perkins:

I think the point here is that actions speak louder than words. Consumers expect brands to meet certain sustainability and ethical standards, but they don't necessarily want them to be overtly political, especially if they're being overtly political by only talking about issues. That's for two reasons, one is that inevitably if you're overtly political on an issue you're going to have some of your customers or consumers that might disagree with that political stance. Secondly is even among those customers that do agree, it's going to sound like a lot of hot air unless you're actually backing it up with action. So I think that brands need to worry less about making big political statements, and need to worry more about acting in the interest of society as a whole, the environment, their customers.

Marcus Johnson:

Ethan?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yeah. I think we're seeing a little bit of culture war exhaustion being reflected in some of these survey results. What struck me was that it was all across the board. To be fair, you still had wildly different overall results based on age, ethnicity, race, political affiliation, et cetera, but every single category declined. No matter who, no matter where you're coming from, you decided that an increasingly large amount of people are sick of companies taking stances in this way, which is a big change. You still have more than 50% of certain categories that do want businesses to be very politically active, and you have other types of people that are way down, but it was all going negative. I think that just chocks up to a sense of social exhaustion on a lot of these topics.

Marcus Johnson:

Bill?

Bill Fisher:

Yeah. It's really complex, complex relationship to brands and certain social causes. Folks will be able to sniff out if you're being disingenuous. We saw this through the pandemic, lots of this, every brand and his dog was thinking of you in these difficult times. Nonsense, they weren't, they were trying to make money to stay afloat. The tricky thing you need to consider as a brand, as Carina mentioned, you've got to think, "What proportion of my customer base or potential customer base am I going to hack off if I take a certain social stand?" You might be compelled by a vocal minority to take a particular stand, but it's just really risky to take a position. So it's difficult to know whether you're going to end up on the right side of an argument based on your client base. So why bother?

Marcus Johnson:

Fair point and great points across the board, folks. A few things from me, why the drop? Why did it go from 48% of people to 41% of people caring about sociopolitical issues? Well, it did drop across the board, as Ethan mentioned, but it fell most with Democrats. So the fallen brand activism interest was driven largely by Democrats saying they don't care as much anymore, slightly more than the others, not a crazy amount. Second thing, less people being

vocal with their wallets. The share of folks who said they're more likely to buy from or advocate for brands that share their own values fell 13 points to 52% in just one year, this was back in June. Then yeah, a few things to just consider staying away from altogether, religion, abortion, political candidates and international conflict had fewer than 30% of people saying brands should address these topics. So definitely certain topics to maybe get involved with over others, based on just how upset you could potentially make your consumers.

All right, folks, that's the end of the Game of the Week. We look to the scorecard, a drum roll in the background. Carina is this week's winner of the game of the week, 12 points to Bill's 10, Ethan's nine. Well played, folks. Carina, we award you the championship belt, which means nothing, and the last word, which means very little to be honest.

Carina Perkins:

Thanks so much. I'm just really glad that I could take this home for the UK today.

Marcus Johnson:

It was definitely, there was a good chance of that.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Uhtred would be so proud, so proud.

Carina Perkins:

The UK retail desk, there we go, if we're being specific.

Marcus Johnson:

There we go. Bloody retail, so competitive. Yes, Suzy, talking to you. All right, folks, that's all we've got time for for the Game of the Week. We move now to Dinner Party Data. This is the part of the show where we tell you about the most interesting thing we've learned this week. Let's start with this week's winner, it's Carina.

Carina Perkins:

I'm going to tell you three interesting things that I learned this week, and they are all linked to Halloween, because we're approaching that time of the year. The first one is that, believe it or not, Halloween actually originated in Ireland 2000 years ago. The second one is that the fastest pumpkin carving took 16.47 seconds, and that was Steven Clarke of New York who

holds the Guinness Book World of Records distinction, got that in 2013. My third fact is that the average American eats about 3.4 pounds of Halloween candy, which is the weight of a small chihuahua in a Halloween costume.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Gross. I have questions about the pumpkin carving. At what point is it determined that you have successfully finished carving your pumpkin?

Carina Perkins:

I would have to look in the Guinness World Records to find them-

Marcus Johnson:

... that they're looking for perhaps, because that seems a bit subjective.

Carina Perkins:

Maybe you go for standardized one, I'm not sure.

Marcus Johnson:

Favorite Halloween costume you've ever seen? No one? I saw one, it was brilliant. So let's see if you can guess it. It was a person dressed up as a wizard with an American football helmet on.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Was it a pun? A walking pun?

Marcus Johnson:

Maybe. Nothing? Fantasy football.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

There you go.

Marcus Johnson:

Bill, no? Nothing. Bill looks hideously unimpressed. Okay, moving on. Let's move on to Ethan, Bill needs some time to calm down after that.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

My Dinner Party Data is about the most important topic in the world.

Marcus Johnson:

The Lakers.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Taylor Swift, Taylor Swift. So as some of you may know, Taylor has a movie out now she just released in the US, I don't know if this is worldwide, released the Eras Tour feature length film that was the dominant performer in the US box office over the weekend. This movie came out to much hype and much fanfare, we were told ahead of time that basically every ticket was sold out, you couldn't even get in to see this movie, even if you wanted to. It has generated a great deal of attention that has been used to buttress her reputation as being the most unstoppable cultural force in the history of the universe, as per her appearance at American football games immediately leading to the greatest ratings of all time for Thursday Night Football, because she was in Kansas City and now dating a Kansas City player, and his jersey sales immediately become number one, et cetera, et cetera.

So the Taylor Swift movie debuted with \$97-million dollars at the box office, which is pretty good, however it's not that good. So I was a little curious when I saw this number, because people were saying, "Oh, look, the Swifties did it again. This is an incredible performance." I was like, "Wait a minute, \$97-million dollars is good, that's good for any regular movie that's good, but it's certainly not great." In my head I was like, "This might be some chinks in the armor here, because this doesn't actually seem like the kind of performance from the most dominant cultural phenomenon that any of us have ever seen." Indeed, this was not even in the top five. So I checked the opening weekend results for the whole year, for 2023, and Taylor Swift's movie is sixth. That's good, but she is not quite as profound a cultural force as maybe some of us nerds are.

Because it turns out that Ant-Man and the Wasp, the third Ant-Man movie, Guardians of the Galaxy 3, the third Guardians of the Galaxy movie, and the Spider-Man animated sequel Across the Spider-Verse all outperformed Taylor Swift. So on behalf of nerds everywhere, we can take heart that the collective power of the superhero nerdism and the Marvel family turns out to be able to far out-draw the Swifties. Of course, the top movies of the year remain by a mile the Super Mario Bros Movie and Barbie, both of which had vastly, vastly superior

opening weekends to Taylor Swift's movie. So I don't know, these Swifties got to look in the mirror. They did not deliver the kind of massive blockbuster that I think a lot of folks were expecting.

Marcus Johnson:

That's right, Taylor. Something for you to think about. Is Barbie number one? Or Mario?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Barbie was number one with \$162-million dollar opening weekend, and Mario was second with almost \$150-million. So Taylor's was in the mid 90s, and all those Marvel movies were short of in the low 100s.

Marcus Johnson:

Taylor.

Carina Perkins:

Have we compared to other such movies from singing stars?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Easily the most successful opening weekend for a concert movie of all time, sure.

Carina Perkins:

Right. So she's done all right.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, this is good, this is good for a regular movie.

Marcus Johnson:

Curses.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

No, if you wanted this to be about a total failure, that's not the story. But I was just looking at it in terms of the Swifties failing to buy as many tickets as Marvel nerds do.

Marcus Johnson:

Who will play me in the Behind the Numbers movie? Denzel, please. You flatter me. Bill, you're up.

Bill Fisher:

Okay. Change of pace, but there is a link to what Ethan was just talking about actually and Marvel. I'm going to talk about words and phrases, I'm a modern English language major. Every quarter the Oxford English Dictionary makes updates to its publication, each time including around a thousand new or revised words, phrases and sentences. For a new entry to make it in, it needs to have been used in a variety of sources by more than one writer, historically it had to have been in use for at least three years, but they've relaxed that in recent times due to the fast pace of change these days. Anyway, I have an interesting September edition for you, it's a phrase and it's one that piqued my interest given our conversation on last week's show, Marcus. It's Marvel related, you accused me of picking a superhero that wasn't a superhero, the Invisible Man is a superhero.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yep.

Bill Fisher:

Anyway, the word-

Carina Perkins:

I bet he uses a self-checkout.

Bill Fisher:

Of course he does, he doesn't like to talk to anybody either. Anyway, the phrase that's been added this September is "spidey sense." It was last used in 2022 in the Fresno Bee newspaper, prior to that most of the written uses appeared in Marvel literature, which is why it hadn't been eligible for inclusion. But yeah, it's made it into the OED this year.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

That's a stretch, that's a stretch. But I like it. I like it.

Carina Perkins:

So people can talk about their spidey sense, about Google and Amazon's practices.

Bill Fisher:

Yeah.

Marcus Johnson:

It shouldn't be in there, but I'm glad it is.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Yes.

Marcus Johnson:

I'm conflicted. Very nice, Bill. Yes, I do owe Bill an apology, the Invisible Man is a real thing. As real as a made up character can be, but he's right it does exist in the world, I said it didn't. Sorry, Bill. All right, so I've got one for you real quick. Where do the ultra-rich spend their holidays? Well, Christina Kostandi just wrote a piece in the Visual Capitalist, and according to Henley & Partners, I'll set the table here, 25,000 people in the planet have investible assets of \$100-million dollars or more, 25,000 folks. But where do they vacation the most? This is vacation during peak holiday month of said location. So during peak month on one place, which may be cold, or peak month in another place, which may be hot.

Where do most people vacation? Also, this is according to folks staying in vacation homes, not hotels. So they have homes in these places, not hotels. I have a top 10, do you each want to give me one guess and see if you can get on this top 10?

Carina Perkins:

Monaco?

Marcus Johnson:

No, that's a fantastic guess.

Bill Fisher:

I was going to go for somewhere in the Caribbean.

Marcus Johnson:

Be a bit more specific, Bill.

Bill Fisher:

Am I on the right lines?

Marcus Johnson:

No. I'm just giving you the chance to be more specific, but Ethan?

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Nantucket or Martha's Vineyard is where a lot of them bounce off to, if you're in this part of the world.

Marcus Johnson:

Still no. These are brilliant guesses as well. I would have thought so too. So in joint fifth, there's a lot of places in joint fifth, so in joint fifth Santa Barbara, San Diego and Napa, all in California.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

Napa.

Marcus Johnson:

Then you've got Aspen, Colorado and Nice in France, South France, and the Golden Triangle, which is an affluent region in the Algarve in the South of Portugal. So they're all in joint fifth. Then you've got Paris in fourth, West Palm Beach in Florida is third, and it's an hour north of Miami. The Hamptons out on Long Island in New York are second, and Miami in Florida is first. It's also first in terms of where these 25,000 folks with \$100-million dollars each, it's also number one, Miami's number one in terms of where they spend most of the time year-round. If you look at year-round, not peak holiday month, but year-round it goes Miami's number one, Paris number two, and then Santa Barbara is third.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

So those places aren't really vacation destinations, as much as they are places where there are large enclaves of mansions and big residential type places where you can have a big house and spend a lot of time at on your "vacation," because you happen to not be in Manhattan or London at the moment.

Marcus Johnson:

Yeah. Pretty unimaginative, I must say. I thought it was going to be like Virgin Islands, Lake Como, Barley, the moon, the Lost City of Atlantis. At least the Seychelles or Bora Bora.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

San Diego and the Hamptons are not where I would at all be-

Marcus Johnson:

I like San Diego, but they're pretty accessible places. My god, rich people, waste my time. That's all we've got time for for today's episode. Thank you so much to my guests. We thank Ethan.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

My pleasure.

Marcus Johnson:

Thank you to Bill.

Bill Fisher:

It was a pleasure to be here.

Marcus Johnson:

That was better. Ethan, it didn't seem like it was your pleasure, to be honest.

Ethan Cramer-Flood:

I'm still stinging on the Uhtred thing.

Marcus Johnson:

Oh, okay. Fair enough, fair enough. Bill, good enthusiasm. Carina, congratulations, thank you for being on.

Carina Perkins:

Thanks. Best podcast I've ever been on.

Marcus Johnson:

Well played. I'm so glad you won today. Thanks to Victoria who edits the show, James who copy edits it, and Stewart who runs the team. Thanks to everyone for listening in. You can find us on Instagram if you would like, we're @InsiderIntelligence, one word. For behind the scenes content. We'll see you guys hopefully on Monday for the Behind the Numbers Daily, an emarketer podcast made possible by Intuit Mailchimp. Happy weekends.