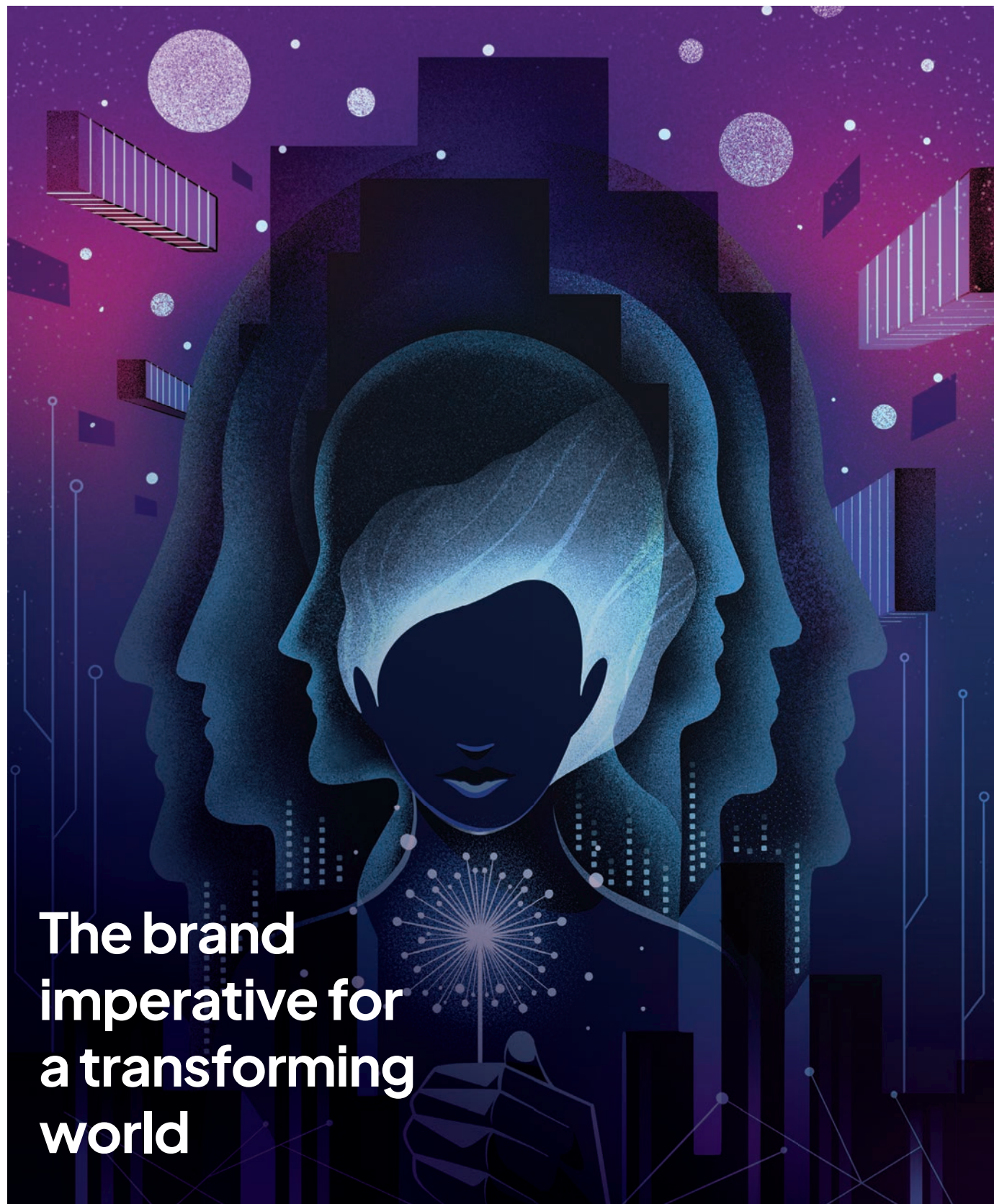


A COLLECTION OF BRAND THOUGHTS, IDEAS AND STRATEGY
INTERVENTIONS FROM MARKETERS AROUND THE WORLD

II EDITION

State *of the* Brand 2025



**The brand
imperative for
a transforming
world**



Navigating the brand landscape of tomorrow

Welcome to the State of the Brand 2025 Digest, a curated collection of thought leadership from some of the brightest minds in branding, marketing, and strategy from around the world. This edition reflects a profound evolution in how brands are conceived, built, and experienced. Across diverse topics - from hyper-localization to regenerative branding and from digital-physical integrations to the ethical consumer shift - it becomes evident that the modern brand landscape is as dynamic as it is complex.

The past year has shown that successful brands are no longer just storytellers; they are collaborators, innovators, and sometimes even change-makers. They don't just adapt to trends, they set them by aligning deeply with human values, embracing emerging technologies, and pioneering sustainable practices.

From managing coherence across increasingly fragmented ecosystems to designing immersive customer journeys that blend digital and physical realms, today's marketers are challenged to deliver not just products or services but meaningful, memorable experiences. In a world where hyper-connectivity has blurred the boundaries of geography and culture, brands must master the delicate balance of maintaining a global vision while resonating locally.

We also delve into the resurgence of emotion in B2B marketing, proving that even in rational decision-making environments, emotional connections remain pivotal. The advent of generative AI offers new opportunities for efficiency and personalization, yet these must be harnessed with an unwavering commitment to authenticity, a theme echoed across the contributions in this edition.

Ethical consumption and sustainability are no longer niche concerns but mainstream imperatives. As brands strive to go beyond "doing less harm" to actively contributing to environmental and social well-being, regenerative models

are emerging as the blueprint for the future. These forward-thinking brands are creating ecosystems where businesses, people, and the planet thrive together.

At its heart, this digest is a testament to the transformative power of branding in the modern era. It invites readers to rethink, reimagine, and redefine their approach to branding in light of the challenges and opportunities ahead. Whether you are navigating the complexities of global markets, exploring AI-driven personalization, or embedding sustainability into your brand DNA, these pages are filled with actionable insights and provocative ideas to inspire your journey.

I hope you find the *State of the Brand 2025* both a mirror and a map - a reflection of the shifting currents in branding and a guide to navigating them. Here's to shaping brands that not only stand out but stand for something.

Warm Regards,
Anand Sankara Narayanan
Curator,
State of the Brand 2025

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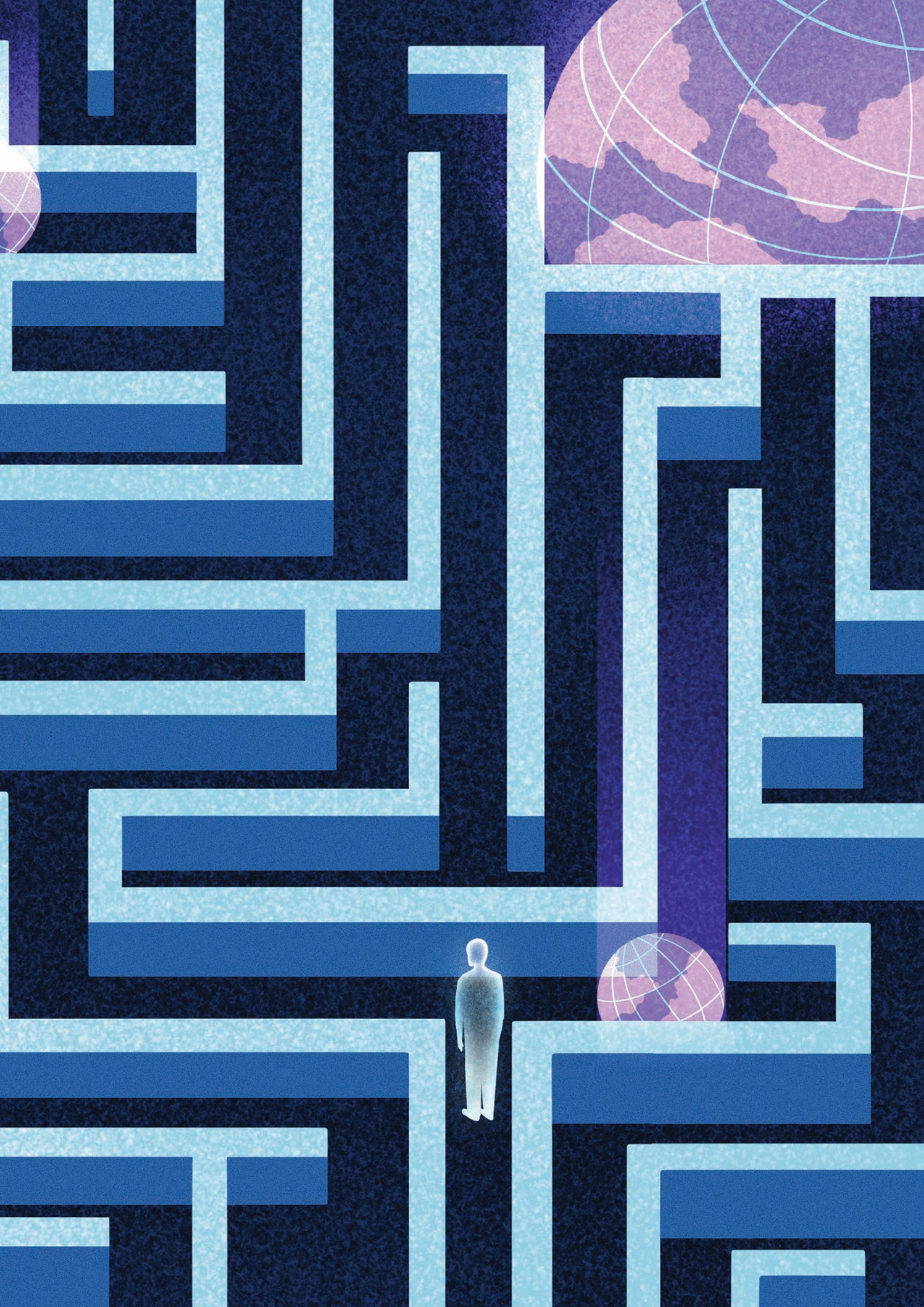
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BRANDING IN A

FRAGMENTED WORLD



The rise of hyper-localized branding: Balancing global vision with local relevance

by Asaf Wolff | SVP, Growth and Experience, University of the People, USA

How brands can adapt to the increasingly fragmented cultural and political landscape while maintaining a cohesive global identity.

In an era of rapid cultural shifts and geopolitical fragmentation, brands face a new challenge: maintaining a cohesive global identity while connecting meaningfully with local audiences. This balancing act is becoming increasingly vital, as today's consumers expect brands to reflect not just universal values but also their specific cultural, political, and social realities.

Hyper-localized branding—strategically tailoring a brand's identity and messaging to resonate with individual markets—has emerged as a powerful approach. However, achieving this requires more than adapting slogans or translating copy. It calls for a profound understanding of local dynamics, a willingness to innovate, and a commitment to maintaining a unified brand essence.

This article explores the trends driving hyper-localized branding, the challenges brands encounter along the way, and innovative strategies that are helping companies succeed.

The growing demand for hyper-localization

Globalization meets regional identity

While globalization has made the world more interconnected, it has also amplified regional identities. Local cultures, traditions, and priorities remain deeply ingrained, and consumers are increasingly drawn to brands that respect and reflect their unique contexts.

Take, for example, Procter & Gamble (P&G). The company's laundry detergent brand, Ariel, uses a hyper-localized strategy in India, running campaigns that address gender inequality through a culturally resonant lens. Its "Share the Load" initiative, encouraging men to take on household responsibilities, reflects local societal values and P&G's global commitment to social progress.

Personalization in the digital age

The rise of digital technology has further fueled the push toward hyper-localization. Consumers now expect personalized experiences across platforms, and social media amplifies the need for relevance. Content that feels generic or out of touch should be

more noticed and addressed.

Netflix is a master of hyper-localization in the digital space. The streaming giant invests heavily in producing and promoting content tailored to local tastes, from Korean dramas to Indian originals like *Sacred Games*. By combining a global platform with region-specific offerings, Netflix stays relevant and recognizable worldwide.

Challenges in hyper-localized branding

While the benefits of hyper-localization are clear, the path to achieving it is fraught with challenges.

Maintaining brand consistency

One of the most significant hurdles is ensuring that localized strategies do not dilute the brand's global identity. Local campaigns can drift away from core values without careful coordination, leading to a fragmented or contradictory brand image.

Consider Starbucks. While the coffee giant embraces local adaptations—offering matcha lattes in Japan and masala tea in India—it maintains its global ethos of providing a "third-place" experience. This consistency ensures that whether you're in Seattle or Shanghai, Starbucks feels familiar yet locally relevant.

Resource allocation and scalability

Hyper-localization can be resource-intensive. Creating unique campaigns, products, or messaging for every market demands significant time, effort, and budget. Smaller organizations may need to implement such strategies more efficiently.

Even large corporations face scalability challenges. For example, Coca-Cola's "Share a Coke" campaign, which involved printing popular names on bottles, was highly effective in Western markets but required careful adaptation in regions with different naming conventions. Balancing creativity with feasibility is a delicate task.

Navigating political and cultural sensitivities

In an increasingly polarized world, brands must tread carefully to avoid missteps. Messaging that resonates in one region may be controversial—or even offensive—in another. The risk of cultural appropriation, tone-deafness, or political backlash is ever-present.

For instance, Dolce & Gabbana faced widespread criticism for an ad campaign that was deemed culturally insensitive in China. The backlash highlighted the importance of consulting local experts and thoroughly vetting campaigns before launch.

Innovations driving hyper-localized branding

To overcome these challenges, brands turn to innovative approaches combining creativity with data-driven precision.

Data-driven insights

Advances in analytics and artificial intelligence (AI) are revolutionizing how brands understand and engage with local audiences. AI-powered tools can analyze regional trends, consumer behaviors, and sentiment

in real-time, enabling brands to create highly targeted campaigns.

Spotify exemplifies this innovation. The platform uses data to curate localized playlists and promotional campaigns, such as its "Wrapped" feature, highlighting listening trends by country. This data-driven approach allows Spotify to celebrate global diversity while reinforcing its identity as a personalized music hub.

Co-creation with local communities

Another emerging trend is co-creation, which involves working directly with local communities to develop products or campaigns. This approach ensures authenticity and fosters a sense of ownership among consumers.

Adidas employed this strategy with its Parley for the Oceans initiative, creating sustainable footwear in collaboration with environmental groups and local stakeholders. By addressing a global issue — ocean pollution—through a locally anchored partnership, Adidas reinforced its brand purpose while engaging meaningfully with diverse audiences.

Decentralized branding models

Some companies are adopting decentralized branding models, empowering local teams to shape strategies within a global framework. This approach balances consistency with flexibility, allowing brands to respond quickly to regional needs.

Unilever's "Crafting Brands for Life" initiative illustrates this model. The company equips local marketing teams with the tools and guidelines to develop campaigns that align with Unilever's global purpose while remaining culturally

relevant.

Real-world applications and takeaways

Consumer goods: A fine balance

In consumer goods, brands like Uniqlo demonstrate the power of blending global vision with local relevance. Known for its minimalist aesthetic, the Japanese retailer adapts its offerings to suit local climates and preferences. In India, for example, Uniqlo introduced lightweight, breathable fabrics to cater to the country's hot weather.

Hyper-localized branding - strategically tailoring a brand's identity and messaging to resonate with individual markets has emerged as a powerful approach.

However, achieving this requires more than adapting slogans or translating copy.

Higher education: Adapting to global students

The higher education sector offers another compelling case for hyper-localization. Universities with international student populations must navigate diverse cultural expectations while projecting a unified institutional brand. Successful institutions invest in localized recruitment strategies, culturally tailored support services, and inclusive marketing campaigns that resonate across borders.

Best Practices for Hyper-Localized Branding

Brands looking to adopt hyper-localized strategies can benefit from the following best practices:

Listen before you act

Conduct thorough research to understand the cultural, political, and social nuances of your target market. Engaging with local stakeholders can provide valuable insights.

Empower local teams

Decentralize decision-making to allow regional teams to adapt strategies while remaining aligned with the global brand vision.

Leverage technology

Invest in tools that enable real-time insights and personalization, such as AI-driven analytics and social listening platforms.

Test and iterate

Pilot campaigns in select markets before scaling. Use feedback to refine your approach and minimize risks.

Stay true to your core values

Ensure that all localized efforts reflect the brand's overarching purpose and ethos. Consistency is critical to building trust.

Conclusion: Bridging the global-local divide

Hyper-localized branding is not merely a trend—it's necessary in an era where consumers demand authenticity and connection. By embracing cultural diversity, investing in innovation, and maintaining a clear global vision, brands can bridge the divide between international and local perspectives.

The rise of hyper-localized branding allows businesses to navigate cultural fragmentation and thrive within it. Those who succeed will redefine what it means to be a truly global brand that listens, learns, and leads across borders.

Managing brand coherence across diverse ecosystems

by Meenakshi Shunmugham | Brand Strategist, CMO & Founder - MESH Strategy, UAE & Singapore

The complexities of maintaining a consistent brand identity across an ever-growing array of platforms and touchpoints.

In an era of hyperconnectivity and ever-expanding digital ecosystems, managing brand coherence is both a strategic challenge and a critical necessity. The explosion of platforms, channels, and customer touchpoints - from mobile apps to social media, customer service interactions to voice assistants has made it increasingly difficult for brands to maintain a consistent identity across these diverse and fragmented ecosystems. Yet, despite the complexity, ensuring brand coherence is more important than ever for driving consumer trust, loyalty, and, ultimately, long-term business success.

The evolution of the brand ecosystem

Historically, managing a brand was relatively straightforward. A brand would exist in a few well-defined places - perhaps a print ad, TV commercial, or store location - and these would shape the consumer's perception. The brand's identity was tightly controlled, communicated through the mass media channels that dominated the 20th century. Companies like Coca-Cola, Nike, and McDonald's built their empires through carefully constructed, one-way communication channels. In this world, brand consistency was largely about adhering to a set of established guidelines - logos, fonts, and taglines that had little chance of deviating across platforms.

Fast forward to today, and we find ourselves in a radically different environment. The advent of digital technology has fragmented consumer touchpoints, leading to an explosion of interactions that span multiple channels, devices, and environments. Brands are no longer confined to traditional media - customers now encounter brands in app notifications, social media posts, email campaigns, online ads, and even through IoT-enabled devices or voice assistants.

The challenge, then, is twofold. First, there's the challenge of ensuring that brand

identity remains coherent and recognisable across all these diverse touchpoints. Second, with the rise of user-generated content (UGC) and consumer influence through social media, brands must now contend with the fact that they no longer control every aspect of their brand's messaging. Consumers themselves are co-creators of brand meaning.

But maintaining coherence in a complex, fragmented landscape is not just about making sure your logo and tagline appear uniformly everywhere. It's about ensuring that the brand's essence - its core values, messaging, and customer promise - are preserved across each ecosystem, even as the medium, context, and consumer interaction evolve.

Brand coherence in the modern world: The role of emotion and consistency

Recent findings from System1, a global leader in behavioural science and marketing effectiveness, provide valuable insight into why brand coherence is so crucial. According to their research, emotional response to a brand is one of the key drivers of long-term brand success. System1's research has consistently shown that brands that evoke positive, strong emotional connections

are more likely to be remembered and chosen by consumers.

Emotion and memory are deeply intertwined, and it's the consistency of these emotional cues across platforms that helps solidify a brand in a consumer's mind. This emotional resonance must be consistent in both digital and physical touchpoints. Whether a customer is browsing an app, watching a TV ad, or interacting with a brand on social media, the emotional signals should be aligned to reinforce the brand's positioning.

Brands like Coca-Cola and Nike excel in this area because they manage to deliver the same emotional essence - optimism, joy, and energy across all their channels. Nike's "Just Do It" mantra, for example, isn't just about the words - it's about the feeling they evoke. Whether on Instagram, TV, or in-store displays, Nike ensures that its emotional tone remains consistent. This emotional consistency has been a cornerstone of their brand success, as System1's research suggests that brands able to trigger strong emotional responses gain mental availability, increasing their likelihood of being noticed and purchased.

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute: Consistency and Distinctiveness

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science is another thought leader that provides critical insights into managing brand coherence. Based on years of research into consumer behaviour, the institute's work challenges marketers to rethink how they approach brand management. One of their most significant contributions is the theory of distinctiveness versus differentiation.

The Ehrenberg-Bass Institute argues that it's not enough to simply differentiate your brand from competitors - it's more

it's more important to make your brand distinctive. This distinction is achieved through consistent, easily recognisable brand assets that remain unchanged across touchpoints. Distinctiveness means creating a brand identity that is immediately recognisable in any context - whether a consumer encounters it in a social media ad, an email, a mobile app, or in-store.

Brands that rely heavily on differentiation strategies - constantly shifting their message to stand out in new and diverse ways - risk confusing consumers and diluting their brand coherence. Instead, the focus should be on consistency, repetition, and distinctive assets that create a mental shortcut for consumers.

For example, McDonald's has achieved remarkable brand coherence over the years by maintaining its distinctive assets: the golden arches, its red and yellow colour scheme, and the unique fonts and packaging. While the company has adapted its messaging and offerings in different markets, its core visual identity and brand experience have remained constant. This consistency has made McDonald's a globally recognisable brand, as outlined in Ehrenberg-Bass Institute's research on the importance of ownable assets.

The B2B Institute: Brand coherence in the B2B space

The B2B Institute at LinkedIn also provides valuable insights, particularly for brands operating in the business-to-business (B2B) space. In its research, the B2B Institute emphasises the importance of long-term brand-building over short-term, transactional marketing efforts. The Institute's research suggests that B2B brands that focus on building mental availability through consistent and coherent brand messaging across all touchpoints are more likely to be chosen by potential customers.

For example, LinkedIn itself serves as a prime example of brand coherence. From the LinkedIn app to the LinkedIn website to its advertising campaigns, the platform's messaging remains consistent: it's a place to network, learn, and grow professionally. The LinkedIn brand is about professionalism, trust, and opportunity, and this identity is maintained regardless of whether you're on the platform's desktop version, mobile app, or viewing a LinkedIn-sponsored ad.

Moreover, the B2B Institute's research underscores the importance of brand salience - the ability of a brand to come to mind when a need arises. In B2B marketing, where purchase decisions often involve multiple stakeholders and long decision cycles, brand salience is critical. To build salience, B2B brands must ensure that their messaging is clear, consistent, and present across all touchpoints, ensuring that their brand is top-of-mind when business needs arise.

Brand coherence in action: Apple and Netflix

As we consider the modern landscape of brand coherence, let's consider the brand journey of two standout companies: Apple and Netflix. Both companies operate in highly digital industries but have managed to maintain exceptional brand coherence, despite their different ecosystems.

Apple: A masterclass in brand coherence

Apple's brand is a textbook example of how to achieve coherence in today's fragmented

Research from System1 reinforces that Apple's ability to generate a strong emotional response from consumers - whether they are unboxing a new iPhone or visiting an Apple Store is central to its brand success. Apple has cultivated an emotional connection with its customers by consistently positioning its products as tools of creativity, innovation, and simplicity.

Apple's brand is defined by a few core principles: simplicity, innovation, and premium quality. It is these principles that form the foundation of the brand experience across its many touchpoints. Whether you're interacting with Apple through an iPhone app or receiving customer support from a retail associate, the brand is unmistakable.

Apple's core brand values translated across touchpoints

Apple's ecosystem includes everything from its physical retail stores to its online presence, and it has carefully tailored each touchpoint to reflect the same core brand values:

Simplicity: The design of Apple's products, website, and retail spaces all share a minimalist aesthetic, often with clean lines, open spaces, and intuitive user interfaces. The same principles are applied to its advertising, which often relies on short, bold statements and striking visuals.

Innovation: Apple's marketing copy consistently positions its products as the latest in a long line of technological advancements. Whether you're watching an ad, browsing the App Store, or receiving an update notification, the emphasis on new features and innovations remains constant.

Premium quality: The customer service experience at Apple is consistently top-notch. Whether you're calling Apple Support, visiting the Genius Bar, or attending a product launch, the experience is seamless and high-end.

The brilliance of Apple's approach lies in its ability to keep its brand values intact across all these touchpoints while still adapting to the unique demands of each platform. The company's omnichannel strategy - from its website to social media ads to physical stores ensures that the Apple experience feels the same, no matter where a customer interacts with the brand. Apple's minimalist design, iconic logo, and consistent messaging are easily identifiable across all touchpoints, helping to reinforce its brand's position as a premium, user-friendly tech brand.

Netflix: Consistency across touchpoints in the entertainment industry

Netflix is another prime example of a brand that excels at maintaining coherence in a highly fragmented landscape. As a global leader in streaming entertainment, Netflix reaches audiences across multiple devices, from smart TVs and mobile phones to laptops and gaming consoles. Despite this diverse array of platforms, Netflix has managed to maintain a consistent brand identity that resonates with users, keeping them emotionally engaged and loyal.

Netflix's brand is defined by a few key values - entertainment, personalisation, and

innovation. These principles are seamlessly translated across all user touchpoints, creating a unified experience whether customers are browsing for content, interacting with customer support, or engaging with Netflix on social media.

Netflix's core brand values translated across touchpoints

Netflix's ecosystem includes its website, mobile apps, smart TV interfaces, and marketing campaigns, and every aspect of the Netflix experience reflects its core values:

Entertainment: Netflix is synonymous with great entertainment. Its marketing, interface design, and user experience all reinforce the idea that Netflix is the ultimate destination for watching high-quality, compelling content. The brand's tone - whether in its ads, email marketing, or user experience is always designed to generate excitement about its offerings.

Personalisation: One of Netflix's greatest strengths lies in its ability to tailor content to individual tastes. Whether users are engaging with Netflix on mobile, desktop, or TV, the brand ensures a personalised experience through content recommendations based on past viewing habits. This personalisation helps reinforce Netflix's commitment to delivering entertainment that is relevant and unique for each user.

Innovation: Netflix is constantly innovating, whether through using advanced algorithms to recommend content or by creating high-quality original productions that set new standards in the entertainment industry. The brand's ability to stay ahead of trends - whether in content or technology remains central to its identity across all platforms.

What makes Netflix's approach to brand

coherence so powerful is its deep understanding of its audience and its unwavering commitment to delivering a seamless experience across every touchpoint. The brand doesn't just serve content - it curates an experience that feels personal and intuitive, fostering long-term loyalty. By blending personalisation with consistent messaging, Netflix has created a brand that's not only recognisable but emotionally resonant with its global user base.

Just as Apple's brand consistency is rooted in its clear values of simplicity, innovation, and premium quality, Netflix's coherence stems from its dedication to providing engaging, relevant, and innovative entertainment. It's this consistency across platforms, devices, and even marketing messages that ensures Netflix remains a dominant player in a highly competitive and ever-evolving space.

The four pillars of brand coherence in today's ecosystem

Drawing insights from prominent marketing institutes, leading brands, and the latest academic research that informs modern best practices for marketers, we can identify four key pillars that can help any brand maintain coherence across diverse ecosystems:

Clear brand purpose: The brand must have a well-defined purpose that is consistently communicated, no matter the platform. This purpose should inform every aspect of the brand experience, from design and tone to customer service and product features. Apple's commitment to simplicity, innovation, and premium quality is clear in everything it does.

Adaptability without compromise: While brand values must remain consistent, the way those values are expressed can vary depending on the touchpoint. A brand must adapt its messaging and tactics for each platform while keeping the core message intact. Netflix excels at this. On its mobile app, Netflix prioritises personalised recommendations with quick updates, while its social media presence uses a more conversational tone to engage users, promoting community conversations around shows.

Omnichannel consistency: In today's fragmented media landscape, brands must deliver a consistent experience across all channels. Whether a customer is engaging with the brand online, on social media, or in person, the experience should feel seamless.

This doesn't mean using the same content everywhere - it means using the same brand principles to guide content creation and customer interactions. Netflix's omnichannel consistency is remarkable. Whether you are browsing on your phone, watching on a smart TV, or interacting with Netflix's social media, the brand experience is unified. The content recommendations are personalised, the interface is intuitive, and the brand's promise of quality entertainment is evident at every touchpoint.

Continuous monitoring and feedback: Managing brand coherence is not a one-time exercise; it's an ongoing process. Brands must monitor their interactions across platforms, paying close attention to customer feedback and adjusting their approach when necessary. This can involve testing different messaging approaches, analysing customer sentiment, and tweaking the brand's touchpoints for greater coherence. Apple continuously monitors customer feedback, adjusting everything from its products to its marketing efforts based on consumer preferences. The seamless

integration of its hardware and software ecosystem is a direct result of constant refinement, ensuring that every touchpoint stays aligned with its brand promise of simplicity and innovation.

Pitfalls to avoid

In our pursuit of brand coherence, there are a few common pitfalls that many companies fall into:

Over-standardisation: While consistency is key, over-standardising can lead to a brand that feels robotic or inauthentic. Brands like Apple have succeeded because they know when to infuse their personality into different channels, from their "Think Different" campaigns to the experiential design of their retail stores.

Inconsistent tone: Many companies struggle with tone consistency across different platforms. A brand might come across as too casual on Twitter and overly formal in an email, leaving consumers confused about the brand's true personality.

Neglecting new touchpoints: As new technologies and platforms emerge, it's easy to overlook them in favour of the familiar. Brands that ignore new ecosystems - whether it's voice assistants, emerging social networks, or the Internet of Things (IoT) - risk falling behind.

The future of brand ecosystems

As we look to the future, the challenge of maintaining brand coherence will only grow more complex. Emerging technologies like augmented reality, voice interfaces, and IoT will create new touchpoints that brands must integrate into their ecosystems.

Consider the potential of a smart home ecosystem. A brand like Apple or Google

must ensure that its voice assistant, smart displays, connected appliances, and mobile apps all work together seamlessly to deliver a consistent brand experience. This level of integration requires not just visual and tonal consistency, but also behavioural consistency across a wide range of devices and interactions.

Conclusion: The art and science of brand coherence

Managing brand coherence across diverse ecosystems is both an art and a science. It requires a clear vision, meticulous planning, and the agility to adapt to changing landscapes. But at its core, it's about creating a seamless, recognisable experience that builds trust and loyalty with your audience.

As marketers, our job is to make sure our brands are recognised, remembered, and chosen - no matter where or how consumers encounter them. As such, we must remember that brand coherence is not about being uniform across every platform, but about being unmistakably "you" no matter where or how a customer interacts with your brand. In doing so, we create not just a brand, but a living, breathing ecosystem that resonates with our audience and stands the test of time.

In the words of the inimitable Seth Godin, "A brand is the set of expectations, memories, stories and relationships that, taken together, account for a consumer's decision to choose one product or service over another." In today's complex brand ecosystems, our job is to ensure that these expectations, memories, and stories are consistent, compelling, and true to our brand's essence, no matter where or how our audience encounters us.

Brand coherence is not about being uniform across every platform, but about being unmistakably "you" no matter where or how a customer interacts with your brand.

Turning fragmentation into opportunity: Harnessing purpose, personalization, and trust to unify your brand

by Anand Sankara Narayanan | CMO - Finance House Group, UAE

Exploring how brand leaders can align teams, engage diverse markets, and build lasting relationships in a divided world.

We live in a world of profound fragmentation. Media channels multiply by the day, customer journeys splinter across countless digital and physical touchpoints, and cultural nuances abound as businesses expand into new markets. Yet amid these complexities, strong brands continue to stand out, not by ignoring fragmentation, but by embracing it and responding with strategies that honor both global consistency and local relevance.

For business leaders and marketers, the notion of “fragmentation” isn’t new. However, the speed at which it’s accelerating can be disorienting. Social media platforms rise and fall, consumer tastes shift rapidly, and technologies like artificial intelligence redefine what personalization and branding can mean. To thrive, brands must remain consistent in core identity while skillfully adapting to the cultural, technological, and social forces that shape a fragmented landscape.

1. Understanding the nature of fragmentation

Fragmentation in branding stems from multiple sources: *platform proliferation, global expansion, and cultural divergence*. Where a generation ago brands might have managed a handful of marketing channels like television, radio, print, and retail, today they juggle a tsunami of digital platforms, from TikTok to LinkedIn to niche community forums. Each channel has its own style, audience demographics, and rules of engagement.

Moreover, consumer journeys themselves have become highly non-linear. It’s common for buyers to discover a brand on social media, compare reviews on e-commerce sites, and then sample the product in a physical pop-up, all before making a final purchase through an app. In many ways, fragmentation reflects a consumer-centric world where buyers dictate how, when, and why they engage with brands.

Key insight: Managing fragmentation isn’t about controlling every channel uniformly. Instead, it’s about creating a flexible brand ecosystem that allows for unique, channel-appropriate expressions

while maintaining a shared core identity. In a fragmented world, each new platform or cultural context represents both a challenge to brand consistency and an opportunity to connect more deeply with diverse audiences.

2. The rise of “Global-Local” tensions

One of the most pressing issues for brands that scale internationally is the tension between *global consistency* and *local relevance*. Gone are the days when a single global campaign could simply be translated and distributed worldwide. Audiences are more discerning, expecting culturally attuned messaging and offerings that speak directly to their local realities.

For instance, a food and beverage company might discover that a product name has a negative connotation in one language, while a car manufacturer may need to consider different design aesthetics in markets that prioritize compact cars versus luxury SUVs. Similarly, holidays and cultural norms vary across regions, influencing everything from advertising visuals to the tone of brand communications.

Actionable Tip: Maintain a centralized brand guide that articulates your core values, tone, and visual system, but allow regional teams the freedom to adapt content. A well-structured governance model ensures local campaigns remain “on brand” while still reflecting unique cultural nuances.

3. Personalization, privacy, and the brand balancing act

As part of the digital revolution, brands now have unprecedented access to consumer data, enabling hyper-personalized experiences. This can be a powerful differentiator in a fragmented world, where each micro-segment of your audience may have distinct wants, needs, and cultural perspectives. Yet with great data comes great responsibility: privacy has become a central concern for modern consumers.

Why it matters: If personalization crosses the line into intrusion, brands can swiftly lose trust. On the other hand, failing to deliver relevant content can undermine the brand’s value proposition in a world where “you should know me well enough” is a baseline expectation.

Strategies for success:

Data transparency: Clearly communicate what data you collect and how it’s used. Transparency builds trust and helps consumers feel comfortable with personalization.

Consent and control: Empower users to customize how and when they engage with your brand. Some may enjoy hyper-personalized emails, while others might opt out.

Value-driven personalization:

Personalization should solve a real pain point or enhance the user experience. Superficial personalization (“Hey [First Name]!”) without actual relevance does more harm than good.

Remember, personalization is not just about plugging in a consumer’s name; it’s about tailoring the entire brand experience, from recommended products to customer service interactions in a way that feels both relevant and respectful.

4. The power of authenticity in a fragmented market

In a world where audiences are scattered across platforms and geographies, authenticity is the glue that binds a brand’s diverse expressions into a coherent identity. Whether your brand is posting on LinkedIn, responding to X (formerly Twitter) threads, or launching a marketing campaign on a local language radio station, authenticity ensures that people recognize and trust the voice behind the message.

Hallmarks of authenticity:

Consistent core values: Ensure your brand’s actions align with stated values, whether that’s sustainability, customer-centricity, or innovation

Genuine engagement: Respond to questions and feedback transparently. If mistakes are made - own them quickly and responsibly

Humanized voice: Even if your brand is global, speaking in a human voice rather than corporate jargon creates a connection

A fragmented market amplifies any inconsistency or perceived insincerity. If a brand claims to champion environmental responsibility but continues harmful practices in certain regions, expect fragmentation to expose that hypocrisy quickly through social media chatter or local advocacy groups. Authenticity therefore requires vigilance and alignment across all brand outposts.

5. Community-building: A unifying strategy

In the face of countless channels and cultural differences, one of the most powerful strategies for brand cohesion is community-building. When customers feel they are part of a brand’s community, fragmentation matters less because the brand relationship transcends individual channels.

How to foster community:

Shared values and interests: Align your brand with causes or interests that resonate deeply with your target audience. Create forums (online or offline) where those shared interests can be explored and celebrated.

User-generated content: Encourage customers to share their stories, solutions, and creative uses of your product or service. Highlight and reward these contributions to

reinforce a sense of belonging.

Events and experiences: Whether virtual or in-person, events help build camaraderie. Workshops, product launches, or networking sessions can be tailored to local markets while staying consistent with global brand messaging.

Communities are inherently fragmented. Different pockets of your audience might have unique interests, pain points, or cultural references. But a sense of belonging and shared purpose acts as a connective thread. Over time, the brand becomes more than just a supplier; it's a facilitator of meaningful connections.

6. Embracing tech innovations without losing the human touch

Digital transformation and emerging technologies like AI, blockchain, and augmented reality present a double-edged sword in a fragmented world. On one hand, they allow brands to operate at scale, harness data, and create new kinds of immersive experiences. On the other, overreliance on automation can erode the human element that customers increasingly crave.

Balancing technology and humanity:

Chatbots: Great for quick inquiries but ensure a clear path to human support for complex issues.

AI-driven insights: Use machine learning to identify patterns, but validate those findings with human judgment. Data may show trends, but context and empathy guide brand decisions.

Personalized journeys: Automated personalization can deliver customized recommendations, but a genuine human voice in communications fosters emotional connections.

The key is to deploy technology in ways that enhance, rather than replace, genuine interaction. People still form bonds with other people (or, at least, with brand personalities that feel human). When properly balanced, technology can reduce friction, unify disparate data sets, and offer real-time insights into a fragmented consumer base without sacrificing warmth or trust.

7. Cultural sensitivity and inclusivity

In a fragmented world, a brand's audience is rarely monolithic. Customers may span numerous cultural backgrounds, languages, and socio-economic contexts. A single campaign slogan or ad design can resonate profoundly with one group while alienating another.

Best practices for cultural inclusivity:

Local partnerships: Work with local experts or agencies who understand the cultural nuances of each market.

Inclusive imagery: Represent diverse voices, body types, and identities in brand visuals. This signals that your brand recognizes and embraces a variety of experiences.

Language adaptations: Go beyond mere translation; adapt idioms, references, and

humor to local norms. A brand that invests in linguistic nuance shows respect and resonates more deeply.

By incorporating cultural sensitivity, brands can avoid missteps that go viral for the wrong reasons. More positively, inclusive branding often garners loyalty from communities that feel genuinely seen and respected.

8. Aligning internal teams for external consistency

A brand is only as strong as the people behind it. In a fragmented world, **internal alignment is paramount.** Whether an employee is in customer service, product development, or marketing, they should embody the brand's core values. Internal branding initiatives - like consistent onboarding materials, brand training sessions, and open forums for feedback help unite employees around a shared purpose.

Leaders set the tone for how a brand operates internally and externally. By modeling collaborative and inclusive behavior, senior executives can encourage cross-departmental cooperation, ensuring brand messages remain unified. Culture plays a huge role in brand success; companies with cultures that encourage open dialogue and empower employees to be brand ambassadors typically fare better in fragmented markets.

Silos within organizations are a microcosm of external fragmentation. When marketing, sales, customer service & product teams operate independently, customers receive conflicting messages. Establishing cross-functional teams or brand task forces can break down these silos, ensuring each department aligns on messaging and strategy. Regular communication, both formal (meetings, memos) and informal (Slack channels, coffee chats) helps teams adapt quickly to market changes and maintain a unified brand front.

9. Measuring brand consistency in a fragmented landscape

Traditional brand metrics like unaided recall, brand association, and preference still matter. But fragmentation calls for more nuanced measurement strategies. Digital analytics allow for real-time tracking of how consumers engage with your brand across multiple platforms. Social listening tools uncover sentiment in diverse communities and languages. Employee surveys shed light on internal brand alignment.

Metrics to consider:

Share of voice across platforms: Understand how often your brand is mentioned relative to competitors on each channel.

Engagement quality: Go beyond likes or clicks. Measure meaningful interactions, such as comments and shares that indicate deeper engagement.

Customer satisfaction and NPS: Ask how likely your customers are to recommend your brand. Investigate differences across regions or demographics.

Internal brand alignment: Gauge how well employees understand and embody your brand values, as this directly impacts external consistency.

With data scattered across multiple channels, a unified dashboard that aggregates these metrics can help you spot inconsistencies, adapt strategies, and maintain brand cohesion.

10. The ever-evolving playbook: Staying agile

Perhaps the most critical element of branding in a fragmented world is agility. Consumer tastes shift, new competitors emerge, and global events can reshape entire industries overnight. Branding strategies that are too rigid often fail to adapt in time.

Agile branding tactics:

Modular branding systems: Instead of a single, fixed brand identity, consider flexible design elements that can be quickly adapted for new campaigns or platforms.

Rapid testing: Use small-scale pilots on social media or localized markets to gauge response before a broader rollout.

Feedback loops: Encourage customer feedback at every stage and pivot based on real-world insights.

Scenario planning: Anticipate possible market shifts and outline how your brand will respond, whether that's adopting new tech or adjusting messaging for emerging consumer values.

In short, agility means building processes that let you listen, learn, and iterate swiftly. While brand consistency remains paramount, minor course corrections or creative twists are necessary to keep pace with a world that refuses to stand still.

Conclusion: Coherence through chaos

Branding in a fragmented world may seem like a paradox. How do you maintain a coherent identity when audiences, platforms, and cultures grow increasingly diverse?

The answer lies in embracing fragmentation as a reality rather than a problem. By acknowledging multiple channels, cultural contexts, and stakeholder perspectives, a brand can strategically adapt while staying true to a unifying ethos.

Maintain a strong core: Define values and identity that transcend any single campaign or region

Adapt thoughtfully: Respect local nuances, cultural sensitivities, and platform-specific norms.

Prioritize authenticity: In a world of constant change, authenticity remains the compass that guides consumer trust.

Invest in community: Forge deeper relationships by creating spaces (digital or physical) where customers, employees, and partners can connect around shared interests and ideals.

Leverage technology responsibly: Automate for efficiency but keep a human touch to ensure personal connection and trust.

Maintain consistency: A cohesive brand architecture and governance framework ensure a consistent global presence.

Build trust: Demonstrate reliability, transparency, and empathy at every touchpoint.

By weaving these threads together, brands can find coherence amid chaos, achieving relevance and resonance with audiences who are simultaneously more diverse, more discerning, and more empowered than ever before. The brand of the future is not a monolith that dictates a single narrative; it is a dynamic presence that evolves with its communities, staying agile and authentic in a landscape defined by fragmentation.

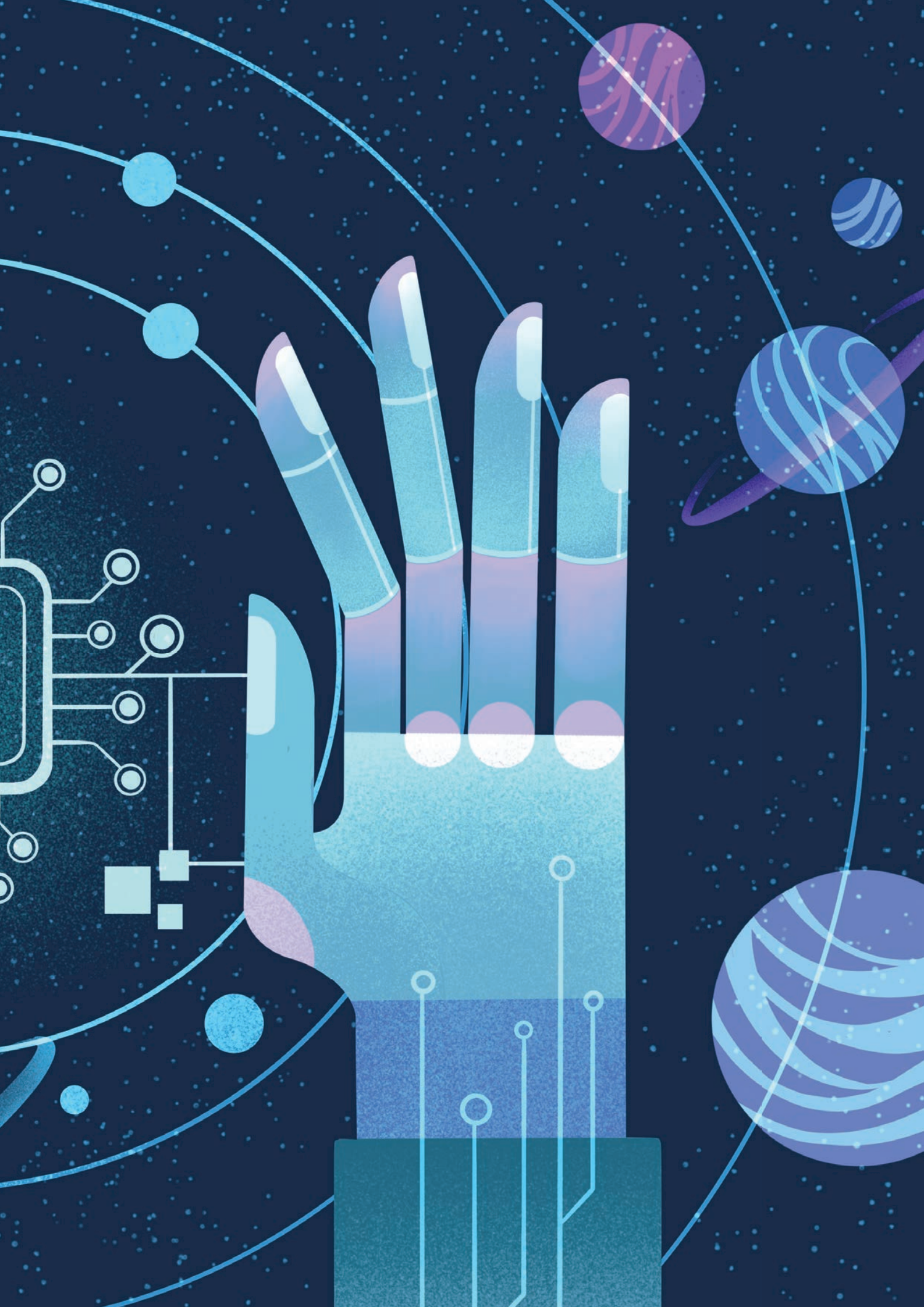
HUMANIZING

TECHNOLOGY IN

BRANDING



AI



AI meets authenticity: Creating meaningful connections in the age of automation

by **Ben Hoehn** | Fractional Marketing Leader & AI Consultant - Mojomogul, U.S.A

How brands can leverage AI and automation without losing the human touch, emphasizing genuine, personalized experiences.

Generative AI is exploding, and marketers are scrambling to harness its power. But amidst all the hype, it's crucial to remember one thing: AI is a tool, not a replacement for your brand's unique human element. Sure, AI can whip up snazzy content, analyze trends faster than you can say "algorithm," and even personalize customer experiences at scale. But here's the thing: without a human touch, your brand risks becoming just another face in the AI-generated crowd.

AI is useful as a powerful assistant

Think of AI as your super-efficient assistant. It can handle the grunt work, freeing you up to focus on what truly matters.

For example, a [study by MIT Sloan](#) found that generative AI could improve the performance of consultants by nearly 40%. However, it's important to note that this benefit was only observed when the AI was used within the boundaries of its capabilities.

That's the key – keeping AI within its limits.

AI can generate perfect prose, but it can't capture your unique voice and perspective. Let your personality shine through! Share your stories, your passions, your weird sense of humor.

I often use this scenario to describe the current GenAI landscape:

- Imagine you have a tireless PhD-level research intern who can crank out first drafts and analyze data at warp speed
- You have them at your disposal, and they can churn out amazing work without sleeping, but you can't just lock them in a room and ask them to write a blog post, or forecast next quarter's marketing-sourced revenue
- They will immediately ask for source materials and a lot of background information
- GenAI is the same way – you first must feed in all of the historical data, guide it to the ideal output using a series of confirmation prompts, and finally double-check the accuracy of the results within each query
- Doesn't sound very automated or intelligent, does it? There's legwork involved that is fundamental to getting results, just like bringing in top talent.

Why the human touch still matters (more than ever)

Fast forward to 2025, everyone is using their GenAI tool of choice (I have a group of tabs perma-open with my favorites as I type this), and people can spin up thousands of images and blog pages at will.

How can you compete with the level of volume that now saturates most media outlets?

How can you differentiate yourself from the competition and the pack – all likely leveraging GenAI to produce more content?

Be human.

Now, you might be thinking, "Duh, Ben, I *am* human!" But what does that *really* mean in the age of AI?

It's about tapping into those uniquely human qualities that machines can't replicate (yet!).

a) Embrace your quirks

AI can generate perfect prose, but it can't capture your unique voice and perspective. Let your personality shine through! Share your stories, your passions, your weird sense of humor.

I usually speak out loud when I'm composing a blog post to capture how I would actually say this text to you in person, with full vocal inflection, so you can tell that a human wrote this. (And rewrote it too many times.)

b) Show some empathy

AI can help with writing efficiency, but human writers excel at injecting empathy, storytelling, and nuanced understanding into content, forging stronger bonds with the audience.

Can AI show your audience that you get

them? Will it understand their pain points, their challenges, or their aspirations?

No, because we have the benefit of emotional intelligence. And guess what? Your audience has it, and craves human connection.

[Salesforce's "State of the Connected Customer" Report](#) emphasizes that customers, even in B2B, crave authenticity and emotional connection with brands. Content that feels genuine, relatable, and speaks to their needs on a human level resonates more deeply.

Use AI to boost your writing efficiency, but don't forget to inject those uniquely human elements.

c) Build real relationships

AI is great at automating those routine interactions, but it can't build genuine relationships. That's where you come in, with all of that extra time you gained from AI efficiency.

Invest that time in connecting with your audience, partners, and team on a human level. Be present, be engaged, be real.

LinkedIn's ["The B2B Institute" research](#) consistently emphasizes the importance of building long-term relationships in B2B. Content plays a crucial role in nurturing those relationships, and the human touch is vital for personalization, addressing specific needs, and fostering genuine connections.

Since COVID, I've been pushing myself to break out of my "extroverted introvert" shell and connect with at least one new person virtually every week, and attend an in-person networking event at least every fortnight.

Yes, I'm an American that just used "fortnight" in a sentence. Quirk.

In a world saturated with AI-generated content, your humanity is your competitive advantage. Lean into genuine interactions, embrace your authentic self, and watch your brand truly connect with your audience.

B2B customers crave authenticity and emotional connection with brands. Content that feels genuine, relatable, and speaks to their needs on a human level resonates more deeply.

The human approach: AI as your co-pilot

However, if you can learn to train and tame it, AI can free you up to strategize, brainstorm trending ideas, and inject your unique human touch into your marketing creative.

One of the key benefits of using generative AI for marketing content is that it takes the ego out of the equation. I often [leverage AI to create a "straw man" or first draft](#), which can then be refined and improved. Iteration is faster when a first draft was written by a machine hand.

Here's how I use AI to 'augment' my brand's human element:

a) Expanding a content library

AI can generate content, but it can't 'strategize'. You need a human to understand your audience, their pain points, and how your brand uniquely addresses them.

Forrester's podcast about B2B AI usage

did a great job outlining [how repurposed content can then be used](#) to create derivative assets such as landing pages, emails, social media posts, blog articles, newsletters, and video clips.

It's something that just about every B2B marketer is currently doing, or planning on implementing in the near future.

This really helps if you already have a large content repository, or competitor content to pull from. Feeding that large data set into an LLM and having it produce net new content becomes instantly easier than performing an in-depth content performance analysis, reviewing that with a team of content strategists, and then framing the next set of drafts.

[CMI's B2B Content Marketing Trends](#)

report states that half of B2B marketers (51%) who use generative AI are noticing fewer tedious tasks as a result. Forty-five percent see more efficient workflows, 42% experience improved content optimization, and 38% see improved creativity.

Not only are we reducing hours to minutes, but we're increasing creativity.

b) Streamlining content creation

Once you have your first drafts, you can instantly refine the output with your unique voice, tone, brand, and perspective. This is where those experienced humans come in - those designers, creative directors, and copywriters who will run circles around any AI output.

Even if any of those creatives are having a temporary "idea block", Generative AI can be used to generate ideas for content, conduct audience research, and brainstorm messaging.

This helps marketers overcome writer's block and get to the drafting stage more

quickly, and again destroying a straw man that was automated from.

Critical stage for this entire creative sequence is making everything distinctive; the human voice's emotional resonance can be detected by anyone that's truly paying attention, and it might be [the only thing that matters](#) in a GenAI world.

c) Personalizing customer experiences

AI can analyze mountains of data and serve up the perfect content to your audience at the perfect time. It's like having a personal shopper for every single customer.

Let's be real, humans can't compete with AI when it comes to crunching numbers and spotting patterns. AI can sift through thousands of customer records, from demographics and purchase history to interviews and case studies, to deliver hyper-personalized content that hits the mark, without the need for complex human analysis and distillation into cohesive messaging.

[Salesforce's report](#) mentions that customers are open to AI when it is transparent, secure, and improves their experiences – but only 14% of B2B marketers see more personalized content from using generative AI at this time.

There's a lot of room for growth here.

If your customers are fine with AI that can automatically segment audiences and tailor messaging for each persona and account, why not use it?

The focus then becomes ensuring a human touch is present in key interactions – like experiential events, ad creative, and relevant content.

That's where you'll forge those genuine connections and build lasting relationships.

d) Trendjacking like a pro

AI alerts me to trending topics instantly and can curate relevant and valid research with a keystroke.

I'm now able to craft content that aligns with my brand's values and personality, but back it up with established authoritative substance that is still trending in-market. This expands my reach, makes me look brilliant by association, and strengthens my brand perception as a thought leader.

[Trendjacking isn't just about hopping on the latest bandwagon](#). It's about meeting your audience where they are - scrolling through their feeds, consuming content at warp speed.

By tapping into trending topics, you can grab their attention, spark conversations, and position your brand as the authority in your space.

The dangers of an AI-driven brand strategy

Passing your brand strategy to AI is like letting a robot write your love letters. Sure, it might get the grammar right, but it'll lack the heart and soul that make it truly yours.

Here's just a couple of areas where things can go sideways if you let AI take the reins:

a) **Loss of authenticity & judgment**

Your brand becomes generic, indistinguishable from the AI-generated noise. Look, if your brand starts sounding like it was generated by a robot, you're in trouble.

[The Content Marketing Institute's "B2B Content Marketing Benchmarks, Budgets, and Trends: Outlook for 2025"](#) report highlights this perfectly. Marketers are embracing AI, but they know that human oversight is still crucial.

Why? Because we humans bring those essential qualities to the table that AI just can't replicate.

We can analyze information, spot trends, and make those judgment calls that AI can't.

We can connect the dots between your brand, your audience, and your business goals.

We know what makes your audience tick, what keeps them up at night, and what kind of content will truly resonate with them, based on our own experience.

Don't let your brand fade into the AI-generated background noise. Inject your unique personality, your human touch, and watch your brand come alive.

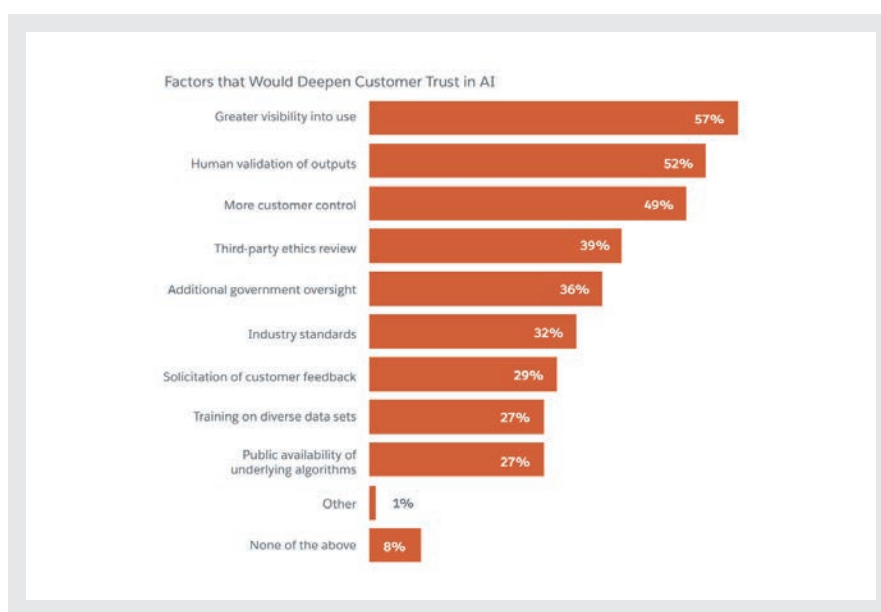
b) **Erosion of trust**

Customers crave genuine connection, not robotic interactions. For AI to effectively support these personal growth areas, it's essential to build trust and transparency in AI systems.

Individuals need to be aware of the limitations and potential biases of AI, critically evaluate AI outputs, and understand how their data is being used.

Pulling from the [Salesforce Connected Customer report](#) again, "Transparency is the foundation of what customers want. Over half of customers say greater visibility into how AI is applied would boost their trust."

This promotes responsible AI adoption and ensures human agency in the process.



The bottom line

No technology currently holds more promise than GenAI does right now. We're deep in a hype cycle, and I would concur that Generative AI is a major paradigm shift in terms of how we plan to perform daily tasks; but it won't overtake as much of your life as you might hope. Yet.

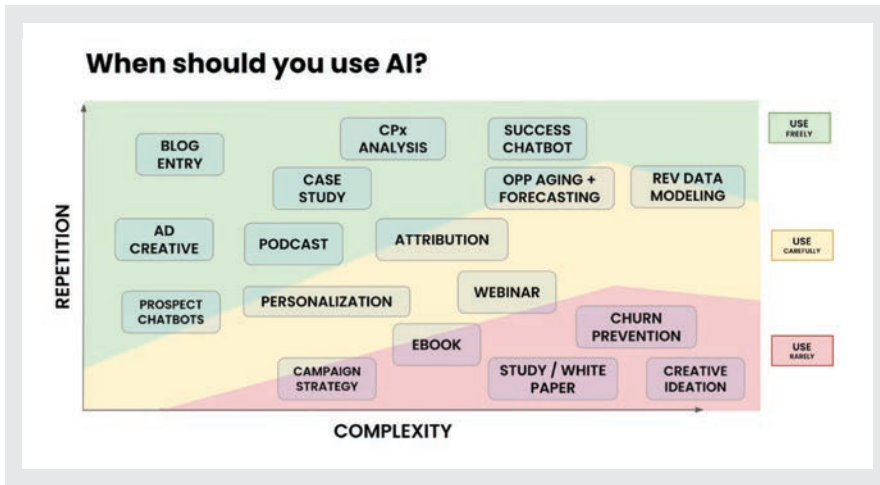
For now, proceed with the understanding that AI is a powerful tool, but it's not a magic bullet.

Utilize AI to automate repetitive tasks and gain insights from data – it's [amazing at cutting through established processes](#) and trimming hours of busy work. For example, in marketing, AI can generate social media posts, emails, and blog articles. In software development, AI can generate code snippets, identify bugs, and suggest optimizations. In finance, AI can predict stock prices or identify investment opportunities. In healthcare, AI can help diagnose diseases and make treatment decisions.

It can even handle somewhat complex tasks that require predictive analysis, dynamic personalization, and content distillation from multi-media sources.

If you're a leader, invest in training and development to ensure that your team has the skills and knowledge to work effectively with AI.

However, to truly connect with your audience, you need to infuse your brand with the irreplaceable human element.



Human creativity and strategic thinking is what will make you stand out. If all of your strategy & creativity becomes AI generated you will be lost in the noise.

Don't let AI take the reins – let it amplify what makes your brand uniquely YOU.

The digital-physical nexus: How brands are blending real and virtual worlds

by **Sathyannarayanan Ramachandran** | Associate Professor of Marketing,
IFMR Graduate School of Business – Krea University, India

How brands are creating hybrid experiences that merge the physical and digital, from virtual shopping to immersive brand storytelling.

The past twenty-four years since the advent of the new millennium have been fascinating regarding the changing marketing landscape and the consumer cohorts. These two decades saw immense change in the technology-driven business environment and consumption habits of digital natives vs Immigrants. As we discuss this, we'll soon witness distinct behaviour between VR natives vs Immigrants and AI natives vs Immigrants. Such is the power of technology that is bringing in sweeping changes. In the last 150 years, brands have evolved with various customer engagement interfaces from direct face-to-face selling, print, radio and television advertising, and digital advertising to an experience economy involving digital experience in virtual worlds.

The Experience Economy

The 1998 HBR article, “Welcome to the Experience Economy,”¹ by B. Joseph Pine II and James H. Gilmore articulated the movement of economic offerings towards experiences. Pine and Gilmore explained the evolution of the experience economy with the making of birthday cakes over the ages- from the time when it was fully home-cooked to the 'experience' era where the whole birthday party experience is outsourced with the cake being just one part of the entire birthday celebration experience.

From then on, the brand experience slowly moved towards a hybrid resonance with the intermingling of digital technologies. With strong development in the digital technology space, commerce was augmented from a brick-and-mortar, physical world to the e-commerce space, and technology was integrated to enrich the experience in the physical space.

Metaverse

Virtual and augmented reality in the metaverse and artificial intelligence are opening

up unimaginable possibilities to provide immersive experiences and customer engagement for brands. Neal Stephenson introduced the term 'Metaverse' in his 1992 science fiction novel "Snow Crash"². It is a convergence and blending of digital and physical space and human-machine existence – a computer-generated online space in which users can interact as in a physical space. Metaverse is expected to bring in a new wave of opportunity similar to the internet of the 1990s. Though the initial large-scale hype on metaverse has slowed down, the idea is expected to linger on. So, brands are latching upon the concept in two ways –

- (1) Integrating the power of technology in the physical space and
- (2) using the digital space to provide an immersive experience to the customers.

Through virtual reality (VR), brands try to provide a wholly virtual and digitally immersive brand-connected experience using a headset. With augmented reality (AR), digital technology enhances the physical experience of a brand touch point. Mixed reality (MR) combines the best of both worlds for a hybrid experience³. This is also sometimes called a 'phygital' experience – a portmanteau of physical and digital. Technology giants like Meta, Apple, Google, Microsoft, and Nvidia are

betting highly on this and have invested substantially in developing hardware and software.

Brands in the Metaverse

Two significant uncertainties, product performance uncertainty and product fit uncertainty, can affect the online purchase decisions of a brand's customers due to the lack of touch-and-feel experience as in a physical store. Virtual reality helps immensely to minimize these uncertainties. Gamification using the metaverse is also paving new ways for brand-customer engagement. Brands like Gucci (Guccivilla, Gucci Arcade), Estée Lauder (Beauty Bounce), and Nike (RTFKT Studio) were some of the early movers to have a brand presence in the metaverse.

Indian brands like the Taj (Tata Group's Indian Hotels Company Limited) also tested the metaverse waters in 2022 with the virtual launch of the 'She Remains the Taj' campaign. Tourism destination authorities like Uttar Pradesh Tourism, India, also actively enter the metaverse. The 'Museum at Fingertips' is a virtual tour project aimed at putting the state museum in the capital city of Lucknow into the virtual world⁴. The state Directorate of Tourism has also invited proposals to develop a 3D Metaverse Integrated System for tourist destinations like Lucknow and Prayagraj⁵. The concept of 'digital twins' – virtual replicas of any physical entity from objects to places is expected to find more currency in the coming decade.

Augmenting Beauty and activation

Beauty and cosmetics are another category quickly adopting augmented reality and artificial intelligence. As early as 2014, L'Oreal launched the Makeup Genius app, through which a user can

upload a selfie and try various makeup combinations before making the final choice⁶. The app has reportedly seen 20 million downloads. L'Oreal also introduced an AI-powered virtual personal beauty assistant called 'Beauty Genius' to answer various user queries on beauty regimens and also enabled them to use a try-on facility⁷.

Companies like Sa Sa International Holdings Limited, Hong Kong, which once closed its entire chain of stores in Singapore, have bounced back healthily with renewed strategies. In its phygital brand engagement strategy, Sa Sa also latched upon the idea of activation at ground level during the recent Happy Shopping Festival organized by the Hong Kong Retail Management Association and held the AI Makeup Genius Competition⁸. The participants used the digital interface to create innovative makeup styles and used a shopping window to procure the materials to apply the idea. Such experiments attempt to provide an immersive experience by marrying the best of physical and virtual worlds.

Store of the future

One of the pioneering attempts to present a phygital experience to the consumer was the 'Store of the future' concept in 2017-18 by Farfetch, a digital marketplace platform for luxury goods founded by José Neves⁹. In 2015, Farfetch acquired UK's brick-and-mortar luxury retail brand Browns to study the nuances of physical retail experience in the luxury goods sector. In an attempt to create a "connected store," Farfetch introduced virtual reality aided by emotion-scanning software and payment options in the physical store to enable better data capture of customer movements for studying the patterns similar to a scenario in a digital store environment¹⁰. The app also enabled the customers to create and update a wish list and seamlessly interact with the physical environment, creating usable data points and critical consumer insights for customizing the store experience. The digital interfaces in the physical store also helped the customers to try the items in the virtual mode and order based on their preferences.

LVMH Dream Garden

Luxury marketer LVMH showcased several of their innovations during the 8th edition of VivaTech at Paris Expo Porte de Versailles in May 2024. The event witnessed the power of Dior's Astra AI platform, which aggregates customer reviews from various platforms, research insights, and physical shopping patterns to pick trends. Loro Piana Silhouette is another interactive experience in which a customer's image is completely taken in to provide the opportunity to try various apparel designs and fit virtually. 'Extraordinaires AI-Configurator' is capable of suggesting LVMH products that will be apt for the customer with a mere photograph¹¹.

Coca-Cola's Augmented Reality

Coca-Cola used the power of Snapchat's augmented reality technology in its static vending machines to make it a powerful and active interactive medium. In addition to the regular process of vending the drink, Snap's AR and Camera Kit technology enabled gesture-based navigation in the machine, helping the consumer to play with and try on merchandise. This exercise has reportedly resulted in 2150% longer engagement compared to the industry average and more than 40 million media

impressions¹². Coca-Cola also did an activation exercise using Augmented reality in its vending machines stationed at the University of Southern California during the 2022 Halloween season. Towards this, a microsite was created as a central connection to the whole exercise. The vending machine experience was made spookier and more interactive using augmented reality, mobile, and the microsite to provide a "treat" to the students, thereby making it a highly engaging brand-consumer initiative. The initiative was made possible with the deployment of the Lightship Visual Positioning System from Niantic¹³.

Audi vrooming with mixed reality

Audi introduced the Audi City showrooms with a completely interactive digital experience in 2014¹⁴. During the Consumer Electronic Show (CES 2016), Audi unveiled the concept of VR-enabled showrooms of the future. At a basic level, today, Audi VR Showrooms provide virtual test drives for customers. Being a luxury car maker, Audi thrives on providing maximum choice in the configuration of the cars. According to an Nvidia report, the Audi Q3 itself is produced with a combination of over a thousand individual features that customers can finalize, from color to seat design. In a VR Showroom, the customer can use Oculus Rift and HTC Vive headsets to try various combinations of the features and experience the car with their customized choices. This is a win-win for the customers and the dealers as it reduces the number of changes and the associated costs¹⁵.

While brands focus on deploying phygital tools for customer engagement, Audi went a step ahead in 2022 and used mixed reality using smartphones while introducing the Audi A8 60 TFSI e Quattro to journalists and influencers¹⁶. A classic example of integrated marketing communication strategy for effective PR.

More brands in the Phygital party

Several leading brands have realized the power of phygital experience and are deploying exciting ways to engage with their customers. Nike uses augmented reality to present information about the sneakers to the customers. Ikea provides a visualization experience for the choice of furniture based on the interior of the customer's home. TOMS is an exciting social impact brand that donates a pair of shoes for every pair purchased by the customers. VR adds value to this process by allowing customers to see the VR-powered video on the social impact of the donation, showing the positive and happy emotions of the underprivileged children who are the beneficiaries of the initiative¹⁷.

Future Forward

What we are witnessing is just the tip of the technology iceberg. The digital-physical nexus will be mind-boggling with galloping developments in artificial intelligence, hardware possibilities, and a future transition to 6G networks. As generational cohorts change with new consumption habits, the brands must embrace the changes and ride over future opportunities with excellence in managing the brand touchpoints and immersive customer engagement.

The digital-physical nexus will be mind-boggling with galloping developments in artificial intelligence, hardware possibilities, and a future transition to 6G networks.

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People don't buy what you do;
they buy why you do it.

- Simon Sinek -



THE NEXT FRONTIER IN BRAND SUSTAINABILITY





Regenerative brands: Creating value beyond zero impact

by **Nada Sayarh** | Professor/ D. Director of Sustainability, SP Jain School of Global Management, UAE

Why marketers should pay attention to regenerative brands?

As the world faces growing environmental and social challenges, the pressure on businesses to act as responsible stewards of the planet has never been greater. This is backed by consumer preferences and upcoming regulatory mandates. For example, according to the Euromonitor International Voice of the consumer and voice of the Industry Lifestyle and Sustainability Surveys, 2023, 70 percent of companies are receiving consumer pressure to act on climate change. Marketers whose main focus lies in driving revenue and customer satisfaction, now find themselves at the forefront of an evolving conversation: how to align brand strategies with the pressing need for sustainability.

While globally marketers are showing increasing interest in the matter they have been slow to leverage their expertise for driving more impact. According to the [WFA and Kantar's Sustainable Marketing 2030 report](#), there has been an increase in the incorporation of sustainability metrics on marketing dashboards. It went from 26% in 2021 to 42% in 2023. This comes as a response to the growing consumer demand for products that are environmentally and socially friendly. Unfortunately, in this regard, they have been acting as mere recipients of corporate sustainability agendas rather than adopting their usual role of innovation and transformation drivers. Hence their actions remain mainly tactical, and the focus is on incorporating Sustainability claims into their products. See chart below from Euromonitor.



Source: <https://lp.euromonitor.com/white-paper/2024-global-consumer-trends/greenwashed-out>

This disconnect is partly due to a lack of awareness about the pathways for integrating sustainability at the level of brand strategies, as well as uncertainty about how these efforts can contribute to a brand's bottom line. This knowledge gap is the main culprit in preventing brands from achieving a “win-win” outcome for the business and positive contributions to society and the environment.

From sustainable brands to regenerative brands

There are varying commitments when it comes to a brand's approach to sustainability. The evolution from sustainable to net positive to regenerative brands reflects a growing level of engagement with environmental and social responsibility.

While sustainable brands focus on avoiding further harm and net-positive brands strive for compensatory positive impacts, regenerative brands go a step further by aiming to rebuild and enhance the systems they depend on. These brands are about creating long-lasting, resilient ecosystems and communities, providing an opportunity to play an active role in shaping a healthier, more equitable future for both society and the planet.

Sustainable brands focus on minimizing their negative impact on the environment and society. Their primary goal is to reduce harm through sustainable practices such as energy efficiency, waste reduction, and ethical sourcing. Several aim for compliance with environmental regulations and strive to be "less bad". Sustainability often operates on the principle of "do less harm" and adopts strategies that focus on maintaining a balance between environmental, social, and economic goals. For example, Unilever focuses on eco-friendly materials by reducing virgin plastic use and increasing recycled content in its brands' packaging, aiming for 100% of its plastic to be reusable, recyclable, or compostable by 2025. The company also innovates with carbon capture technologies and offers biodegradable products made from sustainably sourced materials.

Another example is French luxury brand Chloé launched its "Vertical Project" as part of the Spring/Summer 2023 collection. Each piece in the collection features a digital ID embedded via a QR code on the product tag, offering customers instant access to traceability and authentication details. Further elevating its commitment to circularity, Chloé has partnered with luxury resale platform Vestiaire Collective to introduce an exclusive resale program for these items. Through this collaboration, Chloé earns a share of the profits from each authenticated piece sold, unlocking a new revenue stream in the thriving secondhand market while reinforcing the brand's sustainability ethos.

Net positive brands take sustainability a step further by aiming to give back more than they take from the environment and society. They recognize that simply reducing harm is no longer sufficient in addressing global

The key to a net-positive approach is the idea of compensation whereby brands acknowledge that their activities may cause harm, but they go beyond mere mitigation by generating positive outcomes elsewhere.

challenges. They seek to create a net positive impact on social and environmental factors, striving to improve the well-being of all stakeholders. They achieve this by implementing initiatives that enhance community welfare, restore ecosystems, and contribute positively to society. Unlike sustainable brands that focus on reducing harm, net-positive brands seek to leave the planet and society in a better condition than before, compensating for negative effects. For example, brands might offset their carbon emissions by planting trees, investing in renewable energy, or engaging in activities that have a beneficial impact on communities and ecosystems. The key to a net-positive approach is the idea of compensation whereby brands acknowledge that their activities may cause harm, but they go beyond mere mitigation by generating positive outcomes elsewhere.

For example, Coca-Cola focuses on water stewardship, aiming to replenish as much water as it uses through community projects and sustainable sourcing. The company also engages communities in water conservation efforts. It has contributed to the Replenish Africa Initiative (RAIN) which has improved access to clean water for over 6 million people across 4,000 communities in 41 countries. It has collaborated with sugar cane farmers, and WWF Australia since 2009 to reduce the damage coming from agriculturally contaminated water to flow into the Great Barrier Reef. This

project incorporated more than 130 farmers and improved the quality of 150 billion liters of water flowing into the reef.

British Telecommunication, on the other hand, targets carbon reduction by helping customers lower their emissions threefold compared to its own footprint. They commit to renewable energy and transition their fleet to electric vehicles by 2030. Together, these brands demonstrate that businesses can thrive while making positive contributions to society and the environment.

Regenerative brands mirror a paradigm shift from both sustainable and net-positive approaches by moving from aiming to actively restore and regenerate the systems they interact with. Rather than simply minimizing harm or compensating for damage, regenerative brands seek to rebuild ecosystems, enhance biodiversity, and support the well-being of communities. Their objective is to create a thriving ecosystem where both people and nature can flourish. This could involve working directly with communities to restore indigenous lands, investing in regenerative agriculture that improves soil health, or implementing business practices that actively restore degraded ecosystems. They recognize the interdependence of human and natural systems and emphasize long-term thinking, innovation, and co-creation with stakeholders.

SWAY is a California based startup that exemplifies how a regenerative brand can effectively address pressing environmental issues while fostering community resilience and promoting sustainable consumption practices. It creates innovative packaging solutions using seaweed, as an alternative to single-use plastics. Their mission is rooted in four pillars: regeneration, innovation, dependability, and inclusivity. By leveraging seaweed, a naturally abundant and regenerative resource, SWAY seeks to replenish the planet rather than deplete it. It produces packaging that decomposes naturally and is compostable at home. They engage with coastal communities to ensure that their supply chain benefits local economies and ecosystems. Their supply chain strategy connects every step from seaweed harvesters to processors. It has partnered with various eco-conscious brands such as J.Crew and Burton. It engages with the community through educational initiatives to raise awareness on the negative impact of plastic waste.

Table 1: Summary of key differences between brand approaches to sustainability:

	Brand type	Objective	Approach	Focus
Increasing ESG embeddedness and innovation) ↓	Sustainable	Do less harm	Minimize negative environmental/ social impacts	Maintain balance between economy, society, and environment
	Net-Positive	Create positive impact	Offset negative impacts through positive actions	Achieve more value than is consumed
	Regenerative	Intentional about restoring ecosystems and communities	Heal and regenerate systems for long-term well-being	Create thriving living systems through holistic integration of value

Most global brands that have the scale to drive meaningful impact remain rooted in more conservative approaches, such as sustainable or net-positive strategies. In contrast, many start-ups and smaller, emerging companies are embracing regenerative brand strategies. This is because start ups being newer to the market can embed regenerative principles into their business models from the outset. Global brands, on the other hand, often have deeply entrenched systems and legacy practices that make a rapid shift to regenerative strategies more challenging. Yet, it is precisely these global brands with their immense scalability and reach that have the potential to drive the most significant impact.

The objective of this article is to bridge the knowledge and awareness gap and to provide a roadmap for marketers to accelerate their move to making their brands more regenerative. This will not only benefit our planets and society but will also help brands pre-empt the expectations of increasingly informed and environmentally conscious consumers. As awareness of sustainability grows, consumers are demanding more from companies - expecting transparency, accountability, and a

genuine commitment to positive impact. Brands that anticipate these demands by embracing regenerative strategies will not only lead in their industries but also build stronger, long-lasting relationships with their customer base.

How to make your brand regenerative

Regeneration is at the core of regenerative brands, shaping their entire business model from the ground up. This mindset drives how they source materials, focusing on ethical and sustainable practices, and how they manufacture products. It extends to how they engage with employees, partners, and stakeholders, fostering transparent, equitable relationships. Regenerative brands are also committed to a product's full lifecycle - designing for reuse, repair, and repurposing - ensuring that every stage of production contributes to a healthier ecosystem and a more sustainable future.

It is important to understand regeneration as a spectrum of efforts and an evolutionary journey rather than a destination. This requires a mindset shift whereby, rather than viewing regenerative practices as a fixed checklist of criteria where some brands fit and others don't, we must see them as part of an ongoing journey towards a long-term goal.

Brands may start by implementing regenerative practices in certain areas, such as sourcing materials or extending product lifecycles, while gradually expanding these efforts to other parts of the business. This perspective encourages progress and innovation. It recognizes that while some brands may lead the way, others are progressing in their journey. The focus should be on encouraging these incremental changes and recognizing the potential for continuous improvement rather than

disqualifying those brands who aren't yet fully regenerative.

The following roadmap provides actionable steps for brands to transition from traditional sustainability toward true regeneration, making a positive impact on both society and the planet.

1. Knowledge and mindset of the marketer

For brands to begin their regenerative journey, brand leaders must possess the right mindset, skills, and knowledge. Regenerative leadership involves not only technical expertise but also a deep understanding of complex systems and the ability to see beyond immediate brand boundaries.

They need to be purpose driven leaders who adopt multigenerational thinking. They require personal attributes like empathy, open-mindedness, and a commitment to social justice. They should not be playing not to lose but playing to win aiming to create win-win outcomes for the brand, society, and the environment. They should develop their long term brand vision of what an alternative future would look like for their brands.

However, mindset alone isn't enough. Leaders must also have a baseline knowledge of global challenges, ecological and economic systems, and the various functions that drive the business. Regeneration requires an interdisciplinary understanding of procurement, supply chain, product design, finance, regulatory affairs, and risk management - alongside brand, communication, and marketing. By broadening their expertise, leaders can make recommendations that span functions, enabling them to lead transformative change effectively.

2. Redefining the playing field

Regeneration challenges brands to

expand beyond traditional boundaries and adopt a multi-stakeholder model. Leaders need to embrace an inclusive and collaborative mindset, looking at how the brand impacts all stakeholders - employees, communities, the environment, and society as a whole. Regenerative brand leadership requires to move beyond the traditional marketing skills and to develop a systems understanding of the overall playing field in which their brand operates. Brand leaders must assess the brand within the larger context of ecological, economic, and social systems, understanding how each part interacts and influences the whole.

This shift requires leaders to be audacious in their goals, and willing to set objectives that balance profit with social and environmental responsibility. They must develop solutions that go beyond profit-maximization and look for win-win opportunities that benefit both the brand and the wider ecosystem. Leaders should view sustainability not as a compliance requirement but as a cornerstone of the brand's strategy - future-proofing its identity and narrative while staying ahead of regulatory demands. By proactively adopting regenerative practices, brands can strengthen trust and credibility with increasingly informed and discerning consumers. With the growing consumer preference for sustainability and awareness of greenwashing risks, it is crucial for brands to authentically communicate their regenerative efforts.

3. Holistic contextual understanding

A true regenerative approach goes beyond corporate premises, requiring a thorough understanding of the brand's impact on interconnected systems. Leaders must conduct a holistic impact assessment, measuring not only their environmental footprint but also the brand's influence on communities and

societal well-being. This involves understanding the broader ecological, economic, and cultural landscapes in which the brand operates.

In setting ambitious targets, brands should envision an alternative world where social justice, inclusivity, environmental restoration, and human rights are prioritized. They must incorporate a long-term, multi-generational perspective, recognizing that today's decisions will impact future generations. This expanded outlook demands an appreciation for the complexity of social and ecological systems, encouraging leaders to see the "big picture" and assess how every action contributes to a healthier, more equitable world.

4. Setting restorative natural and social goals

A regenerative brand sets goals that address the gaps, risks, and opportunities necessary to create a balanced and fair society, with objectives that span environmental, social, and economic dimensions. This involves adopting circular economy principles - designing products for longevity, repair, recycling, and minimizing waste.

By taking responsibility for the entire lifecycle of their products and services, regenerative brands embrace long-term, sustainable impact, positioning themselves as leaders in transformation. Also, regeneration must be embedded as a core part of the brand's strategy, directly linked to leader accountability and performance metrics. Only when these practices are measured and tracked do they become materially relevant and drive real outcomes.

5. Continuously reinventing the brand and business model through innovation

The journey toward regeneration requires brands to constantly innovate and adapt. This involves reevaluating

business models to incorporate circular economy practices, exploring service-based models, and embracing an entrepreneurial mindset that encourages calculated risk-taking. Regenerative brands continuously assess and refine their strategies, embracing new approaches to remain relevant in an evolving landscape. They should respond dynamically to new challenges, pushing the boundaries of what's possible and setting a precedent for future-focused, resilient business models.

Leaders need the confidence and knowledge to challenge conventional systems and drive transformation within their sectors. They must not only set a baseline ambition and strategy but also remain agile, open to learning, and willing to pivot based on results and feedback. By communicating transparently about where they are in their journey and sharing knowledge with stakeholders, brands can foster trust and educate audiences on complex, often misunderstood topics.

Becoming a regenerative brand is not a one-time shift; it's an ongoing journey that requires brands to build foundational awareness, redefine their operational scope, assess holistic impact, set bold goals, and continuously innovate. It guides brands to prioritize progress over perfection, stay proactive rather than reactive, and build a foundation of trust with stakeholders.



Marketing takes a day to learn. Unfortunately,
it takes a lifetime to master.

- Philip Kotler -





FUTUREPROOFING B2B BRANDS



The B2B brand renaissance: Injecting emotion into rational decision-making

by Mordy Oberstein | Founder, Unify, A Brand Development Consultancy & Wix, Israel

The shift towards emotional branding in B2B, moving beyond purely functional messaging to connect on a human level.

It's peculiar to write about a return towards emotional branding even within the context of B2B marketing. Not because the trend isn't apparent but because the demand for it has been ever-present. The move towards speaking to a B2B audience in a connective manner has been bubbling beneath the surface for years as it speaks to the core shift the web has undergone and is still undergoing.

Examining the roots of the shift presents an important opportunity in better understanding the overarching state of audiences in the context of the online ecosystem.

In other words, the shift towards a more "human" approach within the B2B space is emblematic of a renaissance in connectivity across the entire web and beyond.

The significance of emotional B2B branding

In many ways, the shift towards the emotive within the confines of B2B signals a return towards a state of health within branding as a whole.

While an ethereal concept to begin with, "branding" in recent years, had taken on a new definition that placed it beyond the confines of what branding actually is. Instead of being connective at its core "brand" came to mean something entirely broad and entirely unrelated to anything deep-seated or associative.

Too often do I see an overly energetic product marketing strategy being peddled as "brand".

In the B2B space this concept was all the more prevalent and ingrained into the marketing lexicon. Digitally focused brands came to see "brand marketing" as being anything that produced product awareness.

Thus, deciding on the most effective method to leverage social media to showcase

product and product features became synonymous with "brand." However, this is pure product marketing. The fact that the audience becomes aware of your brand as a relevant option does not define the activity as being "brand marketing." The branding impact and effect is not the primary goal in these activities but rather a secondary substance and a derivative outcome.

Brand is not defined by the production of awareness or sentiment. It is possible to produce a desired user sentiment via product marketing. Brand is about identities and connection. It is the merging of two identities, the brand and the audience.

This is why the trend towards including emotionally driven messaging at the B2B level is so significant. It's a move back towards what brand marketing fundamentally is. I think there's still a long way to go until the overall sense of what branding is and what it should be aligns with its true definition.

There are various signs that the return of genuine branding online will continue as the brand has taken center-stage within various performance marketing communities. Having emotive marketing manifest itself in the B2B space is a strong catalyst for future change within the marketing industry.

The trigger behind the move to emotive B2B marketing

Businesses exist in context just like anyone else. And just like anyone else are impacted by the ecosystems they operate in. The most prominent such ecosystem, obviously, being digital - and the digital ecosystem has undergone a fundamental shift.

Think of the web as a child undergoing various stages of transformation. As the child moves from stage to stage their level of awareness increases. Our ability to understand our surroundings online has dramatically increased (for a variety of reasons). It's a total paradigm shift much the way that going from being a child to a teenager is.

A major part of this transformation is the breaking down of what I'll call the "facade" of the web and a search for more genuine online experiences. Even the web's largest player, Google, has taken strong notice. You see this in the shift in Google calling for its [Quality Raters to evaluate for experience](#) and in [Google's desire for firsthand "experiences"](#) among its results as well as in the rise of [Reddit within Google's search results](#).

Simply, there is a demand for content that connects and that does not hide behind veneers of slick and crafty messaging.

A substantial part of this shift has been the unification of our various identities. There is far less compartmentalization of the persona across scenarios, situations, and ecosystems. Who we are professionally is far closer to who we are personally than ever before.

This paradigm shift puts emotive messaging within the B2B context squarely in the sights of any brand who has their finger on the pulse of the current ecosystem.

Effectiveness of emotive marketing is a constant

I don't think anything has actually changed. B2B consumers didn't suddenly wake up with a demand for more emotional branding. Emotive marketing was not any less effective at the B2B level prior to the current trends. Rather, a latent acceptance of the lack of emotive messaging in the B2B was pervasive to the extent that it became normative. People, consumers in specific, simply accepted the fact that B2B marketing was not "supposed to be" emotive. When something becomes normative it doesn't undergo the process of being challenged despite its obvious flaws and inconsistencies.

Brands and the marketing professionals have mistaken the latent acceptance of a lack of emotive marketing at the B2B level as a net positive. Marketers mistakenly believed there was a specific desire for a conscious lack of emotion in B2B marketing. As if it were some inherent "good" to strive for.

This a-priori notion could not have been further from the truth. When something becomes truly normative it's borderline impossible to explicitly call for something different. However, within the recesses of the unconscious mind there is certainly a sense of lack.

The sense of "lack" in B2B marketing has existed within the fabric of our latent minds for years. I think we all saw B2B marketing as being overly stoic, if not worse. The move towards the emotive is only now gaining expression due to the shifting sands within the ecosystem overall thereby allowing the consumer market to give a specific and conscious voice to a need they've long held within.

Beyond surface level emotional targeting

As brands lean into the trend towards emotive messaging in their B2B marketing I urge them to go beyond surface-level emotional experiences. As with any trend, adopters need to be careful when jumping on the bandwagon and to ensure they are offering meaningful experiences.

There's a danger of leaning into shallow emotional experiences. However, this is entirely counterproductive. The precipitous shift towards emotive marketing in the B2B space is rooted in the desire for more authentic content and brand experiences. Paying lip service to this consumer demand via shallow emotive experiences is a metaphoric slap in the face.

A lot of the emotive targeting I see B2B is overly focused on vibe, not substance. At the B2B level there is still a greater tendency to value substance. The emotional response you want to engender should move past "fun" or "likeability" and more into respect and trust.

Brands are getting this wrong all of the time. Yes, we live in the TikTok generation but that doesn't carry over to every walk of life the same way. While the overall ecosystem is far less formal (thus allowing for emotive marketing in the B2B context), B2B still has unique needs. Who we are in the professional setting is still distinct. Thus, the type of emotive branding needed in the B2B context does have some stark differences in emphasis, with the demand for depth being one of them.

A focus on B2B demands depth concepts

Not all emotions are equal. And not all emotions are equally applicable within the B2B context. Your branding should target the life context of your audience. The context of your audience within the B2B framework should demand an extra layer of emotive depth.

There is an extra layer of accountability and consequence that still exists despite B2B being far less formal than it once was. Establishing trust and positioning your offering with a layer of substance resonates. It resonates even more so within the B2B environment.

You wouldn't market a new pharmaceutical that helps you manage diabetes with the same sort of messaging for an energy drink. There's an extra layer of depth that's needed because the stakes are higher. It's the same when working with emotional messaging within the B2B context. There is an additional layer of emotional depth that's required in order to resonate simply because the stakes are higher.

At the B2B level you need to be taken seriously, be seen with respect, and disseminate an undercurrent of professionalism. Yes, there can be secondary emotional targeting that is a bit lighter but it must be built on a foundation of that which is emotionally substantial. For the record, I am not saying your B2B branding has to be overly serious. What I am saying is that it has to be overly meaningful at some stage.

We respect and trust something that has meaning and that is meaningful.

As a consequence, your positioning and messaging should tie into what I call "depth concepts." A depth concept is something that almost transcends the psychological and touches on the

existential. It's a very subtle, yet very important distinction.

When looking to audit your branding I recommend using a framework that allows you to score the level of depth that is latently present.

The process entails:

- Creating a rubric on which to grade its depth
- Defining the underpinnings of the branding concept being transmitted
- Identifying, in an explicit manner, the reasoning behind your assessment

I want to use an unlikely example of what I mean when I refer to "depth" - The United States Marines.

Not exactly who you think of when you say "good branding." But they have excellent branding. Some of the best in my personal experience.

Take one of their taglines: "The Few, The Proud, The Marines"

At first glance it may not seem much. But in reality it is some of the most powerful messaging and positioning out there.

They're not selling you surface level things like action, adventure, or career advancement. What they're actually selling you is, you. A new you.

With "The Few, The Proud, The Marines" they are selling your identity. It's essentially the equivalent of "Join us and gain identity."

That's not emotional anymore, that's downright existential. That is depth at its best and it was done so incredibly subtly.

If you can find a way for brand identity, positioning, and of course messaging to ever so slightly tap into concepts like

- Striving
- Overcoming
- Authenticity
- Transcendence
- Fulfillment
- Drive
- Connection
- Courage
- Fearlessness etc.

At the B2B level (which is not easy) you set yourself up to be taken seriously by your audience. Being looked at with respect and substance still plays a larger role than B2C in my opinion and therefore puts a unique emphasis on tapping into depth concepts adequately.

That's not to say lighter and more engaging elements should not be present. Many B2B brands have inserted lighter-oriented emotional messaging to great effect. Rather, always remember that there is a business decision being made by someone who will be held accountable for that decision and as such trust and substance have to come into the fold in a foundational way.

The companies I see doing well with fun or light hearted activities usually have a strong brand presence that is already trusted and established.

Zendesk would be an excellent example of this.

Their long standing reputation allows them to branch out and speak to the funnier or lighter side of the human experience. Yet, they always balance it with depth messaging at the same time.

So while they might run with a fun creative about scooter batteries dying as they did in 2023 they also run creatives that advocate messaging like “the customer is always human” as they did in 2024. Parenthetically, the concept and implementation of “the customer is always human” touches on the existential quite well.

The next evolution for emotive B2B branding

Integrating emotional concepts within B2B marketing should be widespread and consistent. By consistent I specifically mean in where the messaging is implemented. However, where emotive elements within B2B storytelling have thrived it is virtually absent from site content.

Most web copy almost exclusively focuses on performance (i.e., conversion). As a result, there is a noticeable lack of emotionally-centric language within B2B webcopy.

Brands still look at web content from a pure performance perspective and are afraid of any impact changes would have on conversion.

The result is copy with a bit of messaging but where the messaging is less focused on positioning or identity and more on conversions.

Take MailChimp’s H1 on their homepage as an example. There is a hint of brand in the notion that you’re turning emails into something “more” but it’s too direct, overt, and linear to produce any real sentiment or association level impact.



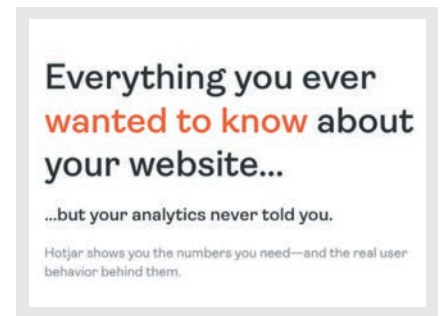
The main goal of the copy is clearly to assist in getting users to click on the “Start Free Trial” button beneath the initial copy.

Some sites aim to have their copy strongly target a highly leverageable pain point.

SaaS platform Hotjar’s above the fold home page content would be a good example of this.

The company knows users are feeling in the dark about what is truly happening

on their site from an analytics point of view. They know there is a deep-seated desire to really understand the state of their site’s user behavior and interactions with the site and they know traditional analytics leave you feeling unsatisfied. Which is why they twist that knife from the get-go.



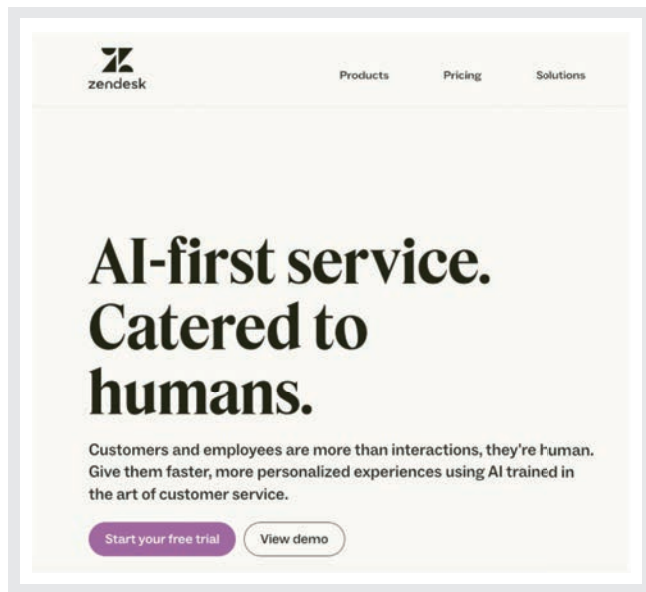
Such instances in my mind inch closer to bonafide emotive branding due to the intrinsic overlap between USPs and brand positioning. Still, it doesn’t quite get there. The copy never gets to the level of offering enough latent substance for there to be subconscious connection of any real kind.

Which is why tools like HotJar are still looked at like a utility by their users and a brand.

Returning to Zendesk and we start to get a glimpse of what balancing performance-led and brand-led web copy looks like.

There’s the obvious push for AI that every company from here to Mars is pushing (which is an entire conversation for a different time) but that cliché is actually used to create some “meaning” on the Zendesk website.

The second half of the page’s H1 takes the AI focus and gives it some direction with the phrase “catered to humans.” But this really just a set up for the body text below the header.



“Customers and employees are more than interactions, they’re human.” That is far more “meaty” and emotive than most content you will see on the web (especially for a SaaS platform, who are notoriously horrible at this).

What Zendesk is doing here is connecting the idea of using their software with the concept of “caring” - specifically, caring for other human beings.

You don’t use Zendesk to make your customer support efficient, you use it because you care about humans. That concept, simple as it is, opens a slew of emotional doors and connective pathways for users to identify with the brand and develop deeply rooted associations to the brand.

If B2B brands want to get ahead of the curve, they would do well to insert emotive language into their most covered conversion corners, the above the fold section of their home pages. Is it a risk? No risk it, no biscuit.

The demand for connectivity will always reign supreme

Existential needs cannot be easily extinguished. The craving we have for depth and for resonance at the emotional level is infinite. The demand for this within the B2B space is not new. What is new is our acknowledgement of it. It took a bubbling over effect, a change across the entire web ecosystem to make this happen.

Brand marketers run the risk of continuing to be behind the trend here. Instead of looking at emotive marketing within B2B as now being “safe” look at it as confirmation to what I think we all knew to be true this entire time: Depth resonates no matter the context. B2C or B2B, depth and genuine emotional connection resonates. So instead inching along towards wider adoption of emotive marketing within B2B, run with it and get ahead of the curve.

Existential needs cannot be easily extinguished. The craving we have for depth and for resonance at the emotional level is infinite.

The evolution of B2B buyer behavior: How brands can adapt to new decision journeys

by **Nadia Benaissa** | Global Head of Marketing, Paymentology, UAE

Changes in B2B buying behavior driven by digital transformation, multi-stakeholder decision-making, and the increasing importance of trust.

Navigating the new B2B decision journeys

The world of B2B buying is evolving at an unprecedented pace. Gone are the days of cold calls, glossy brochures, and hard-sell pitches. Today's B2B buyers are informed, empowered, and expect experiences that rival the convenience and personalisation of consumer shopping. For brands, this shift presents both a challenge and an opportunity. The key question is: How can you adapt? Drawing on my experience as a fintech marketer, here are three strategies to help you succeed in this new landscape.

B2B buyers are experts: Don't sell - Educate

In the past, sales teams controlled the flow of information, acting as gatekeepers to product knowledge. Today, that dynamic has changed dramatically. Modern B2B buyers are experts in their fields, equipped with detailed research and sophisticated tools. They don't want to be sold to - they want to be guided.

To meet this demand, brands must embrace

a knowledge-first approach. Don't just sell - educate. Offer resources that empower buyers to make informed decisions: white papers, insightful articles, data-driven webinars, and comprehensive self-service platforms. These tools should go beyond generic content, offering specific, relevant insights tailored to their unique business needs.

Think of your role as less of a salesperson and more of an advisor - or even a journalist. High-quality, relevant content does more than guide buyers - it earns their trust and positions your brand as a partner rather than a vendor.

Moreover, this approach aligns with a broader business strategy: the shift towards first-party data ownership. By creating valuable content that encourages engagement, you can build a robust database while supporting the buyer's journey. With advancements in data analytics, you can now track, refine, and personalise that journey with unprecedented precision, ensuring your efforts deliver maximum impact.

Simplify the brand: Focus on outcomes, not complexity

In a fintech environment, simplicity is the secret to standing out. Buyers aren't looking to decode technical jargon or

wade through a maze of features, they're focused on outcomes. They want to see, clearly and quickly, how your technology will solve their challenges and deliver tangible results. The reality is, people don't want to think about the mechanics; they want to experience the value.

Simplifying your brand is about more than just streamlining your messaging; it's about designing every interaction, be it your website, product demo, or sales conversation, with clarity and ease at its core. Highlight how your solution delivers faster payments, sharper data insights, or seamless integration, and let the technology speak for itself. When you remove unnecessary complexity, you don't just make your brand more accessible, you instill confidence, showing buyers that you understand their priorities and can deliver results without the hassle. In a landscape as competitive as fintech, simplicity isn't just smart, it's transformative.

B2B buyers behave more like consumers

The lines between B2B and B2C buyer expectations are blurring. The convenience, personalisation, and immediacy of consumer experiences have set a new benchmark. Today's B2B buyers expect:

- Seamless interfaces that simplify their journey
- Personalised recommendations tailored to their unique challenges
- Instant answers across multiple digital touchpoints

Research shows that B2B buyers engage with up to 10 different channels during their purchasing journey. Traditional tactics like generic email campaigns or cookie-cutter sales pitches are no longer effective. Instead, personalisation is essential.

Leverage AI to deliver tailored interactions at every stage of the buyer's journey - from content recommendations to virtual demos. However, while AI offers scale and efficiency, it's vital to ensure that your messaging retains authenticity. It's easy to sound robotic or overly polished, but buyers value a brand's unique voice and perspective.

Consistency and authenticity are non-negotiable. Whether you're training a chatbot, crafting campaigns, or creating long-form content, your messaging must reflect your brand's identity and values. A consistent voice builds recognition, while authenticity strengthens relationships, enabling your brand to stand out in a crowded digital marketplace.

Trust wins the deal

If education and personalisation provide the foundation, trust is the keystone. In a marketplace saturated with options, trust is often the deciding factor for buyers.

Today's B2B buyers are skeptical of traditional marketing claims. Instead, they rely on the voices of their peers, client reviews, detailed case studies, and testimonials carry far more weight than any sales pitch. Investing in customer experience is no longer optional; it's essential. Satisfied clients who advocate for your brand are your most valuable assets, as their unfiltered feedback builds credibility in ways that traditional marketing cannot replicate.

Trust isn't just about testimonials. In complex buying journeys with multiple stakeholders, trust extends to how well you address diverse priorities:

- Finance executives care about ROI and cost efficiency
- IT leaders focus on security, scalability, and integration
- Marketing heads prioritise customer experience and differentiation

Tailored messaging is crucial. By addressing the unique concerns of each stakeholder, you demonstrate an understanding of their specific needs, building confidence across the decision-making committee. This level of personalisation not only strengthens trust but also accelerates the decision-making process in your favour.

The road ahead: Authenticity and consistency are everything

Adapting to shifts in B2B buyer behaviour isn't about chasing every trend or adopting the latest technology. It's about going back to basics: building genuine relationships, delivering consistent value, and staying true to your brand's unique strengths.

This transformation takes time. Brands that succeed in this new B2B landscape are

those willing to play the long game. Education, personalisation, and trust aren't just strategies, they're mindsets. The goal isn't to meet every expectation flawlessly, but to consistently show up authentically, building meaningful relationships that drive long-term growth.

In a world where buyers are informed, behave like consumers, and demand trust, the brands that thrive will be those that genuinely put their customers first. While the journey may be challenging, the rewards, deeper relationships, stronger loyalty, and sustainable growth are well worth the effort.

Beyond selling – Building partnerships

The strength of your brand is often the deciding factor in a crowded marketplace. Buyers are inundated with options, but they'll choose the brand that resonates most with their needs, values, and aspirations. Today's B2B decision journeys demand more than transactional relationships. Buyers expect experiences that educate, connect, and inspire trust. By embracing this reality and adapting your approach, your brand can navigate and thrive in the evolving B2B landscape.



Your brand is what other people say about you
when you're not in the room.

- Jeff Bezos -





THE EVOLUTION
OF CONSUMER
EXPECTATIONS



The experience economy: Stop selling products, start creating journeys

by **Siham Malek** | Managing Director and Partner - Integrate (Kantar), Morocco

The shift from product-centric to experience-centric marketing, focusing on how brands can design engaging customer journeys that resonate with modern consumers.

Here's the reality: 80% of people prioritize experiences over possessions (Kantar). It's not about the stuff anymore - it's about the stories, the moments, the memories. In the experience economy, what you sell is just a prop. The real value? How you make people feel.

The old rules of marketing are fading. If you're still focused on product features, price, or convenience, you're playing the wrong game. People aren't just buying what you're offering - they're buying how it fits into their lives, how it makes them feel. And if you're not creating that, you're already behind.

It's not about the product, it's the journey you create

Here's a secret: Your product isn't the most important thing you sell. In today's marketplace, it's the experience surrounding it that matters. A great product? That's just table stakes. The magic happens in how you guide your customers through their journey with your brand.

They're not just buying shoes. They're buying the feeling they get when they wear them for the first time, the unboxing moment, the story they'll tell their friends. If you're only selling products, you're missing out on the real value. You need to create experiences that people will remember and share.

Four ways to build a journey that sticks

Personalization isn't a feature - It's expected

Your customers don't want to be treated like everyone else. They want you to know them. They expect you to anticipate their needs. This isn't a "nice-to-have" anymore - it's mandatory.

Netflix doesn't just throw content at you; they curate it specifically for you. They know what you'll enjoy before you do. That's not just streaming - it's a personalized experience that builds loyalty. In fact, 80% of content watched on Netflix comes from recommendations, and this high level of personalization keeps subscribers engaged.

Then there's *Glossier*. They didn't just build a beauty brand; they built a community

where customers feel like they're part of the creative process. Their Instagram account became a hub for customer feedback, making customers feel personally involved in product development. It's this kind of involvement that turns customers into lifelong advocates. When customers feel like co-creators, they're no longer passive consumers - they're deeply invested in your brand.

Use data not just to segment but to create individual-level experiences. Tools like AI-driven recommendation engines and real-time personalization can help you deliver what feels like one-on-one service, even to millions of customers.

Omnichannel isn't a trend -

It's how you win

Your customers don't think in "channels." They just want a smooth, consistent experience, no matter where they interact with your brand. Whether it's online, in-store, or on an app, it should all feel like one cohesive journey.

Nike has nailed this. Their app syncs with their stores, letting customers reserve shoes, try them on in-store, and check out with a tap. It's not just about selling shoes - it's about creating a seamless lifestyle experience. Customers can even personalize their shoes through

NikeiD and pick them up at the nearest store. This is not just convenient - it gives customers a sense of ownership and connection to the brand.

And *Warby Parker* turned buying glasses into an interactive, fun experience with their home try-on kits. It's not just about frames - it's about making the process easy, enjoyable, and memorable. By blending online and offline experiences, Warby Parker removes the friction traditionally associated with purchasing eyewear.

Focus on creating a unified experience where customers can start their journey in one place and continue seamlessly across different touchpoints. Whether they're shopping on Instagram, your website, or in-store, the experience should feel consistent and personalized.

Emotional connection:

Your competitive edge

People don't buy with logic; they buy with emotion. They don't just purchase products - they invest in how those products make them feel. If you can connect emotionally, you'll stand out in a crowded market.

Apple isn't just selling tech. They're selling creativity, identity, and belonging. When someone buys an Apple product, they're joining a global community of innovators. That emotional connection is what keeps customers coming back. The excitement of the Apple launch event is part of this emotional connection - the anticipation, the reveal, the sense of being part of something special. The brand isn't selling phones or laptops; they're selling a piece of the future.

Airbnb taps into emotional connection in a different way. They're not just selling accommodation; they're selling the experience of feeling at home anywhere in the world. Every aspect of

their brand speaks to connection, adventure, and a sense of belonging. Staying in an Airbnb feels personal - it's an invitation to be part of someone's story.

Use storytelling to build emotional connections. Show your customers that they're part of a bigger narrative. Make them feel that by choosing your brand, they're buying into a lifestyle, a value system, or an identity.

Authenticity isn't optional - It's essential

Customers can tell when you're faking it. In a world where brands are constantly trying to grab attention, authenticity stands out. If you're not being real, your customers will see right through you.

Patagonia doesn't just talk about sustainability - they live it. From encouraging customers to repair old products to donating profits for environmental causes, they're not just selling jackets - they're selling trust. Patagonia's famous "Don't Buy This Jacket" ad was the ultimate statement of their values. It wasn't just a marketing stunt; it was a reflection of their deeply held commitment to reduce environmental impact.

The rise of the conscious consumer means that brands must do more than just market values - they must live them. Consumers, especially Millennials and Gen Z, are looking for brands that reflect their personal beliefs and ethics.

Don't just say you're authentic - prove it. Show customers that your brand stands for something. Whether it's through transparency in your supply chain, environmental initiatives, or genuine social impact efforts, be clear about your values and back them up with action.

Mapping the journey: From stranger to evangelist

How do you take someone from being a curious observer to becoming a raving fan? It's all about the journey.

Awareness: Your brand doesn't just appear - it tells a story that resonates with people's values. It's about creating a moment that feels like discovery. Think of how Tesla uses social media and owner testimonials to highlight not just their cars but the mission behind them - sustainability and innovation.

Engagement: Once they're intrigued, you need to engage. This isn't about pushing sales - it's about creating value, giving them something they want to be part of. Brands like Red Bull are masters at engagement - through extreme sports, cultural events, and social media, they engage their audience in experiences far beyond energy drinks.

Purchase: The buying process should feel effortless. Make it easy. Make it enjoyable. Don't create friction - create flow. Think about Amazon's one-click purchase system or Apple's streamlined, in-store checkout experience.

Post-Purchase: This is where most brands stop. Big mistake. After the purchase is when the relationship begins. Surprise them, thank them, and keep the connection alive. Zappos is known for delivering surprise upgrades to customers, creating joy long after the sale.

Advocacy: Turn your customers into storytellers. Give them reasons to share their experience. Create a community they're proud to be part of. Think about Spotify's Wrapped campaign - each year, users eagerly share personalized insights into their music listening, essentially becoming brand ambassadors.

Technology: The power of connection, not complexity

Technology isn't just a tool - it's the key to making connections that matter. But it's not about the latest gadget. It's about using tech to make the customer's experience richer, more engaging, and more personal.

Sephora uses augmented reality to let customers try on makeup virtually. It's not just about convenience - it's about making the experience fun and engaging. AR bridges the gap between online and offline shopping, offering a highly personalized interaction.

And AI isn't about replacing human interaction - it's about anticipating what customers need before they even know they need it. Brands like Amazon use AI-driven product recommendations, while Spotify uses it to curate playlists that feel uniquely tailored to each user.

Global scale, local touch

The experience economy may be global, but it needs to feel personal and local. What works in London won't necessarily work in Tokyo. The brands that win are those that can make their experiences feel relevant, no matter where their customers are.

In Japan, brands like Muji offer deep levels of service that tap into the cultural emphasis on respect and hospitality. In Africa, mobile technology has reshaped how brands interact with consumers, using SMS and mobile payments to reach customers in rural areas. And in Europe, sustainability is more than a preference - it's a requirement. Brands that don't show real commitment to sustainability are irrelevant.

What you need to do

Here's your roadmap to thrive in the

experience economy:

Map the customer journey:

Break down every step of the experience. Where do customers get stuck? Where do they feel joy? Fix what's broken, amplify what works.

Go all in on personalization:

Data isn't just about numbers - it's about understanding your customers better than they understand themselves. Use it to create experiences that make them feel known and valued.

Create a community, not just a brand:

People want to belong. Don't just sell to them - invite them into something bigger. Build a tribe that sticks around.

Use technology to wow them:

AI, AR, VR - these aren't just buzzwords. They're ways to make experiences magical. Use them to create unforgettable moments that customers will share.

The takeaway

The experience economy isn't the future - it's now. People don't want more products. They want experiences that matter. If you're still focused on selling, you're playing an outdated game.

Stop selling. Start building journeys. Create experiences that people will talk about, that they'll share, that they'll love. Because in the experience economy, the brands that create unforgettable experiences will be the ones that win.

The new consumer:

How ethical choices are reshaping the shopping experience

by **Jad Hindy** | SVP Marketing - Expo City Dubai, UAE

How consumers are increasingly prioritizing ethical considerations in their purchasing decisions, and how brands can align their values with those of their customers.

Imagine walking into a store ten years ago, scanning the shelves for your favorite snack. You'd probably grab whatever was cheapest or most convenient, maybe a big brand that everyone trusted, and that was it - shopping done in minutes.

Fast forward to today, and everything's changed. Now, the same decision-making process looks more like a moral dilemma. You're not just buying chips; you're picking a side. Is the packaging recyclable? Are the ingredients sourced sustainably? Did the workers get a fair wage? Suddenly, your quick grocery run has turned into an ethical interrogation.

Welcome to the world of the new consumer, where buying decisions are no longer just about price or convenience. Today's shopper cares about more than what's in the cart - they care about what the cart represents. These shoppers are prioritizing ethical considerations and reshaping the way companies do business.

In this era of conscientious consumption, brands are scrambling to align their values with those of their customers.

But how did we get here, and what does it mean for both consumers and companies? Let's dive into the fascinating evolution of the new consumer.

The evolution of ethical consumption

The concept of ethical consumption didn't pop up overnight. If we had to trace its roots, we'd go back to a time when environmentalists and social activists started whispering about fair trade and sustainable farming practices. At first, it was a niche concern - something you'd find in a co-op grocery store full of granola, hemp clothing, and bike commuters. But like any good trend, it started spreading.

Then, the world started feeling the effects of climate change, and social media gave consumers the ability to call out shady corporate practices. Suddenly, buying cheap fast fashion or picking up produce that had traveled thousands of miles felt... wrong. Shoppers wanted more. They wanted to buy from companies that cared

about people and the planet.

This shift in mindset wasn't limited to food or fashion. Consumers began questioning everything: the gadgets in their hands, the coffee in their mugs, the sneakers on their feet. They demanded transparency, ethical sourcing, and corporate responsibility. And as consumer demand grew louder, brands had no choice but to listen.

The new consumer: Values over price

The "new consumer" doesn't just shop - they make statements with their wallets. Gone are the days when the best deal was the one that saved you a few bucks. Today, people are looking for brands that speak to their values, even if it means paying a little more. According to research, more than 70% of consumers are willing to pay a premium for products that come from brands committed to sustainability and social justice.

Let's be clear: it's not that people don't care about price anymore. We still love a good deal. But if that deal comes with a side of environmental destruction or worker exploitation, today's shoppers are hitting

the brakes. After all, what's the point of saving money on a product if it's going to cost the planet or the dignity of another human being?

Take fashion as an example. Ten years ago, fast fashion reigned supreme - cheap clothes churned out in weeks and destined to be tossed after a few wears. But today, the fashion industry is facing a reckoning. Consumers are calling out brands that exploit low-wage labor or pollute waterways with toxic dyes.

The rise of slow fashion - think high-quality, sustainably made garments that are designed to last - has disrupted the industry. Brands like Patagonia, which actively campaigns for environmental causes, have built a cult following by putting ethics at the forefront.

The role of information and social media

So why the sudden shift? It's not like we just woke up one day and decided to be more conscientious. A big part of the change is due to the power of information - and we have the internet to thank for that. In the past, consumers didn't have access to the details of a brand's supply chain. But today, a quick Google search or a viral X thread can expose unethical practices in a heartbeat.

Remember when a popular chocolate company was called out for sourcing cocoa from child labor farms? Or when tech giants were accused of using conflict minerals? These scandals don't just blow over anymore - they stick. And consumers are making it clear: they won't support companies that can't get their act together.

Social media, especially, has supercharged this shift. Brands are held accountable in real-time, and word spreads fast. One misstep, and a company can be trending on TikTok for all the wrong reasons. But there's a flip side: brands that get it right

earn the trust - and dollars - of a loyal, ethically minded audience.

The shift from niche to mainstream

For a long time, ethical consumption was seen as a niche market - a passion project for tree-huggers and social activists. But now, it's mainstream, it's everywhere.

You can't walk down a supermarket aisle without seeing labels like "organic", "fair trade", "sustainably sourced" or "B-Corp certified". Even fast food chains are jumping on the bandwagon, offering plant-based options and pledging to reduce their carbon footprints.

From the food industry to electronics, every sector is feeling the pressure to meet the demands of the ethical consumer. But here's where it gets tricky: while some brands genuinely care about ethics, others are just playing the game.

Enter **Greenwashing** - the act of pretending to be eco-friendly without actually doing much. It's like slapping a "sustainable" label on a product without changing anything about how it's made. Unfortunately, some companies use this tactic to ride the wave of ethical consumption without doing the work. And consumers? They're not buying it. Literally.

The power of certifications and labels

That's why certifications and labels matter so much. They offer proof - tangible evidence that a company is walking the ethical walk, not just talking the talk. And consumers are paying attention to them more than ever.

Take **Fair Trade** certification, for instance. When you buy fair trade coffee, you're not just buying a bag of beans. You're supporting farmers who are paid fairly and ensuring that they work in safe conditions. Then there's **USDA Organic**, which guarantees that your food was grown without harmful pesticides or synthetic fertilizers. Or **B Corp Certification**, which means a company meets rigorous social and environmental standards.

For the new consumer, these labels are like badges of honor. They signal that a product aligns with their values, allowing them to shop with confidence and peace of mind.

What ethical consumers really want

So, what exactly are ethical consumers looking for? Well, it's not just about one thing - it's a whole list of criteria. Here are the biggies:

1. Sustainability: Ethical consumers are hyper-aware of environmental issues like climate change, deforestation, and plastic pollution. They want products that are made sustainably, with minimal environmental impact.

2. Fair labor practices: No one wants to support a brand that exploits workers. Fair wages, safe working conditions, and non-exploitative labor practices are non-negotiable for these consumers.

3. Animal welfare: Whether it's cruelty-free cosmetics or vegan leather shoes, a growing

number of shoppers are concerned about animal welfare. Products tested on animals? Hard pass.

4. Transparency: Ethical consumers demand transparency. They want to know where their products come from, how they're made, and who makes them.

5. Social justice: Brands that take a stand on social issues, like gender equality and racial justice, often earn the loyalty of ethical consumers.

How brands can win over ethical consumers

Aligning with the values of ethical consumers is no easy task, but for brands that get it right, the rewards are huge. The key is authenticity. Consumers can smell fake from a mile away, so brands must truly commit to ethical practices - not just use them as marketing gimmicks.

1. Be transparent: Open up about your supply chain, labor practices, and environmental impact. The more transparent a brand is, the more trustworthy it becomes.

2. Embrace Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR): Build CSR initiatives that go beyond token gestures. Support causes that align with your brand values and invest in long-term change.

3. Innovate sustainably: Innovation doesn't have to come at the cost of the planet. Brands should focus on creating products that are sustainable by design, from the materials used to the packaging they come in.

4. Support social and environmental movements: Brands that champion social causes - whether it's climate action, racial justice, or gender equality - are more likely to attract ethically minded consumers. Just make sure it's not performative.

5. Fight greenwashing: Companies should avoid greenwashing at all costs. It erodes trust and can lead to public backlash. Instead, commit to real, measurable improvements in sustainability and ethics.

The future of ethical consumption

So, what's next? Ethical consumption isn't just a passing trend - it's the future. The new consumer is here to stay, and they're only getting more vocal.

As technology advances and transparency becomes even more accessible, brands will have no choice but to continue evolving. Those that resist the shift may find themselves left behind, while those that embrace it could earn the loyalty of a new generation of conscientious consumers.

In the end, this isn't just about changing the way we shop. It's about changing the way we think about the world. It's about realizing that every purchase is an opportunity to make a statement, to support the kind of world we want to live in. And that? That's something worth buying into.

Consumers can smell fake from a mile away, so brands must truly commit to ethical practices - not just use them as marketing gimmicks.

Meet the team

State of the Brand



Anand Sankara Narayanan

Curator

Anand began his career in an agency, then co-founded a brand consultancy, and now serves as CMO at Finance House - UAE's largest non-banking financial institution. Drawing on expertise in brand strategy, creative thinking, and consumer behavior, he specializes in brand marketing and transformation. Anand also sits on the jury screening council for the MMA Smarties X Global + North America marketing awards.



Diya Susan Pallikal

Creative Director

Diya is an independent, award-winning creative professional who thrives on tackling creative challenges and visually articulating a brand's strategy and messaging. Proficient in both creative endeavors and athletic pursuits, she brings a unique blend of skills to her work. Diya has contributed to some of the foremost brands, defining their identities and creatively expressing their brand strategies. Her work has been featured in 'Lürzer's Archive - 200 Best Packaging in the World' and showcased on 'Ads of the World' and 'Packaging of the World'.



Prashanth Sridhar

Creative Strategist

Prashanth is a Co-founder at Adwants - an independent creative agency. He collaborates with top-tier brands to craft communication strategies and offer business advisory to enhance their brand presence. As a neuro-science enthusiast, he combines entrepreneurial flair, sharp business acumen, and a deep psychological understanding of marketing dynamics. He champions a human-centric approach to advertising, ensuring strategies resonate authentically with audiences.



Edduchuy

Illustrator & Visual Artist

Phan Ed Chuy is a Vietnam-based graphic designer and illustrator. He completed a Bachelor's in Graphic Design from the Ho Chi Minh University of Fine Arts. As a lecturer at DAS - Design Anthropology School, he merges creativity with cultural insights. Skilled in Adobe Illustrator, branding, and digital painting, he crafts compelling visuals.

State *of the* Brand ²⁰²⁵

This digest serves as a guide for businesses navigating the path forward.

Featuring insights from global marketing veterans and brand experts, this collection provides a comprehensive view of the evolving branding landscape.

State of the Brand 2025 empowers brand builders to distinguish themselves and connect with their target audience.