

THE

TRENDS & MORE EDITION 2025

PULSE

Inside

Mayur Hola's

Playbook for
Building Brands

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TRENDS & MORE EDITION 2025



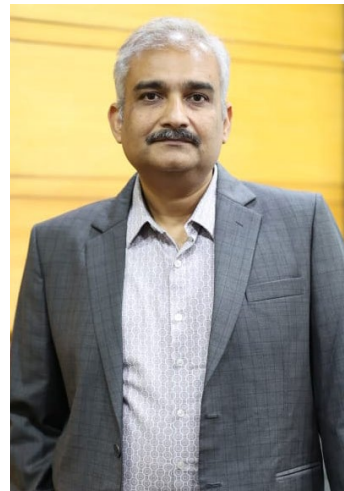
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THE PULSE

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ground, many brands are shedding their corporate façade, choosing to connect with consumers in a more unfiltered, human way.

At the core of it all, one truth remains unchanged—there's no singular formula for engagement, but keeping the consumer at the center of every marketing move is the only way forward.

This edition features a cover story on Mayur Hola, VP-Brand at Swiggy, who believes a brand should act as a person. Throughout his career, he has built brands that have seamlessly become a part of our daily lives, to the extent that we can't imagine a world without them.

Beyond the cover, this issue brings together insights from advertisers and marketers on how they're navigating the ever-evolving landscape. From trend forecasts to strategies shaping the industry, these pages aim to serve as a guidebook for marketers planning the year ahead.

Here's to staying ahead of the curve!

As we move deeper into 2025, the advertising and marketing landscape continues to evolve at an unprecedented pace. The year has already witnessed brands making their mark, whether through high-stakes cricket tournaments like the Champions Trophy, WPL, and the much-anticipated IPL, or by tapping into occasions and cultural moments like Valentine's Day and Holi.

Yet, this is only the beginning. The industry thrives on change, and in a world where consumer behavior is as dynamic as ever, no playbook remains valid for too long. With the rise of hyper-personalization, brands are finding innovative ways to engage audiences, some striking the perfect chord, while others struggle to adapt. While traditional advertising still holds its

Mrinil Mathur
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Aabhinna Khare

*Chief Marketing and Digital Officer
at Bajaj Capital*

Aabhinna Khare is the Chief Marketing and Digital Officer at Bajaj Capital, leading the brand's marketing and digital transformation efforts. He joined the company in 2019 as Vice President of Growth, where he played a key role in driving strategic expansion and business development. With nearly two decades of experience, Khare's career began as a manager at Speciality Chemicals. Eager to refine his expertise, he pursued further education at the Mudra Institute of Communications (MICA) before joining Zee Media Corporation, marking the beginning of his journey in the media and marketing landscape.



Abhishek Jain

*Business Director India,
Virtue Asia*

Abhishek Jain is a seasoned leader in the advertising and marketing industry, bringing nearly two decades of expertise in brand strategy and community engagement. As the Director of Virtue Worldwide, he plays a pivotal role in shaping impactful, integrated campaigns that elevate brand positioning across diverse markets. With a deep understanding of consumer behavior and storytelling, Jain has successfully crafted and executed marketing strategies. Before joining Virtue Worldwide, he spent over five years at L&K Saatchi & Saatchi as Senior Vice President, driving innovative brand solutions and strategic growth.



Ashit Kukian

*CEO, Music Broadcast Limited
(RadioCity)*

Ashit Kukian is the CEO of Radio City, one of India's well-known radio networks. With over three decades of experience in media and entertainment, he has contributed to the growth of the industry in various leadership roles. Before joining Radio City, he was with Times Network, where he played a role in launching Zoom. At Radio City, he is focused on strengthening the brand's digital presence and expanding its offerings for both listeners and advertisers.



Junaid Shaikh

*Managing Director of RoshanSpace
Brandcom*

Junaid Shaikh is the Managing Director of RoshanSpace Brandcom, a boutique agency specialising in Out-of-Home (OOH) and Digital Out-of-Home (DOOH) advertising, based in Mumbai, India. Founded by Abdul Kader Shaikh, the agency has carved a niche for itself in the advertising landscape. Since taking the helm in 2007, Junaid has played a pivotal role in shaping RoshanSpace Brandcom into a prominent player in the OOH industry. One of his most notable achievements includes leading the development of Bandra Focal, Asia's largest billboard, launched during the pandemic.



Mazhar Gadiwala

*Vice President
-Sports at Togglehead*

Mazhar Gadiwala is the Vice President - Sports at Togglehead, where he leads the sports vertical, helping clients achieve their business goals through innovative digital and marketing strategies. With a deep passion for sports and a strong background in marketing, he plays a key role in shaping brand narratives and driving engagement in the industry. In addition to his role at Togglehead, Mazhar serves as the Head of Marketing at FieldFlicks, leveraging his expertise to amplify the brand's presence. He is also the Founder and Co-Host of All About Sports, a podcast dedicated to in-depth discussions on the world of sports,



Mehak Chawla

*Strategic Marketing,
VDO.AI*

Mehak Chawla currently leads Strategic Marketing at VDO.AI and Z1 Tech. Before stepping into this role, she advanced through positions as a Manager and Associate in Strategic Marketing at both companies. Beyond her expertise in marketing, Chawla has also contributed as a Mentor at topmate.io and served as a Content & PR Strategist at BrandBurp Digital. Her leadership journey includes roles as the Marketing & Strategy Head at NutrioBox and



Prathap Suthan

Managing Partner & Chief Creative Officer (CCO) of BangInTheMiddle

Prathap Suthan is the Managing Partner and Chief Creative Officer (CCO) of BangInTheMiddle, with nearly four decades of experience in the advertising and marketing industry. A visionary creative leader, he has been the driving force behind several iconic campaigns like Incredible India.

Suthan began his journey in advertising at DDB Mudra in 1987, where he spent eight formative years. An experience he credits as the foundation of his creative expertise. He later took on the role of National Creative Director (NCD) at Grey Global Group, leading groundbreaking work for nearly 11 years before moving on to serve as NCD at Cheil Worldwide.



Shradha Agarwal

Co-founder and Global CEO of Grapes

Shradha Agarwal is the Co-founder and Global CEO of Grapes, a digital marketing agency. With over 15 years of experience, she has worked across various roles, gaining a strong understanding of the digital landscape. Agarwal began her career in 2008 as a Digital Affiliation Manager at Zoom Entertainment Television, where she recognized the growing potential of digital media. In 2015, she partnered with Himanshu Arya to co-found Grapes (formerly Grapes Digital), building it into a well-established name in the digital marketing industry.



Shubham Singhal

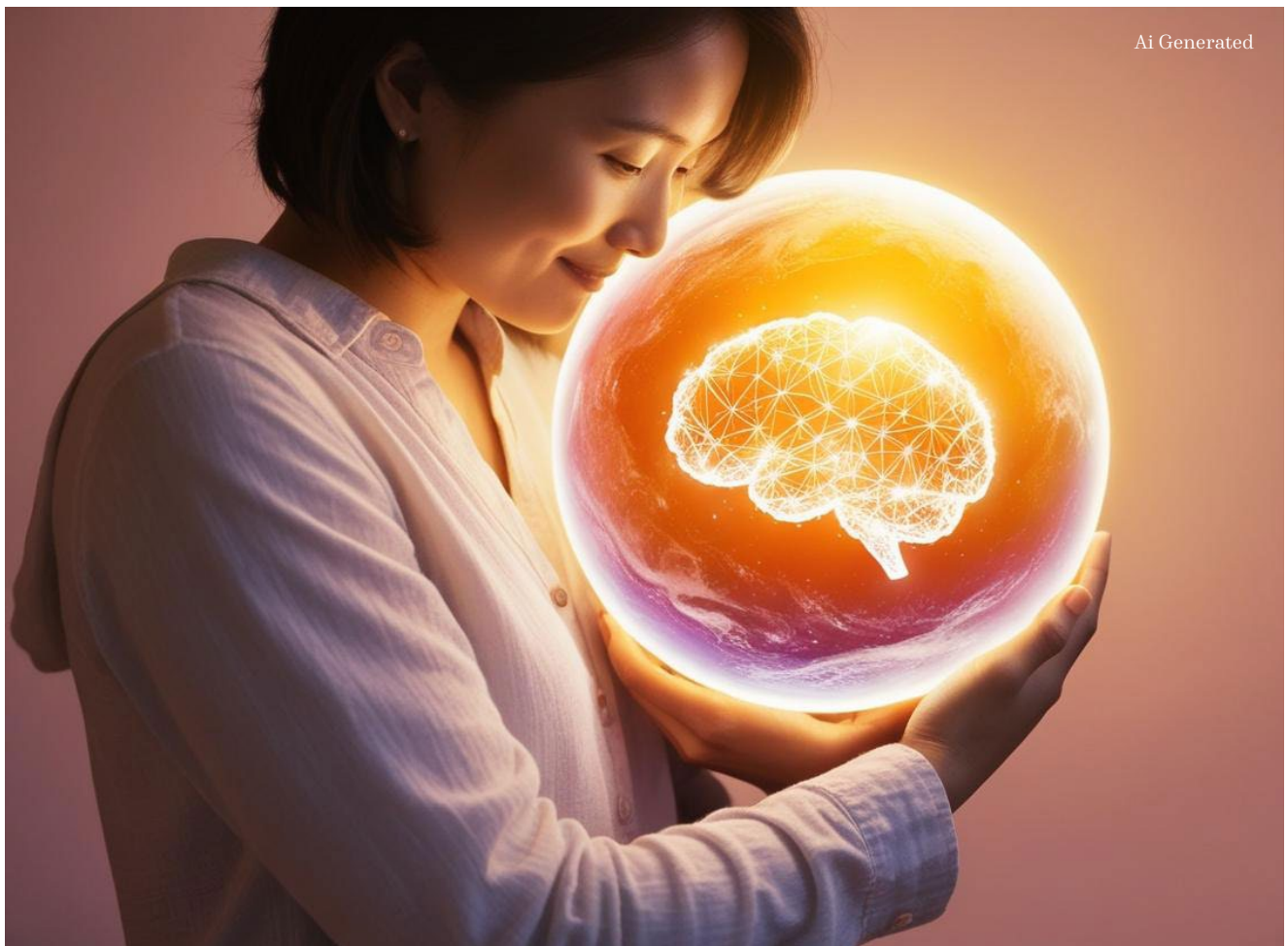
Co-Founder and CEO of Dot Media

Shubham Singhal is the Co-Founder and CEO of Dot Media, a dynamic digital marketing and 360 talent management agency. In 2020, amidst the challenges of the lockdown, Shubham embarked on his first independent venture in Kanpur. Today, Dot Media boasts a community of 150+ exclusive creators and a portfolio of over 250 clients. Before stepping into entrepreneurship, Shubham honed his expertise as a Sales Manager at Swiggy, equipping him with the strategic insights to navigate and innovate in the ever-evolving digital landscape.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO TRULY BELIEVE IN YOUR IDEAS?

It is truly an art to know when to fight harder for your idea, one that could probably change advertising as we know it, and when to let go. Some experts have learnt to balance this, knowing when to fight and when to let go. If you are also struggling to not take rejection personally and understand the difference between being passionate and pushy, this article by Karuna Sharma, Associate Editor, is for you.

AI Generated



How does an idea become an ad? It starts with an internal evaluation process. After a few stages of critical thinking, brainstorming, and self-doubt, the confidence beams through, and the idea(s) is passionately pitched to the managers. Who then picks it apart and at times maybe makes you question your profession or refines it further to present it to their client. A deck is made, and a few ideas shortlisted are pitched. These ideas ranging from the bold and risky to the tried and tested are pitched, keeping in mind the brief, budget, and timeframe. With the client's keen understanding of the brand, the idea travels ahead in the form of a storyboard presentation at first and then sees the light of the day as ad directors lend it their expertise and media agencies step in to distribute it to the masses.

In this long and complex process, which is reduced to a single paragraph here, many ideas don't see the light of the day. With this, I raise another question. How do you really decide what's a good idea? After all, isn't it all subjective? Sometimes, it takes years of experience to master this art of recognising a good idea—intuition—that goes on to shape a brand's identity. At times, your experience fails you. Isn't that the reason why we are seeing rejected ideas getting stolen nowadays without due credit or compensation? I am not naming names, but we all know who I am talking about here and have made mental notes.

I poke at experience here but now even new-age brands with young leaders are coming up with breakthrough campaigns that speak to the audiences. It is them who have proven to the industry that the most bizarre ideas—which often make you question, 'What were they thinking?' but secretly envy their foresight—can work wonders.

Well, I digress. Pardon me, I am merely a thinker. Coming to the real reason I am doing this story, for which I decided to speak to creative minds to understand the fine art of pitching ideas, is all about hearing your gut. I don't know about you, but my gut, she is often late.

Experienced folks from the industry helped me understand the humane struggle behind the business of ideas. They answered how far should creative heads go to convince a client that their idea deserves to become an ad when it's time to let go, and how to cope with the loss of a great (well, at least that you thought it was) idea.

"Great ideas change lives," says Binaifer Dulani, Founding Partner & Creative at Talented. With her wit and intelligence, Dulani has proven to the industry that it takes boldness to be creative. Her ideas have not only changed her life, which has seen a challenger agency winning awards at such a young age but also contributed to brands becoming a powerhouse. Her most recent work includes Nature Shapes Britannia.

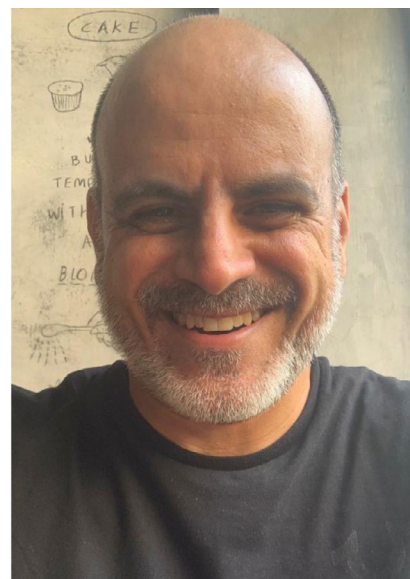


Binaifer Dulani

*Founding Partner & Creative
at Talented*

For her, this intricate journey of idea exchange begins with a sharp understanding of the problem and an unrelenting drive to see the idea come alive.

Ashish Khazanchi, Managing Partner & CCO at Enormous Brands also offers similar advice from his wealth of experience and emphasises the need for preparedness. "The first step is to avoid going underprepared," he notes.



Ashish Khazanchi

*Managing Partner & CCO
at Enormous Brands*

"If there's recognition of a great idea, the preparation to ensure it sees the light of day should begin early. Creative professionals and agencies need to be genuinely interested in the client's business. When you deeply understand their business, audience, and the problems your idea solves, you essentially become the client yourself," elaborates Khazanchi.

Vibhor Yadav, Regional Creative Officer - North & South and Founding Partner, tgthr, highlights the power of personal conviction,

saying, “If you don’t believe in the idea, no one else will.” He advises creatives to cocoon their ideas in strategy and fight passionately but strategically to bring them to life.



Vibhor Yadav

Co-founder of Tghtr

HOW FAR SHOULD ONE GO?

Great ideas take shape when you treat them as both your own and the brand’s extension. It requires nurturing too.

When I asked Binaifer how far one should go to pitch their idea, she offered an anecdote that delivered a puncher. She said, “We may have charged in, uninvited, to a board meeting to convince stakeholders to go with what we really believed in; overshared our personal lives, made an after-movie to talk about our process, and even got our parents to pitch on our behalf.”

This was in pursuit of their founding motive, which meant building a place where ideas are proud to be born because they won’t let them down. And not budging until they get the best budgets, the best timeline, and the best partners to bring it to life.

“We owe our ideas the conviction and resilience - they are nothing without it,” adds Dulani.

As you climb up the ladder, there are added responsibilities that involve shaping how you think and how your team thinks. When an idea is presented to Vibhor Yadav, he pushes his team members to do another round of reflection with a simple, hard-hitting question. “Before someone presents an idea to me, I always ask, “How’s it?” If they say anything less than ‘It’s great’, I tell them they won’t be able to sell it until they themselves are convinced that it is amazing.”

Yadav further reminds how advertising is persuasion, and persuasion is rooted in conviction.

Imagine if Surf Excel hadn’t approved Daag Achhe Hain, the advertising industry would have been deprived of a game-changing idea that reshaped its course and fueled the growth of purpose-driven advertising in the country. And we are all grateful that the agency backed it with the conviction and resilience that it deserved.

Once your gut tells you that it is in fact, a great idea, I asked Yadav how far should creative professionals go to pitch an idea?

“All the way. And then some more, like a dog chasing a tennis ball,” asserts Yadav.

The next step, Khazanchi says, is to make the idea as vivid as possible for the client.

“You need to present it with as much clarity and craft as possible - whether it’s through visuals, storytelling, or explaining the impact on their business. If you can do this effectively, the client is more likely to trust your idea,” shares Khazanchi.

The final step, he recommends, is rallying behind the idea as an agency with the right people in the room to gain the client’s confidence.

“When done correctly, these steps should help the idea get approved,” he adds.

KNOWING WHEN TO REVIVE A REJECTED IDEA

Dulani admits she has and goes on to mention how the industry considers it to be one of the most shameful things.

“At Talented, we believe the more you live with an idea, the better it gets. It’s like a consomme, only hours of simmering can give it real depth. Some of our best work, like MakeMyTrip’s Asli Star, broke the Indian internet because we waited till we found the best conditions for it - the client, the budgets, and the partners,” divulges Dulani.

This is what you get when ideas are treated as their own entities, treated with respect and passion.

ALOE-ING THE STING OF REJECTION

When all the steps mentioned above are followed, and the idea is still rejected, it is time to now embrace it.

While we were discussing this, Yadav said something that made me, admittedly, frown. He said, “I always say, for creative people, work is not a 9-to-5 job.”

“Before anyone raises their brows at that, let me clarify what I mean. A creative mind doesn’t shut down after working hours. Creatives grasp things, observe people, and keep their eyes, ears, and senses active beyond 9 to 5 because that’s where they get the fodder for their ideas. Everything they craft, create, or write comes from their own experiences or observations gathered throughout life. So, whenever they put an idea on the table, it’s essentially a part of them. That’s why it is natural for rejection and criticism to sting,” he adds.

It is bound to sting when you treat an idea as an extension of your being. Rejection, therefore, feels like heartbreak. Yadav has also pitched ideas in a meeting with conviction, waiting for applause but returning with a 5-min rejection—experienced seeing four days of work reduced to five minutes.

“The truth is, 95% of the ideas a creative person comes up with get rejected. It’s part of the game. We eat rejection for breakfast on a daily basis, don’t we,” questions Yadav, matter-of-factly.

But with experience, he and other creative heads I spoke to, have gotten better at handling rejection by accepting that it is a part of the parcel.

“If you didn’t feel the sting of rejection, you wouldn’t feel the elation when your idea is accepted, executed, and loved by peers and consumers alike,” reminds Khazanchi.

He goes on to quote Michael Jordan, who had said, “I’ve failed 99 times, but I’ve gotten up 100 times.” Khazanchi said that in this business of rejection and validation, the key is to learn from rejection, get better, and come back stronger with an even more compelling idea.

YOU ARE NOT THAT IMPORTANT

Well, let me rephrase that so it stings a little less. Your idea is more important than you. When it is rejected, it is hard to separate yourself from your work.

Dulani articulates this struggle with clarity, saying, “When you choose to be Creative, you’ve also chosen a life where you’ll keep putting yourself out there - specifically to judgment. Resistance is futile. Moments that are particularly hard can be those where you’ve put yourself out, and it’s met with a ‘cringe’ or ‘it looks or sounds pedestrian.’ It can almost feel like that’s a direct attack. But it’s often not that. You need to remind yourself that this very natural feeling is actually a little narcissistic because you’re making it about yourself.”

Yadav also has a similar take on this subject. “Over time, I’ve learned that rejection isn’t about you; it’s about the fit between the idea, the client, and the moment. It’s inevitable in the game we are playing.”

He shared how he has gotten better at dealing with rejection, which truly felt like a page out of his diary.

“What also helps me separate the two is a simple thought and a personal ritual. The thought: no single piece of work defines me. The ritual: having a creative outlet that isn’t monetised. I write poems, pen down random thoughts; little creative pursuits that keep me grounded and sane. It reminds me that creativity isn’t confined to deadlines or approvals, it’s part of who I am,” shares Yadav.

As you ponder upon the pearls of wisdom that these creative heads had to offer, I will leave you with one last piece of advice that Khazanchi shared.

“Rejection is part of the game, but it’s also what makes success so rewarding. Aim to reduce rejections by being thorough in your preparation and presentation. And when rejection happens, use it as motivation to create something even better.”

ADVERTISING PULLED HER IN, AND SHE STAYED

Hephzibah Pathak's career is a story of unexpected turns. She didn't plan for advertising, but it found her and shaped her, and now, she's shaping its future with the same fearless spirit she always has. In this conversation with Pranali Tawte of Social Samosa, she reflects on her leadership and the road ahead.



Hephzibah Pathak

Executive Chairperson, India, Ogilvy

When Hephzibah Pathak walked into Ogilvy Chennai in 1997, advertising wasn't the plan. She had her sights set on the US, and this was supposed to be a stepping stone, just a way to gain experience for that hard-to-get visa. But fate had other plans. Advertising pulled her in, and she stayed.

Fast-forward nearly three decades, and Hephzibah is now the first woman to lead Ogilvy in India since its inception 95 years ago. On 1 January 2024, she took over as Executive Chairperson, stepping into the role after Piyush Pandey left day-to-day operations. Her legacy is heavy, but she carries it with the same quiet strength and fierce clarity that have defined her career.

She has been the strategic mind behind brands including Vi, Unilever and Cadbury, shaping their narratives, and their impact. And now she is doing the same for Brand Ogilvy, driving its growth, transformation and future.

When she moved from Ogilvy Chennai to Mumbai in 1999, her colleagues gave her a parting gift unlike any other. Hephzi's Song, a track written, composed and sung just for her. It wasn't just a farewell. It was a tribute to the impact she had left behind. It is these moments, these people and this culture that have shaped her leadership style, one that is distinctly hers, distinctly feminine and distinctly fearless.

As Hephzibah charts the course for Ogilvy's future, she does so with the same passion and conviction that have defined her career. In this interview, she opens up about what lies ahead.

EDITED EXCERPTS:

As the first woman to lead Ogilvy India in its 95-year history, how has this milestone shaped your leadership journey over the past year?

I have grown in the system, so this is like a natural next step. I lead like a woman, just the way I have done for decades.

How was 2024 for Ogilvy in terms of growth and new business? Could you share some of the agency's key highlights, including any notable new client wins or major campaigns that stood out this year?

We would have added a mid-size national agency to our business this year. We have won many new businesses from clients like Google, Adani, Indriya Jewellery from Birla, Sun Pharmaceuticals, and Kurl-on to name a few. Grateful to have got many more assignments from many of our existing clients like Unilever, TCCC, ITC, Pernod, Tata Motors, Nestle, etc. This is the biggest tribute to the enduring partnership with clients. Given that we are a large agency with a presence in so many categories, it is very satisfying

that our width and spread across categories is further growing.

We are driving a culture of innovation. Our transformation agenda continues to accelerate and scale, with our Content Force, Ogilvy One, our digital experience business, driving one to one engagement and experiential activation. Our creative tech force has scaled doubled! We are doing more and more work for global brands across the world. We recently launched a Luxury and Beauty Hub that will focus on and build more specialisation and expertise in this area.

On the creative front, it continues to be exciting and very satisfying. Recently, we put up a very strong performance at the APAC Effies in Singapore, winning more awards than our previous year for our work across clients and brands like Cadbury, 5 Star, Dove, Taj Tea, Sprite, Thums Up, ITC Vi. We won big at the recent LIA awards as well, clearly signalling our work on big brands is making a big impact!

This year, our work across brands Dove Mothermonials, Coke Pujo, Titan Eye Plus, Clinic Plus, and Lakme Rouge Bloom, to name a few, has created a great impact. Much of this work was designed for social influence and commerce, helping us create content that counts and wins in culture.

82.5, our second agency, has got fabulous new leadership, and they have won a spate of terrific businesses like MG Motors, De Beers, Vand adilal, to name a few. We have significantly strengthened our senior strategic, creative, account management and transformative talent. This year has been particularly delightful as we have had a lot of Boomerangs - great talent coming back to the agency!

Globally, Ogilvy worked on some great campaigns last year. Are

there any specific campaigns from around the world that you wish Ogilvy India had worked on?

The 'Turn Your Back' campaign for Dove was brilliant and a great example of how a brand can be a pivot for social and cultural direction. I also loved the Vaseline Trans(ition) Body Lotion idea. The agency went much beyond communication with a thorough and empathetic understanding of the consumer and developed a whole new product offering that endeared the brand to the world.

Looking at the creative ad industry in 2024, do you think it pushed the envelope in terms of boldness and innovation? As we begin 2025, do you foresee Ogilvy taking more creative risks to stand out in an increasingly competitive market?

Winning consumer attention and retention is even more critical in today's attention-deficit world, and we need to continuously disrupt and innovate. Advertising has matured and we need new codes to continuously break through across platforms.

Can you further elaborate on how Ogilvy is positioning itself this year, and what unique strengths or USPs do you want it to be known for?

We want to be the best creative partner and platform for growth for clients and continue to drive immense impact for them by innovating and operating at the intersection of people and capabilities. We call it Borderless Creativity. Creativity is oxygen for growth, and we will continue to build our edge on creativity and innovation. We are creating bespoke teams to deliver exceptional E2E work and solutions across the marketing mix to make a real difference to our client's business.

What steps is Ogilvy taking to nurture, develop, and retain talent while equipping them for the dynamic challenges ahead?

We are continuously looking at best-in-class talent, are building the next-level bench strength and attracting the best across functions to future proof the company. Our next level of leaders are in place. Our training programs, based on Dialogue, Development and Diversity, ensure we design need-based programs that we deliver through a combination of local, regional & WPP programs to strengthen and upskill our talent to make them future fit.

As part of our ongoing transformation agenda, we run organisation-wide programs, like the one on our AI-driven Marketing Operating System, WPP Open. DEI, one of our key imperatives, has led to the development of long-standing leadership programs like JUNO & 30 for 30 for women, and it will be a continued focus area for us. We are continuously looking at great talent across diverse sources and unconventional backgrounds. For example, we have made significant hires from non-advertising backgrounds as we have scaled our Creative Technology function to deliver innovative solutions to our clients.

Given the influence of AI on the industry, are there new roles or specific skill sets that Ogilvy is incorporating into its workforce to stay ahead of technological advancements and industry trends?

We are investing and scaling our creative technologists & technologists who are driving innovation and creative solutions. And helping build solutions to drive product innovations, enhance the creative process, create operational efficiency and enable content production at scale. We also leverage WPP Open, which is our intelligent AI-driven marketing operating system. Ogilvy One, our digital experience business, has a sizable Martech team of 1500 people across Coimbatore, Hyderabad, Bengaluru & Gurgaon. Teams who are certified in multiple CX platforms to design and deliver unique brand experiences.

What is the one leadership quality you believe will be most crucial for success in 2025, and how are you nurturing it within yourself and your team?

I think fluidity is crucial. We are advancing through an age of complexity and rapid change. So, the ability to pivot when needed, being open to change, continuous improvement and innovation, and more experimentation, whether in business models, resource planning or solutions, is key. Learning agility is also a very important part of this. And being hungry to drive growth, innovation and hustling to make things happen.

Finally, what are some of the major goals you've set for Ogilvy in 2025, both in terms of business growth and agency culture?

We want to be the best partners for the growth of our clients by driving impact at the intersections of culture, platforms, technology, commerce & experience. Talent is the lifeblood of our agency, and we will disproportionately focus on our people. We will build and strengthen our culture of Pervasive Creativity and Divine Discontent so we continue to do Red Hot work that makes our clients thrive. We are a very client-focused agency, and we continuously push to create better work and solutions to help our clients win in the marketplace. We will drive and scale our transformative capabilities and culture of innovation. And possibly add another mid-sized agency to our topline next year.

2025's Game-Changing Sports Marketing Insights to Score Big!

Mazhar Gadiwala, Vice President - Sports at Togglehead explores how innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability are set to reshape sports marketing in 2025, offering a glimpse into the trends that will redefine fan engagement and brand strategies.



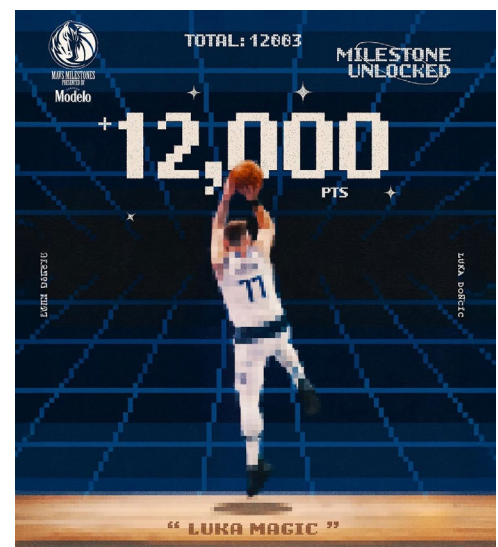
Mazhar Gadiwala

Vice President - Sports at Togglehead

With 2024 behind us and 2025 underway, now is the perfect time to reflect on the thrilling developments in sports marketing over the past year and anticipate what lies ahead. From breakthroughs in technology to shifts in how fans engage, the sports marketing world is evolving fast. Let's dive into some of the trends that are set to shake things up in the coming year.

1. AI-POWERED FAN ENGAGEMENT

Artificial intelligence has been a buzzword for a while, but 2025 will witness its deeper integration into sports marketing strategies. From chatbots offering personalised fan experiences to AI-driven insights for tailoring campaigns, the potential is vast.



For instance, the use of AI in analysing fan sentiment during major sporting events has helped teams like the Dallas Mavericks refine their social media content in real time. Expect to see more teams leveraging AI to create hyper-personalised fan interactions across platforms.

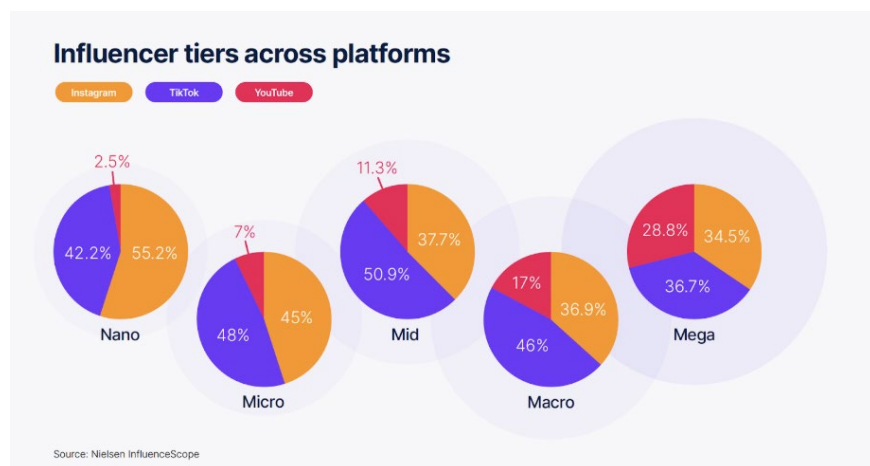
2. RISE OF MICRO-INFLUENCERS IN SPORTS

While celebrity athletes remain crucial to endorsements, micro-influencers with niche audiences are becoming equally valuable. These influencers, often grassroots sports enthusiasts or semi-pro players, resonate more authentically with specific demographics.

INFLUENCER TIER

Tier	Followers	Traits
Nano	1k-10k	High engagement and low cost; local connections
Micro	10k-15k	Niche content; low cost, uniform audience
Mid	50k-100	Strong brand partnerships, cost effective
Macro	100k-1M	Famous internet personalities; broad reach
Mega	>1M	Celebrities; high cost, vast reach

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Studies show that campaigns featuring micro-influencers generate up to 60% higher engagement compared to traditional celebrity endorsements. [\(Source: The Rise of Micro Influencers - New Target\)](#)

There is also a 25% underinvestment in content creator campaigns within advertiser marketing plans [\(Source: Unleashing the Power of Creator Content\)](#), which needs to be addressed. Brands targeting Gen Z and Millennials will double down on this approach to build authentic connections.

3. IMMERSIVE EXPERIENCES THROUGH AR AND VR

The line between reality and virtuality is blurring. Augmented and virtual reality technologies are no longer limited to gaming but have become tools to enhance sports fan experiences.



Imagine donning a VR headset to “sit” in the front row of a game from your living room. Companies like Meta are already piloting these experiences, and 2025 could make this an industry standard. Sports teams will likely collaborate with tech firms to make virtual attendance as thrilling as being in the stadium.

4. THE SUSTAINABILITY PLAY

Sustainability is no longer a nice-to-have—it’s a must. Fans increasingly expect their favourite teams and brands to champion eco-friendly practices.

In 2024, [Adidas set a benchmark by launching its first carbon-neutral football boots](#), and initiatives like these are expected to proliferate. Expect teams, leagues, and sponsors to weave sustainability narratives into their marketing campaigns to connect with eco-conscious fans.

5. EXPLORING THE UNCHARTED TERRITORY OF WOMEN'S SPORTS

Women's sports are finally getting the attention they deserve. 2024 witnessed the ICC Women's T20 World Cup achieving record-breaking viewership numbers, signalling the growing popularity of women's sports. Brands are finally waking up to this untapped potential.

In 2025, investments in women's sports will likely surge, not just in terms of sponsorships but also in digital storytelling that celebrates women athletes. Brands with inclusive marketing strategies will lead the charge in capitalising on this space, paving the way for greater visibility and engagement in women's sports.

6. DATA-DRIVEN CUSTOMISATION IN SPORTS SPONSORSHIPS

Brands are moving away from one-size-fits-all sponsorships to highly tailored collaborations based on robust data insights.

Take the example of [Formula 1's partnership with AWS](#), where real-time data enriches race day experiences and sponsorship activations. As analytics capabilities grow, we'll see even local leagues adopt data-driven approaches to attract and retain sponsors.

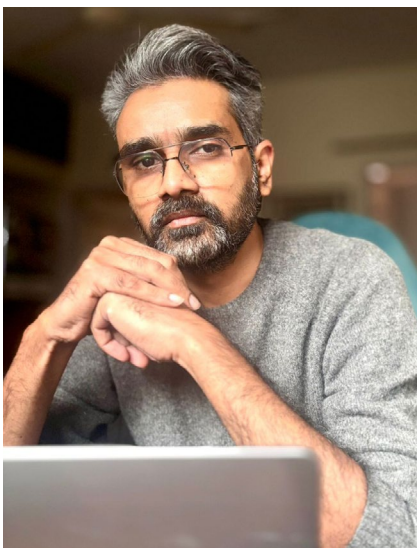
7. THE EXPANSION OF ESPORTS INTO THE MAINSTREAM

Esports' meteoric rise continues, with traditional sports entities investing in gaming ventures. This trend will gather steam in 2025 as brands look to capture the attention of digitally native audiences. Expect esports to play an even larger role in bridging traditional sports and gaming cultures.

As we head into 2025, the world of sports marketing is brimming with opportunities driven by innovation, inclusivity, and sustainability. For agencies and brands, staying flexible and in tune with what fans want will be more important than ever. At Togglehead, we're excited to be part of this journey, shaping the future one campaign at a time.

Cookies Should Not Cost The Cake

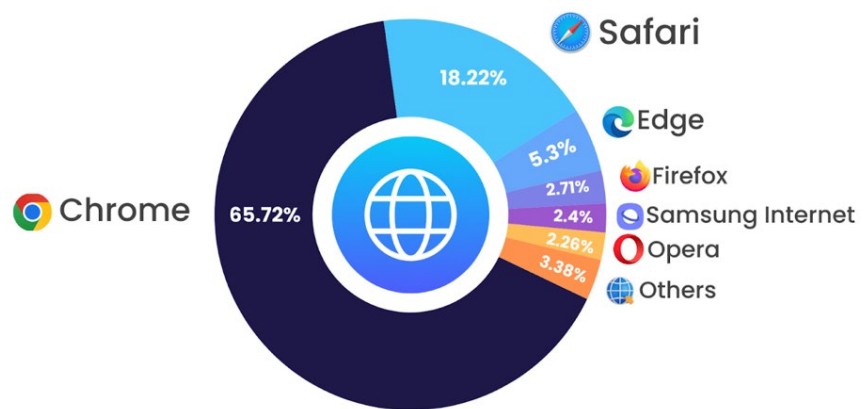
Abhishek Jain, Business Director India, Virtue Asia examines Google's postponed plan to eliminate third-party cookies, emphasising the need for advertisers to adapt to privacy-conscious strategies while leveraging the transitional period to innovate and build trust through first-party data.



Abhishek Jain

Business Director India, Virtue Asia

In 2020, Google's announcement to completely eliminate third-party cookies until 2024 gave sleepless nights to all the marketers. We had just mastered performance marketing and even the most traditional advertisers waking up to change. The advertising ecosystem has long relied on third-party cookies for tracking and targeting different cohorts. Advertisers and publishers have built their entire business models around cookies, and the transition to a cookieless world posed significant technical and financial challenges.



Google's announcement to phase out third-party cookies in Chrome, the leading browser worldwide with almost 66% of the market share, reflected a growing push for greater online privacy. Amid increased pressure from regulators, tech companies, and privacy advocates, Google aimed to empower users with more control over their data.

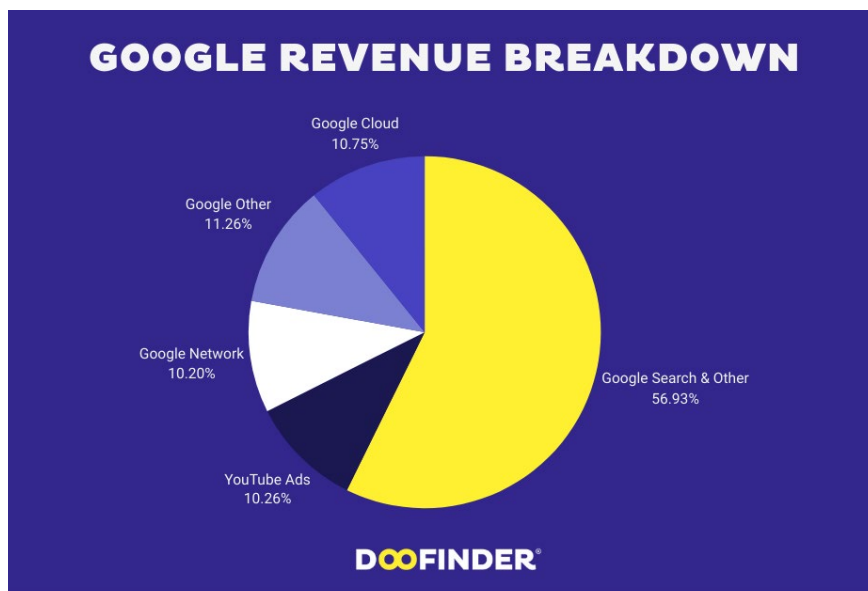
SOURCE: DEMANDSAGE

We all, as individuals, were advocating for more digital privacy and most of us facing the rampant finance scams in the country understood the importance of personal data, but some of us are marketers and these cookies are our lifeline.

Even for Google, advertising revenue forms a significant part of overall profitability. Google's Q2 2024 revenue was \$84.74 billion, and more than 60% of it is dependent on third-party cookies.

SOURCE: DOOFINDER

Hence, to avoid a backlash from the publishers, advertisers and other small businesses Google also announced their endeavour to provide users with more control over their data while ensuring advertisers of the efficacy to reach their target audiences through alternative models like Google's Privacy Sandbox. Sandbox was supposed to replace third-party cookies with privacy-preserving



technologies focusing on grouping users based on shared interests rather than tracking individual browsing behaviour. The goal was to allow advertisers to target relevant audiences while minimising the collection and sharing of personal user data.

However, the Privacy Sandbox initiative, while well-intentioned, faced significant pushback from the digital advertising industry. Many stakeholders, including advertisers and publishers, raised concerns about the potential impact on advertising effectiveness. Smaller businesses were particularly apprehensive, fearing that the reduced granularity of audience data could hinder their ability to compete effectively with larger companies possessing more robust first-party data.

Developing an effective alternative that balances user privacy with the needs of advertisers has proven to be a challenging endeavour. Google recognised the need for more time to develop and test Privacy Sandbox technologies, leading to Google's recent announcement to scrap the plan to kill third-party cookies.

Let us also be warned that this could be a temporary relief as the global scrutiny of all the tech giants on the collection and usage of data is still on, and Google will have to align with privacy standards, regulatory expectations, and user demands for control over their data.

Google's (Android) primary competition, Apple's iOS with its App Tracking Transparency (ATT), is already considered a significant step in curbing online tracking in their ecosystem, positioning Apple as a privacy-first company and a safer alternative to privacy-seeking consumers.

FUTURE IS STRIKING THE RIGHT BALANCE

The reversal of the cookie elimination plan should not be viewed as a permanent reprieve for advertisers. It's more accurately characterised as a strategic delay. This delay provides advertisers with crucial breathing room to reassess their digital strategies without the immediate pressure to hastily adopt new technologies that may prove less effective or difficult to implement at scale.

Focus on more first-party data, which the consumer willingly provides to your website, apps and other digitally owned properties. This data can include email sign-ups, purchase history, loyalty program participation, and browsing behaviour on an advertiser's site.

Brands need to interact more with consumers and build trust to gain information rather than depend on wily methods. Rethink at investments in customer relationship management (CRM) systems, loyalty programs, and personalised marketing strategies.

Privacy concerns will continue to grow; the digital advertising industry must enhance transparency regarding data collection practices and empower consumers with greater control over their data usage. Advertisers will need to adapt to more stringent consumer consent frameworks and prioritise privacy-respecting advertising solutions.

Companies that rely predominantly on programmatic advertising may need to explore alternative monetisation strategies, such as contextual advertising, which targets users based on the content of a page rather than personal data.

In 2025, we can continue to rely on third-party cookies, but we must also consider this as a limited period of transition, while challenging, it presents an opportunity to cultivate a more secure and privacy-conscious digital advertising landscape. However, achieving this will necessitate substantial innovation and a willingness to adapt from all players within the ecosystem.

Stepping into the Agentic Era of AI with Chaaya Baradhwaaj

Digital advertising has evolved from its days of mere search engine marketing to infusing AI in campaign creation. BC Web Wise's Chaaya Baradhwaaj discusses this evolution with Shamita Islur, sharing the rise of emerging social media platforms in 2025, privacy-first strategies, and BC Web Wise's journey.



Chaaya Baradhwaaj

Founder - MD, BC Web Wise

For over two decades, Chaaya Baradhwaaj, Founder - MD, BC Web Wise, has been steering her agency through some of the most defining moments in the digital landscape. From the early days of search engine marketing to the rise of social media and now the integration of artificial intelligence (AI), she has not only adapted to these changes but has consistently stayed ahead, helping brands navigate uncharted waters.

As we step into the 'Agentic Era' of AI, Baradhwaaj believes the future of advertising will be defined by a fusion of technology, creativity, and strategy. Reflecting on 2024, she highlights how AI was implemented in content creation for digital advertising and platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts emerged as key players for consumer engagement and storytelling. AI's role in 2025 will extend beyond content creation to optimising campaigns in real-time, predicting consumer behaviours, and seamlessly integrating predictive analytics in digital advertising.

Baradhwaaj envisions 2025 as a year of both opportunity and challenge. With emerging platforms

like Bluesky and Threads rapidly gaining traction, she believes that brands will need to rethink their strategies to connect with audiences in more authentic and impactful ways. Given that the Digital Personal Data Protection (DPDP) Act will soon come to fruition, she also emphasises the importance of balancing personalisation with ethical data practices to ensure privacy concerns are addressed. Looking back at BC Web Wise's journey, Baradhwaaj shares how agility, a client-first approach, and leveraging AI-driven insights have contributed to delivering impactful results.

Her vision for the future of advertising isn't just about leveraging new tools but about reshaping how brands build relationships with their audiences in a world where technology and trust go hand in hand.

In this interview, Chaaya Baradhwaaj discusses the evolution of digital advertising, the rise of emerging platforms in 2025, ad-free social media, models the importance of sustainability and privacy-first strategies, and how BC Web Wise is leveraging agility, data, and technology to drive impactful, consumer-centric campaigns.

EDITED EXCERPTS:

Chaaya, can you look back at 2024 and share some defining digital advertising trends?

2024 was a pivotal year for digital advertising, marked by the growing influence of AI, the dominance of short-form video, and the increasing integration of e-commerce into social media. Platforms like Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts solidified their roles as advertising powerhouses, while conversational AI and voice search gained momentum, especially in linguistically diverse markets like India. Sustainability also emerged as a key focus, with brands aligning campaigns with eco-conscious values.

Looking ahead, which emerging technologies or trends do you believe will shape the industry in 2025, and how should brands prepare for them?

In 2025, AI will dominate the advertising landscape, entering its “Agentic Era” with capabilities like real-time video generation, campaign optimisation, and predictive analytics. Search behaviours will evolve with the rise of platforms like Bluesky, Threads, Perplexity, and ChatGPT. Brands need to rethink their strategies, optimising for conversational search and exploring ad opportunities on emerging platforms. Personalisation will remain critical, but the challenge will be balancing it with ethical data practices and privacy-first solutions.

In the last two decades, BC Web Wise has adapted to many changes in the digital advertising landscape. What unique strategies have allowed it to remain independent and relevant?

As BC Web Wise celebrates 25 years of innovation in 2025, we take pride in our ability to adapt to the ever-changing digital advertising landscape. Over the years, we’ve remained independent and relevant by prioritising agility, creativity, and client-centricity. In 2024, we focused on hyper-localised campaigns, leveraging AI-driven tools for real-time insights, and embedding sustainability into digital strategies. Our legacy of delivering impactful solutions reflects our commitment to staying ahead of the curve while driving meaningful outcomes for our clients.

What were the primary areas of focus for the agency in 2024? How is the agency positioning itself in 2025?

Our primary focus areas in 2024 included optimising e-commerce strategies, integrating conversational AI into campaigns, and enhancing omnichannel customer experiences. Looking ahead, we are doubling down on leveraging AI for predictive marketing, exploring emerging platforms like Bluesky, and expanding our expertise in creating full-funnel strategies that seamlessly connect ATL and digital.

How is BC Web Wise leveraging data and technology to enhance marketing strategies and outcomes for your clients? Could you share examples?

At BC Web Wise, data and technology are at the core of delivering impactful results for our clients. In the education sector, our AI-driven strategies for franchise lead gener-

ation have consistently delivered high-quality leads, enabling sustainable growth for our clients. We also leverage AI capabilities across platforms to optimise campaign performance, ensuring precision targeting and efficient ad spends.

Internally, our use of AI for insights has transformed how we approach pitches, allowing us to craft data-backed strategies that resonate with client goals. Additionally, by integrating AI into our production processes, we’ve significantly reduced turnaround times across services, enabling faster execution without compromising quality.

These advancements reflect our commitment to using technology not just for efficiency but to drive measurable, meaningful outcomes for our clients.

As social media platforms increasingly experiment with ad-free subscription models, how will this change the way advertisers and marketers connect with their audiences?

Ad-free subscription models on platforms like Instagram or X (formerly Twitter) challenge advertisers to rethink engagement strategies. Brands must prioritise authentic content and invest in influencer collaborations and native integrations to maintain audience connections. Quality content and community-driven campaigns will become critical.

With users exploring alternatives to X, platforms like Bluesky and Threads have emerged as popular choices. Interestingly, Bluesky appears to be gaining momentum faster than Threads. What factors could be driving this trend, and how can Indian advertisers effectively tap into the opportunities these platforms offer?

Bluesky's momentum compared to Threads could stem from its decentralised model, appealing to privacy-conscious users. Indian advertisers can tap into these platforms by crafting hyper-local, value-driven content that resonates with niche audiences while staying agile to test and refine approaches as these platforms evolve.

Google's decision to retain third-party cookies has extended the timeline for a cookieless digital ecosystem. How has this impacted the industry's readiness for privacy-first solutions and how are they addressing privacy concerns while maintaining effectiveness?

Google's decision to delay the removal of third-party cookies has provided the industry with more time to prepare. However, the urgency for privacy-first strategies remains. Brands are increasingly investing in first-party data collection, contextual targeting, and transparent data practices to balance effectiveness with consumer trust.

In 2025, it has been said that Artificial intelligence will reach its Agentic Era. Given that we have seen tech giants launching models and tools to craft videos, optimise campaigns and offer predictive analytics, where do you see AI having the most transformative impact?

AI's potential in 2025 extends across multiple domains, from automating content production to optimising campaigns at scale. The most transformative impact lies in its ability to craft deeply personalised experiences, predict consumer behaviour, and enable marketers to adjust strategies in real-time for maximum ROI.

Personalisation is a critical factor in advertising, yet consumer concerns about data privacy are growing. How do you balance delivering tailored experiences while ensuring ethical data usage?

Delivering tailored experiences while addressing privacy concerns requires a delicate balance. At BC Web Wise, we prioritise first-party data collection and transparency, ensuring consumers understand how their data is used. Ethical data usage fosters trust and enables brands to deliver meaningful, personalised experiences.

As the lines blur between traditional ATL advertising and digital campaigns, how can brands and agencies create cohesive, full-funnel marketing strategies that deliver measurable impact?

As the lines between ATL and digital blur, cohesive, full-funnel strategies are essential. Brands need to align messaging across channels, leveraging digital for precision targeting and ATL for broad awareness. Measurement frameworks that capture the impact of integrated campaigns will drive success.

What key marketing lessons are you taking forward in 2025?

The biggest takeaway from 2024 is the power of agility. The brands that thrived were those that adapted quickly to changing consumer behaviours, experimented with emerging platforms, and prioritised authenticity. Heading into 2025, these lessons remain critical for navigating a rapidly evolving digital landscape.

HOW CAN CREATIVITY SHINE IN 2025?

Was creativity in advertising stuck in a loop last year? Some say it was forgettable; others saw hidden sparks. In 2025, will brands play it safe or take bold creative leaps? Sneha Medda speaks to creative minds to discover narratives to help brands shine in the clutter.



Ai Generated

2 024 was a year of fleeting moments in advertising—campaigns came and went, but few left a lasting impression. While brands experimented with formats and messaging, much of the work struggled to break through

the noise. The industry found itself in a period of transition, navigating evolving consumer behaviours, AI's growing influence, and the challenge of standing out in an increasingly cluttered digital space.



Subhodh Chaubey

Creative Director, Infectious Advertising

For Subhodh Chaubey- Creative Director, Infectious Advertising, the year was largely ‘very average.’

He said, “While there were a few hits, not many ads managed to break through the clutter and strike a chord with audiences.” For Himanshu Arora, Co-Founder at Social Panga the year felt like a blur with work that didn’t quite leave a mark. “Conversations often revolved around topics indirectly tied to creativity, reflecting a period of transition and recalibration.”



Himanshu Arora

Co-Founder at Social Panga

As creative leaders look back on the past year, one thing is clear: 2024 was a time of recalibration, not reinvention. But with Holi the first big moment of 2025 around the corner and Cannes Lions on the horizon, the question remains: will this year break the mould, or will it be more of the same?



Surjo Dutt

CCO of dentsu Webchutney

Creativity isn’t just about trends; it’s about finding new ways to connect with people to tell stories that matter. And if, as Surjo Dutt, CCO of dentsu Webchutney, puts it, “There is no advertising without creativity,” then the industry has some catching up to do.

This year, the challenge isn’t just to be creative, it’s to redefine what creativity means in an era of shrinking attention spans, AI-generated content, and tighter budgets. Will brands take the leap and break the cycle, or will they continue playing it safe?

Industry leaders weigh in on the creative shifts set to shape advertising in 2025.

NOSTALGIA AS A DRIVING FORCE

In moments of uncertainty, nostalgia becomes a way of offering comfort by revisiting cherished memories. One study, based on the self-reported experiences of the participants, indicated that nostalgia is, by and large, 'a positively toned and self-relevant emotion that is often associated with the recall of experiences involving interactions with important others or of momentous life events.'

Last year, brands leaned heavily into nostalgia to forge deeper emotional connections. Beloved CID characters returned to screens this time selling makeup and toothpaste while iconic stars like Karisma Kapoor and Zeenat Aman made a striking comeback in advertising.

According to a research study, 86% of people report feeling a deeper connection with brands that appeal to nostalgic emotions, and 42.6% even experience a shift in perception.

Nostalgia is all set to continue to be a trend in the coming year as well.

Subhodh Chaubey says, "For 2025, I see a lot more nostalgia-triggering ads coming our way."

By giving consumers a sense of familiarity and warmth and evoking good memories, brands will have the perfect opportunity to connect with them better.

INFLUENCER MARKETING FOR THE WIN

The influencer marketing space in India is rapidly growing. By 2027, this fast-paced industry is expected to reach over 107 billion rupees.

Yet, in 2024, many felt the space lacked creativity. While social media engagement thrived, influencer content, particularly short-form, felt repetitive. "There was definitely creative fatigue. We saw brands focus on influencers, but not necessarily on fresh storytelling," said Subhodh Chaubey.

Surjo Dutt expected a lot more influencer collabs in the last year. "I expected a lot of interesting work with influencers. From big-ticket to nano influencers, I expected a lot more compelling work. While

the quantity was unsurprising, the overall lack of shiny pieces was surprising."

Last year, for the influencer space, brands did not focus on anything creative. Subhodh Chaubey felt a fatigue here. He said, "Social media engagement definitely thrived in 2024 - whether it was McDonald's 'As Featured In' campaign or Spotify's 'Wrapped'. Where it felt lacking was short form/influencer content where I definitely felt some creative fatigue."

However, 2025 is shaping up to be different. Brands are moving beyond sheer volume and shifting towards strategic, story-driven partnerships.

A good example is Swiggy Instamart's InstaFart activation, a collection of meme-inspired products packed with iconic internet references and hilarious gadgets. The brand tapped into viral culture, collaborating with internet sensations like Ganjhi Chudail and Chwency Girl, making it more than just another influencer-led campaign and making it into a cultural moment.



This year, Chaubey expects to see micro-influencers leading the charge in creativity, while Dutt anticipates a sharp spike in influencer marketing overall. If early trends are anything to go by, brands are finally moving beyond generic influencer collaborations and leaning into authentic, entertaining storytelling.

LOCALISATION & CULTURAL INTELLIGENCE

India's cultural diversity is a treasure trove of untapped opportunities for brands willing to step beyond the mainstream. A major shift in 2025 will be the embrace of hyper-localised advertising. With Gen Z and younger millennials valuing authenticity, brands will need to move beyond one-size-fits-all messaging.

Dutt says, "I expect a lot of brands going very 'Indian culture in' when it comes to big campaigns."

Take, for example, Wok Tok's Chinese par apne style se campaign. Using humour, the ad highlights how the Chinese community in India is very much Indianized, just

like the Chinese food we eat. Hence, the punchline, "Chinese, par apne style se." It is localised in a way that a relatively small group of people in the country would understand, but it still holds relevance.

Yadav says, "The ad isn't just selling noodles; it's making the audience smile and telling a story from the book of their lives. The music is fire. And above all, this ad demonstrates an important lesson: craft matters. Every element, every situation in this TVC is designed to resonate with the audience."

Understanding and adapting to cultural differences will gain momentum. Himanshu Arora believes there will be a rise in cultural intelligence (CI). "While AI can decode patterns and trends, it's CI that brings the emotional depth needed to truly connect with audiences," he added.

This means campaigns tailored to regional languages, hyper-local festivals, and community-driven storytelling. Brands that tap into micro-moments, those fleeting yet significant engagement opportunities, will gain importance.

CRAFTING A TRULY MEMORABLE AD IN '25

While trends will evolve, the fundamentals of great advertising remain unchanged. Experts agree that a truly memorable ad consists of the following:

A sharp societal insight: A message that taps into universal human emotions or cultural truths.

High-quality execution: Whether through storytelling, humour, or emotional depth, the craft is crucial.

An 'Oh Damn' moment: Ads that surprise you rather than just being nice.

Purpose-driven creativity: Consumers expect brands to walk the talk. Being 'authentic' isn't just about messaging; it's about delivering on promises.

If 2024 was a year of safe bets, 2025 should be the year of risk-taking. Brands that balance nostalgia and innovation, AI and human creativity, influencers and authentic storytelling will lead the pack.

SHARING THE PIECE OF THE PIE

Collaborations that evoke a sense of companionship are striking a chord with new-age brands. In this in-depth piece, Karuna Sharma explores how brands are moving beyond rivalry to collaborate with competitors, sharing a message of camaraderie. She also speaks with marketing gurus to uncover the ultimate question: to rival or not to rival?



What images come to mind when you think of competition? Perhaps a race where participants sprint aggressively toward the finish line. Or a tug of war, where one winner pulls the rope with full force, leading to the inevitable fall of the opponents. Another familiar picture might be that of climbing a ladder, where a lone participant reaches the top to claim the coveted trophy.

Now, let's shift the perspective. What emotions does collaboration evoke in your mind? Is it a handshake sealing a partnership? A lively conversation in a conference room? The satisfying moment of assembling a puzzle together? All hands joining in unity? These images carry a different weight—one of warmth, synergy, and shared success. Collaboration, unlike competition, sparks a feeling of collective achievement and mutual growth.

Of course, healthy competition has its merits, and we will get to that. But today, let's begin with a different narrative. Join me as we explore the advantages of adopting a collaborative approach in marketing, guided by insights from experts Naresh Gupta, N Chandramouli, Abhishek Shetty, Chandan Mendiratta, and Neeraj Kanitkar. Along the way, we'll also delve into the industries where rivalry remains an effective strategy.

SHARING THE LIMELIGHT

Surf vs Tide, McDonald's vs Burger King, Pepsi vs Coke, Apple vs Samsung—these iconic rivalries have long painted a picture of brands with their claws out, fighting tooth and nail for dominance. The narrative has always been that there's only so much room in the market, and the only way to rise is by bringing others down.

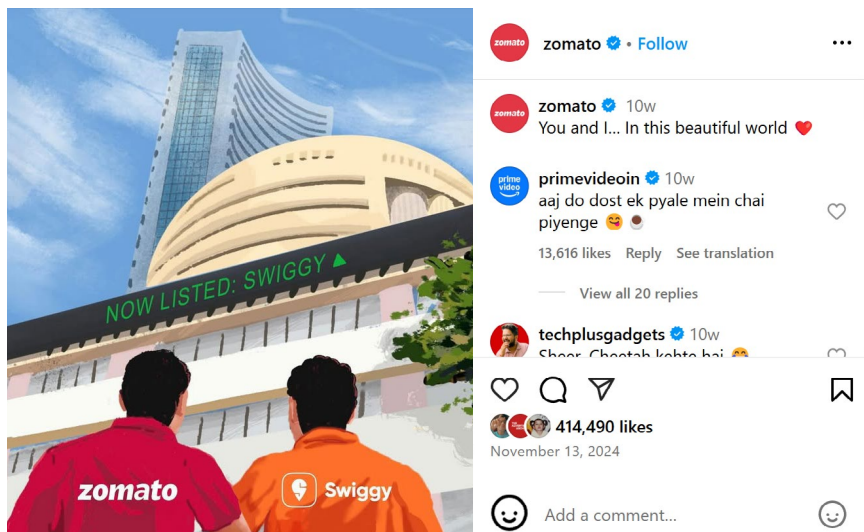


Co-founder & ECD, Fundamental

"There's just often a lot of very loud and toxic noise of disagreement, antagonism and animosity in the online world in general. Politics, sporting rivalries, and even film releases all have attendant shrillness. In such a scenario, warm, heartfelt advertising which fosters emotional connections automatically stands out. Not only stands out but even works as a balm to soothe the frayed nerves. What better for brands to be seen as that?" rhetorically asks Neeraj Kanitkar, Co-founder & ECD, Fundamental.

New-age brands want to be seen as a balm. By collaborating with other brands—even their rivals—they're proving there's another way. These young, dynamic brands are showing us that while they may compete for the same slice of the pie, they can still enjoy the journey, respect the rules of the game, and celebrate the winner at the end.

A recent example of this collaborative approach unfolded when Swiggy went public. Rather than feeling threatened, Zomato took a heartwarming route, choosing to celebrate its competitor's milestone. This gesture sparked an outpouring of positive comments, creating goodwill for both brands and generating invaluable free PR. While it was Swiggy's big day, Zomato's fresh approach also earned it a spot in the news cycle, proving that a touch of camaraderie can go a long way in marketing.



In this new era we're living in, it's no longer about Zepto vs Swiggy Instamart. The narrative has shifted to Zepto and Swiggy Instamart. Brands are collaborating rather than competing to amplify their messages.

So I asked these two Indian rival brands what drove them to adopt a collaborative approach. Three common words that popped in the conversation: authenticity, emotional connection, and inclusivity.



*Marketing Lead, Swiggy Instamart
& Pvt Brands*

"People no longer want brands that simply sell to them—they want brands that share their values, foster community, and create experiences that resonate emotionally," shares Abhishek Shetty, Marketing Lead, Swiggy Instamart & Pvt Brands.

“In a world that often feels fragmented, marketing built on camaraderie and connection offers something powerful: it helps brands go beyond transactions and become part of their consumers’ lives,” adds Shetty.



Chandan Mandiratta

Chief Brand and Culture Officer at Zepto

Chandan Mandiratta, Chief Brand and Culture Officer at Zepto shares a similar opinion. “This approach humanises brands, fostering loyalty and deeper connections.”

Even sworn rivals like Burger King and McDonald’s have occasionally set aside their fierce competition to embrace a collaborative approach. A standout example is Burger King’s A Day Without Whopper campaign, where it paused sales of its iconic Whopper for a day, encouraging customers to buy a Big Mac instead. The campaign supported McDonald’s initiative to donate proceeds to children with cancer.

Globally, such moments of togetherness are often seen around the holidays. Even Coke and Pepsi, long-standing rivals in the cola wars, have set aside their differences for a greater cause. The two soda giants had once united to support a worthy goal: helping veterans find jobs.



Collaborating in marketing doesn’t mean these brands care any less about their business goals. It’s just that they also want consumers to enjoy the experience, whether it’s watching their ads or interacting with the brand.

“At the heart of it all, advertising is competitive. You’re always trying to take somebody else’s market share, customers etc.,” reminds Kanitkar.

He elaborates, “Most times, we don’t need to call it out. Customers are smart enough to know that. They don’t like to be told that they’re being asked to make a pick.”

N Chandramouli, CEO of TRA, further emphasises how collaboration aligns with audience expectations: “Millennials and Gen Z audiences are particularly drawn to campaigns that emphasise shared



N Chandramouli

CEO of TRA

values and emotional resonance. Additionally, urban consumers with global mindsets often appreciate brands that promote unity and inclusivity.”

TO COLLAB OR NOT TO COLLAB

Going against the theme of this story, we are pitting two strategies of marketing, collaboration and rivalry, against each other.



Naresh Gupta

Founder & Managing Partner of Bang In The Middle

Naresh Gupta, Founder & Managing Partner of Bang In The Middle, sees no long-term benefits in taking a collaborative approach. He believes that it is like surfing; you keep riding the waves till they are there, and when the waves ebb, you stop and move on.

“There are no long-term benefits, mostly, such efforts are like a fizz on top of the drink, and they dissipate very fast. There are some short-term benefits, but most of these activities are created on Instagram or X and amplified on LinkedIn, they appeal to a very small band of customers and are often more self-serving than pushing the brand conversation,” says Gupta.

Gupta says that these efforts have little impact on brand equity.

“Most of these are not memorable; they do not drive brand loyalty and often do not even follow the brand tonality. They are fine as small stunts and should be left at that.”

On the other hand, Mendiratta argues that rivalry works in some contexts but doesn’t lead to long-term brand loyalty.

“Rivalry-driven campaigns can create short-term buzz but may alienate some audiences. Companionship-based marketing, by emphasising collaboration and shared values, builds stronger long-term equity and loyalty.”

Swiggy Instamart’s objective behind the collaborative approach, as per Abhishek Shetty, is also to build emotional equity. “And to ensure we’re seen as more than just a Q-commerce brand, we’re a part of life’s most memorable moments.”

WE ALL LOVE A GOOD FIGHT

Rivalry is especially a common sight when smaller fish struggle to survive in the pond. So they pull out the big guns to bring down the competitor. A certain smartphone brand named after a fruit that shall remain nameless has occupied X% of the market, and the next big player comes close at Y%. For other players who are finding their audience and building loyalty, the rivalry does work.

Android users like to tell themselves they are making a better choice by rejecting. (Oops, cats out of the bag). So when android brands try to take another bite out of the bitten apple, audiences relate and feel better. Experts also agree that there’s definitely an audience for a good rivalry. They put emphasis on ‘healthy’ in this context though.

“The audience will love to see a good fight if it’s done with class and without crossing boundaries,” says Naresh Gupta.

“Rivalry-driven campaigns often appeal to competitive enthusiasts and value-conscious consumers. For example, Micromax’s campaigns targeting Apple users with slogans like “I can afford this” resonated with audiences looking for affordable alternatives to high-end brands, leveraging price sensitivity and brand pride,” says Chandramouli.

He said that industries like technology or beverages find rivalry to be an effective strategy for them

At the same time, he also presents a counter-point to this argument.

“However, they often lack the depth to build long-term emotional equity. In contrast, companionship-based campaigns, such as Fevikwik’s ‘Todo Nahi, Jodo,’ foster enduring connections by aligning with universal human values. The choice depends on the brand’s objectives, target audience, and market context,” adds Chandramouli.

With this, Chandramouli settles the debate for us. It all depends on the context and pillars on which the brand is built.

Inside
Mayur Holo's
Playbook for
Building Brands



With over 850 million internet users and a rapidly growing digital economy, India's digital transformation has fueled the growth of digital-first brands. Platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp have become key touchpoints for brand discovery, engagement, and commerce and therefore, a brand's first impression is often made online. These brands are reshaping how businesses engage with consumers.

These brands are built from the ground up with a deep understanding of online culture, data-driven strategies, and community engagement.

But how to build a successful digital-first brand?

Is it an unhinged Instagram page or a viral campaign or using storytelling to seamlessly engage with the audience or usage of AI?

To answer these and learn from one of the best in the business, Mrinil Mathur Rajwani, Editor in Chief, Social Samosa Network spoke to Mayur Hola, VP-Brand Swiggy, as he helps us navigate through the various aspects of Brand Building.

Mayur has been at the forefront of building several digital-first brands like OYO, Subway, Swiggy in his career and the conversation is a short guide that unpacks the key pillars of building a successful digital-first brand, exploring how brands can harness content, commerce, and community to stay ahead in the digital era.





Mrinil Mathur: For starters, Mayur, take us through your journey from Advertising to Marketing

Mayur Hola: Circa 2019 - I've been at Contract for 5 years, working with a bunch of startups where I interact with founders and love the crazy, creative energy of the consumer tech world. I also have partnered with Domino's for those 5 years. By the end of it, I have seen 2 CEOs, 2 COOs, and inducted my 3rd CMO. I knew then that I had to take ownership of a brand and not just be a service provider. It's the only way I could leave a little bit of myself on brand and make a real impact. So, I set about fixing up my website (mayurhola.com) and my LinkedIn page by observing best practices from leaders around the world (LI wasn't such a f**k-fest then).

One fine day, a Polish lady who was leading the global brand for OYO looked up my profile and liked what she saw. And boom, I'm in like Flynn. She soon moves on to other pastures and just like that, I'm global head of brand at OYO. I have the good fortune to work with some of the sharpest minds in the land at that place. What a constellation of talent! I learnt so much. That was my finishing school in a lot of ways. And my transition to the other side, as it's referred to.

From there, I moved to Subway as its CMO, where I managed the biggest menu change since Subway first entered India. I also had Vishy Anand sweat buckets and run into a door.

And now I have been at Swiggy for just short of a year, heading all its brands and making people say WTF and wonder what substance we're consuming, on pretty much a daily basis.

It's been the wildest ride full of hard knocks and exhilarating highs. Most of all it's been a journey of learning, all over again.

I know now that I have learnt from the best in the business across the Marcomm universe and have the infallible belief that if I apply what I have learnt and put in the work, I'll get it right more often than not.

MM: Brand Building or Branding is an art with multiple layers to it, but it is used very loosely as a word, how do you define Brand Building?

MH: Brand is a person.

I remember a discussion with Santosh Desai at McCann. Santosh questioned the one-line brief format and said, why should a brand be so one-dimensional? It's an organic being which is the sum total of various stimuli at various points in time, place and context. Why limit it? We see Brand building as a layer cake. You add texture, you add decadence, sponge to separate the ganache, tart to cut through the richness, some funk to make it stand out and frosting to make it look all sexy and drop dead gorgeous. And you always add salt. Social is the funk and the tart. Play with it, find your audience and be their mate. Whatever you do, don't be salesy. You'll get spat out like marmite by a toddler. Traditional mediums are the sponge. Press, OOH, film, digital advertising; be clever and be arresting on there, but always be comprehensible and clear in what your objective is. Be entertaining and never ever mix hard working with the boring, rinse-repeat argument. That's the refuge of plebs. Activations are the ganache. Delight your folks in different ways at different occasions. And the X factor is the salt, like Instafart is for Instamart. Like Memeverse is for Swiggy Food.

MM: How has Brand Building evolved from the time you started your career till today?

MH: Strangely, I find a lot of similarities in today's the AI era. Now, creation is at the fingertips of everyone. And the only advantage a brand has is to be creative and distinct. And original. Which is what we learnt when we started out. No project is too small, most times we should aim for excellence and at the very least settle for competence. The bar doesn't get lowered beyond this.

Exploit every medium, do standout work in the mundane, make people sit up and marvel. That's exactly how we process it today. All the chat of multiplicity of mediums and the challenges thereof is overplayed. We believe that there's a wide open playground for a brand to influence its audience and be cult. It's just so f***ing exciting. Today, the world is like a love hotel for brand building.

MM: A lot has changed over the last decade or so, with Digital becoming mainstream, AI taking the centre stage, and Technology enabling personalisation at scale. How have these macro developments shaped and influenced your approach to building brands?

MH: Technology (read AI) is doing the heavy lifting for us. Freeing us all to produce our best work. We use it as a sounding board and build a whole brand around cats with its inputs. Technology enables us as opposed to compete with us. And we exploit it ruthlessly to be magnificent.



MM: Brands are built on consistent storytelling, content which enables connections on a mass? What's an ideal framework for storytelling? A Framework that stands through the test of times.

MH: Brands are built on consistent ToV. Like bffs are. Your mate can be funny, irritating, predictably unpredictable, loving, an a\$\$h@%e, whatever. Sometimes your friend is just silent, at other times a chatter box. But they are always there for you when you need them. That's how we want the brand we build to be. Love us, hate on us, always recognise us, never ever ignore us. And always find us doing right by you.

MM: There are Brands who are resilient by choice, and then there are brands who inculcate resilience by force. What are some of the principles brands should follow to thrive in the face of uncertainty and disruption?

MH: Embrace fear. Embrace the unknown. Crisis management is probably the best brand building opportunity. Do the right thing by your customers and not just say the right thing. Then make sure they know you did it. True (brand) love is made of this.

MM: Brand Marketers are often accused of chasing reach & virality over relevance & resonance, how should Marketers navigate these complexities & strike the right balance

MH: By not making them sound like they are at odds with each other. Is Groom-Broom and Chawal-Chawla not relevant? Is Rishab Pant not doing the heavy lifting of explaining Bolt? Is InstaSanta not wholesome yet quirky max? Is a press ad that smells of Mangoes and has just one line on it, not minimalist but also maximalist? Did not all of these go viral? And these are just a few examples. I have ten more. I'll say it till I'm red in the face. Boring is the refuge of the boring.

MM: Trends that are likely to shape the Future of Brand Building in the coming years

MH: This is not a trend. This was and is always going to be true - The meek will inherit the average, and get replaced by an entity. The brilliant will continue to rule the brandverse and be augmented by an entity.

MM: Learnings and Advice for Advertising and Marketing Professionals

MH: 1. To understand that we have no choice but to build a brand, just look at the phone you're reading this on and ask why you picked it. Don't kid yourself. It's not the tech or the camera or whatever. It's the brand.

2. The next time someone uses Nike or Apple as an example in a meeting, sock them with a can of Liquid Death.

3. Don't listen to a thing I say. I'm just the guy who created Instafart.



RIPPLE EFFECTS OF A ROLLER-COASTER ECONOMY

The flux in India's economy implied bumps and dents in the agency business in 2024. The advertising industry witnessed the effects through changes in strategies, budgets, and creative approaches. Experts speak to Harshal Thakur to shed light on the global and local factors that led to terminations, acquisitions, and consolidations in the industry.

Imagine a bustling conference room in the heart of Mumbai. A prominent brand's marketing team debates whether to release a high-budget campaign during Diwali—a decision hinging on consumer sentiment influenced by inflation and geopolitical tensions. This snapshot captures the dilemma faced by countless advertising agencies grappling with a volatile economy.

2024 was a paradox of optimism and caution for India's advertising industry. It started on a high note with marquee events like the IPL, T20 World Cup, and national elections, pushing ad spends into overdrive. Yet, as global economic turbulence took hold, the second half of the year painted a starkly different picture. Consumers tightened their purse strings, and brands recalibrated their strategies, leaving agencies to navigate uncharted waters.

MACROECONOMIC WAVES AND ADVERTISING TIDES

Rahul Vengalil, CEO & Co-founder of tgthr, succinctly captures 2024's narrative: "The interplay of a vibrant first half followed by a restrained second half defined India's advertising trajectory." Early optimism was fueled by high-visibility events, but the latter half saw brands pulling back amidst rising uncertainty.



Rahul Vengalil
CEO & Co-founder of tgthr

The K-shaped recovery of the Indian economy, noted by Pranoy Kanojia, Head of Planning - Delhi, Enormous, played a pivotal role. While affluent consumers gravitated toward premium brands, the masses sought affordability, forcing brands to diversify their product lines. "This shift led to creative challenges for agencies, compelling us to design campaigns that appealed to both spectrums," Kanojia remarks.



Pranoy Kanojia
Head of Planning - Delhi, Enormous

Simultaneously, global factors like the Russia-Ukraine conflict and inflation reverberated through India's advertising budgets. Shrenik Gandhi, CEO of White Rivers Media, observes, "Digital channels dominated investments, while traditional media adapted to changing market dynamics." Despite headwinds, pockets of growth emerged, notably in retail media and streaming platforms.



Shrenik Gandhi

CEO of White Rivers Media

"The second half of the year, traditionally the peak sales period due to festive demand, saw a dip in consumer confidence. Brands, facing an uncertain economic environment, adopted precautionary measures, pulling back on ad spends despite the high purchase potential during this season," Vengalil notes, adding, "Additionally, global factors such as the prolonged Russia-Ukraine conflict, the anticipation of the U.S. elections, escalating inflation in key markets, and the Israel-Hamas conflict, which began in 2023, created a ripple effect."

Kanojia points out that there has been a growth of new home-grown brands who have demanded unparalleled visibility against the media muscle of goliaths of their categories. He shares the examples of Lahori Zeera and Wok Tok Noodles.

Neeraj Bassi, Chief Growth Officer, Cheil X, observes a growing trend of brands being hesitant to spend or being uncertain about the accurate time to spend. "Through 2024, we have been part of pitches which were not won by any agency as the client decided not to do the campaign, because they didn't want to commit to the spend at that time. Probably, the CEO and CFO were not able to visualise what the business would gain from the campaign. The connection between marketing spends and business results has always been questioned, but in general, there is a belief that there is a connection. But in 2024, I saw a big chink emerge in the belief. The focus seems to have shifted from sustainable sales, to sales now," he says.



Neeraj Bassi

Chief Growth Officer, Cheil X

NAVIGATING CHOPPY WATERS: AGENCY RESILIENCE AND INNOVATION

For agencies, 2024 was not just about surviving but thriving through agility and innovation. Vengalil highlights tgthr's operational prudence: "Money is always limited, so we think twice before incurring expenses. This practice ensured no surprises in our survival." Despite challenges, tgthr celebrated milestones such as its first offsite and annual shutdown.

Bassi reflects on dynamic budgeting as the year's toughest challenge. "Clients debated spending priorities—media vs. influencers, big films vs. short ones. The uncertainty often led to campaign cancellations," he shares. This cautious approach underscores a growing disconnect between marketing investments and business outcomes, a trend Bassi predicts will deepen unless faith in long-term brand building is restored.

Technology also played a pivotal role. Agencies like Enormous embraced AI to power human creativity, enabling quicker, more impactful campaigns. Gandhi notes the success of White Rivers Media's Capital Z initiative, which bridged marketers with Gen Z audiences. "We balanced calculated risks with measurable outcomes, leveraging digital channels to experiment thoughtfully," he explains.

Vengalil shares that the usual flurry of full-page print ads in September and October the festive season was conspicuously absent this year. This cautious environment, however, helped tgthr secure a stellar media package with a leading print publication, allowing it to place two full-page ads for its brand at a fraction of the typical cost something that would have otherwise been prohibitive.

INDUSTRY CONSOLIDATION: WINDS OF CHANGE

The advertising landscape saw considerable shifts in 2024, with Wieden+Kennedy shutting shop in India and two giants—IPG and Omnicom—merging. Vengalil attributes the closure to chronic unprofitability: “Winning new business, retaining clients, and cost efficiency are vital for survival. Neglecting these pillars can be fatal.” The merger, he adds, was a pragmatic move to cut costs amidst a competitive market.

Interestingly, independent agencies thrived by leveraging their agility and specialised expertise. As Gandhi puts it, “This renaissance in agency models has accelerated innovation across digital capabilities.”

The consolidation trend also reflects broader client expectations. Kanojia notes, “Big networks face pressure to restructure, while independent players craft creative solutions for home-grown brands competing against category giants.” This agility positions smaller agencies as formidable challengers in the evolving market.

SILVER LININGS AND FRIC- TIONS

Looking forward, agencies are cautiously optimistic about 2025. Financial products, fueled by India’s growing digital penetration, are poised for continued ad spend growth. Meanwhile, the FMCG sector aims to strengthen consumer loyalty in a fragmented market. Gandhi predicts a surge in social commerce, augmented reality, and predictive analytics, which will transform consumer engagement.

However, challenges remain. As Bassi emphasises, restoring belief in marketing’s value is paramount. “Marketing investment connects with a range of stakeholders—employees, partners, influencers—who indirectly drive sales. Cutting budgets reflects a lack of faith in growth potential,” he warns.

In terms of media spending, Kanojia observes that IPL continues to be a driver for brands, along with big TV content IPs like Masterchef and KBC, “but we are also seeing very smart and gutsy media plays by brands where they have associated with new properties like India’s Got Latent or done interesting celeb partnerships on social (Jackie Shroff),” he adds.

TURNING TURBULENCE INTO TRIUMPH

The Indian advertising industry in 2024 was a tale of two halves. Optimistic beginnings tempered by caution. Yet, through resilience, innovation, and a focus on operational efficiency, a number of agencies turned challenges into opportunities. As the economy continues to shape-shift, the onus is on agencies to remain agile, harness technology, and build compelling narratives that resonate across socio-economic divides.

After all, as the adage goes, “Smooth seas never made skilled sailors.” For India’s advertising agencies, the stormy seas of 2024 have been a crucible of transformation, setting the stage for a—from a glass-half-full lens—bold, creative, and impactful future.

THE AD AGENCY SURVIVAL KIT

Surviving the chaos of agency life takes more than just creativity. It requires resilience, humour, and a few secret weapons. Pranali Tawte speaks with creative professionals to explore how they navigate the everyday madness of agency life.

The first time I walked into an ad agency, it felt like a Michelin-starred kitchen during the dinner rush. Deadlines sizzled, stress boiled over, and the entire place moved at breakneck speed. Keyboards clattered like knives on chopping boards, ideas were tossed around mid-sprint, and espresso shots disappeared faster than a chef catching their breath between back-to-back orders.

Welcome to the wild, unregulated, and ‘mildly’ toxic ecosystem known as Agency Life. Here, the coffee is strong, and the deadlines are stronger. It’s an industry fueled by passion, creativity, and not-so-occasional disregard for work-life balance. Burning the midnight oil isn’t poetic; it’s policy, and feedback like ‘make it pop’ can send even the most seasoned creatives into a downward spiral.

Because here’s the thing: no one just works in advertising. They survive it. The pressure is relentless, the chaos never-ending, and yet, somehow, agency folks find ways to power through. How? I asked creative folks for their go-to survival hacks, and their answers were painfully funny, relatable, and alarmingly real.

WHAT’S IN YOUR ‘AGENCY SURVIVAL KIT’?

If you think an agency survival kit includes a laptop, a notepad, and an overpriced cup of coffee, wait till your experience in the ecosystem teaches you otherwise. The real essentials are mental, emotional, and, in some cases, pharmaceutical.



Raj Dasani

Senior Copywriter, Flora Fountain

Raj Dasani, Senior Copywriter, Flora Fountain, swears by communication skills. “Because sometimes, translating ‘make it pop’ into actionable feedback is an art form in itself.”



Aditi Ganvir

Associate Creative Director, Makani Creatives

Decoding vague feedback is one thing, but surviving the daily chaos requires a strong support system. Aditi Ganvir, Associate Creative Director, Makani Creatives, believes it's all about the people. "The ones who remind you why you chose this madness. The ones who hype you up before a pitch, make you laugh on a gloomy day, and, most importantly, keep your snack drawer well-stocked."

But if there's one thing every agency professional absolutely needs, it's a sharp sense of humour. Sometimes, it's the only thing standing between you and a complete meltdown.

KEEPING IT TOGETHER (SOMEHOW)

Since quitting isn't always an option, how do agency workers deal with the relentless chaos? It turns out that it's all about controlled escapism.

Raj finds solace in music and snacks. He said, "It's amazing how much clarity you can find when you tune out the chaos and keep your blood sugar stable."

When deadlines loom, and briefs get more confusing than insightful, a well-timed snack break can sometimes be the only thing keeping sanity intact.

Aditi, on the other hand, gamifies her to-do list. She said, "Every task, big or small, goes into an Excel sheet. It's like levelling up in a game, just without the cool background music. Also, two cups of chai = non-negotiable."

And Vibha does not just manage the madness, she laughs at it. She believes that if there is one thing that can get you through agency life, it is a solid sense of humour.

Maybe she is right. Because if you are not laughing, you are probably crying. And in agency life, that is just another Tuesday.



Vibha Singh

Independent Creative Consultant and Former Senior Creative Director, OLIVER Agency

Of course, some days, no amount of moral support can save you from a pounding headache. Vibha Singh, Independent Creative Consultant and Former Senior Creative Director, OLIVER Agency, keeps it brutally honest with one word: "Paracetamol." Sometimes, survival isn't about strategy. It's about pain management.



Uddhav Parab

Senior Creative Director, Interactive Avenues

Uddhav Parab, Senior Creative Director, Interactive Avenues shares the same philosophy about humour. “You could be burning the midnight oil on a brief that won’t impact the client’s business or your portfolio, but if you can make the team laugh and make the work seem not like work, you’ve already won,” he said.

In an industry where last-minute changes and impossible deadlines are the norm, the ability to laugh through the madness might just be the difference between surviving and burning out.

THE UNWRITTEN RULES

Every creative dream of the perfect campaign, the one that wins awards, makes clients weep with joy and cements their place in advertising history. But here’s the catch: even the best ideas don’t always make it. Sometimes, they get watered down, lost in approvals, or buried under a last-minute change. If Agency Life had a survival manual, these would be the hard-earned lessons scribbled in the margins, refined through experience, and passed down like agency folklore.

“ ***Don’t fall in love with your ideas. Everyone has a different parameter when it comes to creativity and rejection doesn’t mean an idea is bad—it just means it wasn’t the right fit. A great idea needs the right timing, the right pitch, the right budget, and a sprinkle of luck. So, keep your ideas close, but be ready to move on when necessary.***

- ADITI GANVIR



The real skill in advertising isn’t just coming up with great ideas; it is knowing which ones to fight for, which ones to tweak, and which ones to let go of. Because rejection doesn’t always mean an idea is bad.

“Don’t fall in love with your ideas. Everyone has a different parameter when it comes to creativity and rejection doesn’t mean an idea is bad—it just means it wasn’t the right fit. A great idea needs the right timing, the right pitch, the right budget, and a sprinkle of luck. So, keep your ideas close, but be ready to move on when necessary.” - Aditi Ganvir

If you have made it this far, congratulations. You now have a semi-functional survival kit for agency life. Whether it is caffeine, humour, or sheer denial, every creative has their own way of making it through the madness.

So the next time you’re pulling an all-nighter for a campaign that may never see the light of day, just remember: Pain is inevitable. But hey, at least there’s free coffee.

Jokes aside, while we work to fix this broken system and create an environment where advertising employees can go home at a reasonable hour, employees have found comfort in coffee and made humour their defence mechanism.

Trends Forecasting



The “Trends Forecasting” section features expert opinions on key 2025 marketing trends. Shradha Agarwal discusses AI, Q-commerce, and experiential marketing, Ashit Kukian highlights AI integration in radio, Mehak Chawla covers the rise of connected TV, and Junaid Shaikh advocates for ethical reforms in India’s OOH industry.



Shradha Agarwal

Co-Founder and Global CEO

DIGITAL TRENDS

Shradha Agarwal, Co-Founder and Global CEO, Grapes discusses key digital advertising trends expected in 2025, including the rise of AI-driven campaigns, the growth of Q-commerce, omnichannel experiential marketing and the adoption of unconventional, bizarre marketing strategies.

Looking back at the foregone years, the advertising and marketing industry performed fairly well with an emphasis on advanced technologies. Over the last year, digital advertising emerged as a powerful tool driving the success of the brands. The industry exhibited its mettle by navigating the perennially changing market dynamics with agility to adapt to the new trends.

2024 as a year was majorly dominated by AI trends aimed at enhancing customer engagement by ensuring the successful performance of ads or campaigns. Along a similar line, the sector also harnessed the benefits of advanced technologies such as AR and VR for captivating the audience with immersive experiences.

At the same time, the year saw a surge in consumption of short-format videos, with brands riding the wave to forge deeper connections with the audience. Nonetheless, to level up the game, brands also resorted to influencer marketing to expand their reach and tap the loyal followers of the influencers.

Having looked at the trends that shaped the previous year, it has set the stage for 2025, where more progress is anticipated in trends that dominated 2024.

AI TO BE THE DRIVING FORCE

In the year 2025, the advertising sector is anticipated to ace its game by leveraging the benefits of AI to the fullest. Dwelling on the ability of AI, brands are expected to drive ad

efficiency by automating tasks and streamlining campaign optimisation at the same time. The year will also see a spike in the personalisation of ads/ campaigns with the help of AI based on predictive consumer behaviour. Enabling programmatic strategies, brands will be able to efficiently tailor ads in a premium environment.

BOOM OF Q-COMMERCE

With quick commerce gaining a lot of popularity, the sector is expected to boom in the coming year, creating opportunities for brands and advertisers to tap the emerging segment. At the same time, the platforms have been experiencing a surge in ad revenue, indicating the possibility of advertising making strong inroads into the sector.



Therefore, to reach out to the growing audience frequenting the various Q-commerce platforms, innovations are required at the technology end to make ads effective for the brands. Moreover, unique and customisable ad campaigns will exercise an edge over the others with their ability to resonate with the needs of the customers.

RISE OF OMNICHANNEL EXPERIENTIAL MARKETING

In order to expand their reach, brands will have to take an omnichannel approach to bring about the perfect confluence of both online and offline assets. Employing omnichannel strategies, brands will have to come up with more experiential marketing across BTL and digital channels to create a

lasting impact among the audience. For instance, billboards will be seeing more digital campaigns, giving insights into real-world events such as concerts or online experiences. It will open the gateway for curating immersive, interactive moments by blending physical and digital experiences across myriad platforms.

Thereby, the confluence of on-site and online experiences will go a long way in delivering impactful campaigns that strengthen connection with the audience.

UNCONVENTIONAL APPROACH WITH BIZARRE MARKETING

Brands will be riding the wave of bizarre marketing to form deeper connections with the target

audience as well. It is anticipated to establish a strong recall value, giving brands an edge over the others. The recent campaigns around brands collaborating with Ganji Chudail can be considered a perfect example of bizarre marketing. With the memes going viral on account of their eccentricity, brands are innovatively bringing about the seamless integration of their offerings with the narrative.

Hence, the trend is further expected to gain mileage in 2025, helping brands to capture audience attention with out-of-the-box strategies.



Ashit Kukian

CEO, Music Broadcast Limited (RadioCity)

RADIO TRENDS

Ashit Kukian shares how far radio advertising has come and shares the pathway that lies ahead, highlighting the impact of AI, digital integration, branded podcasts, and enhanced analytics.

In 2024, radio advertising shattered the ‘traditional’ label, thriving in India’s digital era with a market forecast of 53.67bn. Boasting an average ad spend of 86.83 per listener and a projected audience of 0.7 billion by 2029, radio proved to be a cost-effective powerhouse for brands, especially local businesses targeting Tier II and III cities. Its resurgence highlights unmatched affordability and reach. But the future is even brighter. 2025 promises a transformation fed by AI and ML, enabling hyper-personalized and interactive campaigns. With innovation steering the way, radio is set to become the “go-to” for advertising and drive incomparable brand engagement.

INTEGRATION OF DIGITAL STRATEGIES

During the forthcoming year, radio will no longer be just a passive medium but a dynamic force seamlessly integrating with digital strategies to enhance reach and engagement. Advertisers will harness the medium’s hyperlocal strength, using it as a gateway to connect with listeners across OTT platforms, social media, and streaming apps. With the rise of podcasts and on-demand audio, stations will expand their digital presence, blending traditional FM broadcasting, digital radio, social media channels like Instagram and YouTube, and tailored apps. This wholesome approach will allow brands to engage audiences across multiple touchpoints, offering a seamless and deeper connection.

INTEGRATION OF AI AND PERSONALIZATION IN RADIO ADS

With time, AI will be a game-changer in radio marketing, revolutionising how brands connect with audiences. Harnessing advanced data analytics, this has already enabled radio stations to craft personalised and highly targeted ad experiences tailored to individual listener preferences. Through AI-powered algorithms, advertisers will gain insights into listener behaviours, allowing them to deliver messages at the perfect moment with content that resonates deeply. This precision will not only enhance engagement but also boost ROI for advertisers. Additionally, this technology will streamline content production, enabling quicker turnarounds and more creative, engaging ad formats that seamlessly blend with music, news, and talk shows.



RISE OF RADIO PODCASTS AND BRANDED CONTENT

The podcast revolution, which has gained immense popularity, shows no signs of slowing down. By the coming year, we can expect the rise of radio podcasts and branded content to take centre stage. Radio stations will increasingly collaborate with creators to produce exclusive content, opening up new opportunities for advertisers to tap into niche audiences. 'Branded podcasts' will become an 'essential component' of radio advertising trends, as they allow advertisers to tell compelling stories while providing listeners with valuable content. These will entertain, inform, and engage listeners, making them more receptive to the sponsored messages embedded within.

CROSS-MEDIA CAMPAIGNS WITH RADIO AS A PILLAR

Radio is balanced to become the kingpin of integrated marketing campaigns in the coming year,

seamlessly bridging traditional and digital media. Advertisers will leverage radio's reach and credibility as a foundation to amplify messages across platforms like OTT, social media, and streaming services. Campaigns will be designed to provide consistent messaging across various touchpoints, using radio to build trust, while digital channels drive deeper engagement. This amalgamation will allow brands to create cohesive narratives that capture audience attention wherever they are, maximising impact and ensuring a unified experience.

ANALYTICS AND MEASUREMENT ENHANCEMENTS

As the demand for measurable outcomes grows, radio advertising, along with digital trends, will involve advanced analytics to prove its ROI effectively. New-age tools will provide real-time insights into engagement levels, listener demographics, and ad performance. AI-powered analytics will help advertisers fine-tune campaigns,

ensuring the right message reaches the right audience at the right time. With these advanced tools, brands can accurately measure success, boosting their confidence in radio as a viable advertising medium.

THE FINAL FREQUENCY

In the year ahead, radio advertising trends will slay, incorporating a dynamic fusion of personalisation, technology, and multi-platform engagement, enabling brands to connect with audiences like never before. With AI-driven insights, digital integration, and branded content leading the way, the medium will not just adapt but excel in the digital age, reaching a broader and more diverse listener base. As this evolution unfolds, radio proves one truth - "Innovation keeps the tradition alive, making it louder and more impactful than ever!"



Mehak Chawla

Lead - Strategic Marketing

CTV TRENDS

Mehak Chawla, Lead - Strategic Marketing, VDO. AI discusses the key trends shaping connected TV (CTV) in 2025, including its rising popularity, interactive and personalised ad experiences, omnichannel strategies, increased ad spend and the importance of high-quality content.

Once dismissed as the “idiot box,” connected TV (CTV) has emerged as a game-changer, revolutionising how brands interact with audiences. As someone who has spent years navigating the dynamic world of advertising, I’ve witnessed that revolution firsthand. CTV has now become the frontrunner of digital innovation—bridging the gap between precision targeting and high-impact storytelling.

In 2025, I firmly believe that CTV will not just be a tool for advertisers—it will be the platform for delivering impactful campaigns and measurable results. Here are some of the trends I believe will shape this space.

CTV’S SOARING POPULARITY

I’ve seen countless brands struggle with dwindling attention spans and oversaturated digital channels. But CTV is different. It brings the immersive power of television to the forefront, coupled with the precision of digital targeting. By 2025, 70% of the U.S. population will be using CTV platforms like Hulu, Netflix, and Disney+, making it an unmissable opportunity for publishers and advertisers alike.

For me, the most exciting part about CTV is its ability to reach audiences in their most relaxed state—sitting on their couches, unwinding, and ready to engage with content.

INTERACTIVE ADS MAKING ENGAGEMENT PERSONAL

If you’ve ever been captivated by an ad that lets you click, swipe, or even shop directly, you’ve experienced the magic of interactive advertising. Personally, I’ve found shoppable ads to be a groundbreaker—they transform passive viewers into active participants.

A great example of this in action is VDO.AI’s [Eveready campaign](#), which leveraged engaging ad formats to drive engagement and purchases. Interactive campaigns like these have been shown to achieve 4.6x higher engagement rates compared to traditional formats.



OMNICHANNEL STRATEGIES: THE FUTURE OF CONSISTENCY

One thing I always tell brands is that a fractured customer experience can dilute your messaging. This is where CTV shines. By integrating seamlessly with existing marketing channels, CTV ensures that your audience hears a consistent story across platforms. This strategy is a must-have in 2025.

PERSONALISATION AT SCALE

I've always been fascinated by how the right ad at the right time can drive conversions. [Dynamic Ad Insertion \(DAI\)](#) takes this a step further by customising ads in real-time based on user preferences. Imagine watching a movie and seeing an ad tailored to your location, time of day, or even your favourite hobbies...this is the future of advertising.

SURGE IN CTV AD SPEND

I've seen CTV evolve into an essential advertising platform. With ad-supported tiers from Netflix and Amazon Prime Video gaining traction, US CTV ad spend is projected to hit [\\$29 billion](#) this year. This is a clear signal for advertisers and publishers to prioritise CTV as its reach and ROI potential continue to grow exponentially.

ATTRIBUTION TRACKING IS MORE SOPHISTICATED

Attribution in CTV has transformed how advertisers measure success. Today, we can directly link sales to ad exposures, offering clear insights into campaign effectiveness. As technology advances, 2025 will bring even more precise tracking, enabling advertisers to optimise campaigns in real time and maximise their impact.

HIGH-QUALITY CONTENT

In my role at VDO.AI, I've seen how premium content acts as a magnet for high-quality advertisers. In 2025, publishers who focus on delivering unique, engaging, and high-quality inventory will outshine their competition. The success of that content will, however, also depend upon [several factors](#) which advertisers should be wary of.

As someone deeply invested in the AdTech space, I see CTV as more than just a trend...it's a revolution that's reshaping how brands connect with audiences. Advertisers and Publishers who embrace these trends and align their strategies will position themselves as a leader in this transformative era.

2025 is the year to embrace change, take bold steps, and redefine success in the world of advertising. The question is...who will lead the charge?



Junaid Shaikh

RoshanSpace Brandcom

OOH: THE NEED FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS IN 2025

Junaid Shaikh of RoshanSpace Brandcom calls out the chaos in India's OOH industry, where clutter grows, ethics fade, and profit overshadows transparency. He advocates for structured policies, global best practices, and a cleaner, smarter ad landscape.

“ Ethics isn't about following the rules, it's about following your conscience ”

Out of Home (OOH) assets are often the first impression of a city for visitors, commuters, and residents. A well-curated and organized OOH environment can elevate urban aesthetics, communicate a city's vibrancy, and drive tourism and economic growth. In countries and cities like China, Tokyo, London, New York, and Dubai, iconic OOH installations have become synonymous with their identity. Indian cities like Mumbai or Delhi, with their unique cultural and commercial dynamism, hold the same potential. However, the increasing clutter of unplanned

billboards, hoardings, and digital displays around urban development projects is undermining this potential.

For decades, OOH advertising has been an integral part of metro cities' urban fabric. Media owners are redefining these cities' skylines with innovative billboards and strategic installations that go beyond advertising; they transform the environment and leave lasting impressions. In the last five decades of the OOH industry in India, specifically in Mumbai, we have seen a major evolution in the consumer mindset. Research reveals that there's been an upsurge in the concentration of people in urban landscapes. Yet, we ask ourselves a question: Has there been a simultaneous and collective reassessment of practices, policies, and responsibilities to transform the OOH media into a sustainable global competitive business?

However, as we enter 2025, we need to address a few growing concerns about the lack of ethical standards in the OOH industry. This issue, coupled with political interference and arbitrary policies leading to unchecked visual clutter, threatens to undermine the industry's credibility and ability to evolve.

WHAT DO ETHICAL STANDARDS MEAN?

Ethical standards in any industry serve as a compass, guiding businesses to operate in a way that balances profitability with responsibility. They encompass principles such as transparency, fairness, accountability, and respect for stakeholders. In the OOH space, ethical standards extend to ensuring truthfulness in advertising, respecting community values, adhering to legal requirements, and maintaining a commitment to environmental sustainability.

“ ***Simply put, an ethical industry uplifts its community, an unethical one exploits it*** ”

Ethical practices are not just moral obligations; they are business imperatives. In an era where consumers are more aware and discerning than ever, maintaining ethical standards is a way to build trust and credibility, two essential pillars for long-term success. It is time for a collective reassessment of our practices, policies, and responsibilities to transform OOH media into a sustainable, globally competitive force.

THE NEED FOR ETHICAL STANDARDS IN OOH

The ethics of the OOH industry are shaped by our commitment to transparency and integrity. Transparency entails fair bidding processes and accountability in operations, while integrity emphasises truthful messaging that reflects respect for audiences.

Unfortunately, profitability often takes precedence over these values. There have been many instances where profitability has pushed ethical practices to the sidelines and weakened the industry's credibility. As media owners, we must recognize that ethical standards are not just about compliance, they are the foundation of sustainable growth. Without them, the OOH industry risks losing the trust of advertisers, regulators, and its community.

THE CLUTTER CONUNDRUM

In cities like Mumbai, or Bengaluru, OOH media should reflect its energy and ambition. Instead, the industry is increasingly marred by visual

clutter. Unplanned and excessive installations have turned the streets of these cities into a chaotic tapestry of billboards and digital screens. For a person driving and navigating through the city roads, OOH assets are often the first impression of the city. However, poorly curated and overcrowded displays fail to project the sophistication and innovation that a particular OOH stands for.

POLICY REFORMS: LEARNING FROM GLOBAL STANDARDS

To create a world-class OOH ecosystem, Indian cities must align their policies with global best practices observed in countries and cities like China, London, New York, and Dubai. These cities have demonstrated how structured regulations and innovative policies can significantly enhance the effectiveness of OOH media. Drawing inspiration from these global examples, Indian cities should adopt key reforms to address existing challenges and create a sustainable, impactful OOH landscape.

First, the allocation of OOH sites must be transparent, with bidding and leasing processes digitized to ensure fairness and accountability. This would eliminate biases and promote trust among stakeholders. Second, zoning regulations should be implemented to limit the number of OOH installations in specific areas, reducing clutter and enhancing the overall impact of advertising. Finally, city planners, and media owners should be involved with authorities in creating impartial policies that align with global standards. This objective oversight can address persistent issues like corruption, unfair competition, and the stifling of innovation. The involvement of city planners, and media owners would provide the industry with the necessary objectivity to implement these reforms effectively. However, these systemic changes require collective action.

As media owners, it is our responsibility to lead by example by prioritizing projects that transcend profitability to contribute meaningfully to a city's identity. This includes designing billboards that seamlessly integrate with the urban landscape and utilizing technology that minimizes environmental impact. While individual efforts are commendable, they are insufficient to achieve widespread transformation.

The industry must unite to advocate for reforms that prioritize ethics and sustainability, collaborate with urban planners to ensure OOH installations align with broader city development goals and educate stakeholders on the long-term benefits of ethical practices.

Vision for the next decade

The coming decade promises to be transformative for the OOH industry in Mumbai and across India. The Indian OOH market is expected to reach USD 676.82 million by 2030 as per a report by Mordor Intelligence. By embracing ethical standards and integrating global best practices, the industry can enhance its credibility, attract advertisers who value integrity and innovation, and elevate Mumbai's global standing as a hub for cutting-edge OOH media.

Ethics is not a constraint; it is a catalyst for growth. As the OOH industry evolves, we must recognize that sustainable success is built on the foundations of trust, transparency, and responsibility. It is only by committing to these values that we can unlock the true potential of our industry and create an OOH ecosystem that best reflects our cities.

THE FUTURE OF AI & MARKETING IN THE BFSI SECTOR: TRENDS TO WATCH IN 2025

Aabhinna Khare, CDMO of BajajCapital, highlights the trends that will dominate the BFSI sector in 2025, emphasising how AI is transforming the sector, making it smarter, more personalised, and deeply customer-centric.



AABHINNA KHARE

CDMO of BajajCapital

In 2025, the Banking, Financial Services, and Insurance (BFSI) sector in India has undergone a seismic transformation. No longer just a facilitator of financial transactions, the sector has evolved into a proactive, intelligent partner in customers' lives. At the heart of this transformation is Artificial Intelligence (AI), which is reshaping how financial institutions operate, engage, and market themselves.

India, with its rapidly digitising economy and a population increasingly comfortable with technology, is uniquely positioned to lead this AI-driven revolution. From hyper-personalised banking experiences to AI-powered fraud detection, the future of BFSI is not just about efficiency—it's about creating meaningful, customer-centric interactions. For marketers, this presents an unprecedented opportunity to redefine how brands connect with their audiences.

Let's explore the key trends that will define the Indian BFSI sector in 2025, backed by data and insights that highlight the scale of this transformation.

HYPER-PERSONALISATION: THE NEW STANDARD IN CUSTOMER ENGAGEMENT

In 2025, the one-size-fits-all approach to financial services is a relic of the past. AI will enable banks and insurers to analyse vast amounts of customer data—spending patterns, life events, and even behavioural cues—to deliver hyper-personalised experiences. For instance, your banking app might suggest a loan for your dream home just as you start browsing real estate listings or recommend an investment plan tailored to your financial goals.

This level of personalisation isn't just a nice-to-have; it's becoming a customer expectation. According to Accenture, 91% of consumers are more likely to shop with brands that provide relevant offers and recommendations. For marketers, this means moving beyond generic campaigns and leveraging AI to craft messages that resonate on a deeply personal level.

AI-DRIVEN CHATBOTS: THE RISE OF 24/7 FINANCIAL ADVISORS

Chatbots are no longer just tools for answering basic queries. By 2025, they will evolve into sophisticated virtual financial advisors capable of handling complex tasks like recommending credit cards, explaining insurance policies, or even helping customers plan their retirement.

The adoption of AI-driven chatbots is already on the rise. Gartner predicts that by 2025, chatbots will handle 95% of customer interactions in the BFSI sector. For marketers, this represents a powerful channel for lead generation and customer engagement. Imagine a chatbot that not only resolves a customer's query but also suggests a personalised financial product—all within a single conversation.

PREDICTIVE ANALYTICS: ANTICIPATING NEEDS BEFORE THEY ARISE

What if your bank could predict when you'll need a loan or when you're at risk of overspending? Predictive analytics, powered by AI, will make this a reality by 2025. By analysing historical data and identifying patterns, financial institutions can anticipate customer needs and offer solutions proactively.

The impact of predictive analytics on marketing is profound. A study by McKinsey found that companies using predictive analytics saw a 10-15% increase in marketing ROI. For instance, a bank could use predictive models to identify customers likely to be interested in a home loan and target them with personalised campaigns at the right time.

VOICE-ACTIVATED BANKING: THE NEXT FRONTIER IN CONVENIENCE

Voice technology is set to revolutionise how customers interact with financial services. By 2025, voice-activated banking will be mainstream, allowing customers to check balances, transfer funds, or even apply for loans using simple voice commands.

The potential of voice commerce is staggering. OC&C Strategy Consultants estimates that voice commerce will reach \$40 billion by 2025. For marketers, this means optimising content for voice search and creating campaigns that leverage voice assistants to engage customers. Imagine a scenario where your bank sends you a voice reminder about an upcoming bill payment or suggests a savings plan based on your spending habits.

AI-POWERED FRAUD DETECTION: BUILDING TRUST THROUGH SECURITY

Trust is the cornerstone of the BFSI sector, and AI is playing a critical role in strengthening it. By 2025, AI-powered fraud detection systems will be capable of identifying suspicious activities in real time, preventing financial losses, and enhancing customer confidence.

The financial impact of AI in fraud detection is significant. Juniper Research predicts that AI will save the BFSI sector over \$10 billion annually by 2025. For marketers, this is an opportunity to highlight security as a unique selling point. Campaigns that emphasise the use of AI to safeguard customer finances can go a long way in building trust and loyalty.

ETHICAL AI: TRANSPARENCY AS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE

As AI becomes more pervasive, customers are increasingly concerned about how their data is being used. By 2025, ethical AI practices will be a key differentiator for BFSI brands. Customers will demand transparency in AI-driven decisions, whether it's loan approvals or investment recommendations.

According to PwC, 85% of customers are more likely to trust companies that are transparent about their AI practices. For marketers, this means incorporating ethical AI messaging into campaigns. Highlighting how AI is used responsibly to benefit customers can build trust and strengthen brand reputation.

THE ROAD AHEAD

The Indian BFSI sector is on the cusp of a transformative era driven by AI. By 2025, financial institutions will not only be smarter and more efficient but also more attuned to the needs of their customers. For marketers, this is a chance to redefine customer engagement, leveraging AI to create campaigns that are personalised, proactive, and deeply meaningful.

As we look to the future, one thing is clear: AI is not just a technological advancement; it's a paradigm shift. It's about creating experiences that are seamless, intuitive, and deeply human. And in a country as diverse and dynamic as India, the possibilities are endless.

The question is no longer whether AI will shape the future of BFSI, it's how quickly we can adapt to this new reality. The future is here, and it's powered by AI.

SOCIAL MEDIA UPDATES SHAPING THE FUTURE OF CONTENT

As new updates shift the future of social media, staying ahead of trends and leveraging new features is key for marketers. Joe Sinha examines how updates across platforms are reshaping strategies for brand success.

Ai Generated



I was introduced to social media when phones still had personality, when they flipped, slid, or had keypads that clicked before screens took over and made everything look the same. From Orkut to Instagram, the excitement was in making connections, discovering new people and seeing that red dot which told us we had gained a new friend. But somewhere along the way, that essence faded. Social media became a battleground for engagement. Influencers and brands took over, and now numbers mean everything. We left behind retro filters and perfectly square images. Now, we've raced into the AI era, where platforms churn out new features daily, each trying to outpace the other.

This competition to hook on to eyeballs is reshaping the digital landscape but also blurring the lines between apps. Platforms, once unique, now mirror each other. When podcasts took off, every major app, from YouTube to Spotify, jumped in. Today, podcast fatigue is real, with more podcasters than listeners. The same has happened with all the micro-blogging platforms, they all look the same and feel the same. The same patterns repeat, short videos, AI tools, custom feeds. Every app is everything, and nothing feels new.

Today, people are even more glued to these platforms, thanks to the inescapable short videos, turning these platforms into the perfect

arena for creators chasing virality, advertisers hunting attention, and everyone else looking for a quick dopamine hit, but this sameness leaves users saturated, switching between platforms that feel indistinguishable. That's why brands hold the real power; people follow creators, not platforms.

Platforms are also trying to listen closely and adapt to changing consumer expectations. They are rolling out new features to make life easier for creators and marketers, hoping to keep their grip on attention.

Here are the updates you must look out for.



Meta's move towards AI-powered tools and wearables points to a future where its platforms feel more personal and interactive. As these changes roll out, more advertisers are taking notice. Its US ad revenue is expected to grow by 13.8% in 2024, reaching \$64.63 billion. Over 4 million advertisers are already using its AI tools to create ads faster and target better, showing that automation is becoming a bigger part of the process. For marketers, this means getting content out quicker, reaching the right people more easily, and working with platforms that keep users interested. Here are a few updates to look out for.

Meta has already replaced its fact-checking program and is rolling out X-like Community Notes, which allow users to add more context to posts. This will help marketers and

users better understand the content while maintaining transparency.

The platform is gearing up to launch six new AI-powered wearables, including smart glasses built for mixed reality. For brands, this offers a chance to create immersive campaigns while users enjoy a more seamless, hands-free way to incorporate the digital world into their daily lives.

The platform is integrating generative AI into ad creation, helping brands create campaign assets faster and cheaper. As a result, users scroll past ads that feel more relevant and easy on the eyes.

It is adding personalised feed updates, such as weekly and weekend digests,, with event picks based on users' preferences. This allows brands to time promotions

more effectively, and users can get event ideas that actually match their vibe.

Meta AI introduced a memory feature to personalise chats, now rolling out on Facebook, Messenger, and WhatsApp in the US and Canada. This could help brands offer more personalised support while users get smoother, context-aware conversations, saving time by avoiding repetitions.

The platform is updating its Advantage+ ad tools with more automation and an 'Opportunity Score' to help advertisers track and improve campaign performance. This could help brands spot what's working faster and tweak their ads for better results.

@ THREADS

When Twitter took its final flight to become X, Meta seized the moment to launch Threads, offering a calmer alternative. Since its launch, Threads has grown to 130 million monthly users, and brands are starting to pay attention. Here are a few features to look out for.

The platform started testing ads with select brands in the U.S. and Japan, marking Meta's first move to monetise the platform. With 320 million monthly users, advertisers will get a fresh space to reach an engaged and steadily growing audience internationally.

The platform is adding a spoiler tag feature, letting users cloak their

posts in a little mystery, keeping plot twists and big reveals under wraps. Brands will be able to build hype with sneak peeks while users get to decide when they're ready for the full story.

The platform started working on 'Loops,' a community feature that will help users find and join groups around shared interests more easily. This could give brands new spaces to reach niche audiences while users connect over what they care about.

The platform is adding a feature to highlight popular search terms, making it easier for users to jump into real-time conversations. For

brands, this means quicker ways to spot what's driving chatter and shape their messaging accordingly.

Threads has started testing a feature that lets users schedule posts in advance, helping them stay active without being online all the time. This will be a handy tool to plan content ahead and stay consistent with the posting.

Threads is leaning into custom feeds as competition with Bluesky heats up, letting users now follow and share public custom feeds, giving brands and creators more ways to build niche audiences.



INSTAGRAM

Instagram is the one app I vividly remember getting a lot of us hooked on. With over 2 billion monthly active users globally and Instagram's ad revenue [projected](#) to reach \$32.03 billion in the U.S. by 2025, the app is now a major force in digital advertising. More than 2 million advertisers run paid campaigns on the platform, banking on its visual appeal and short-form content to drive sales. Here are a few features to look out for.

Instagram has switched to a 4:5 vertical grid, giving posts more height to better highlight vertical content, add more information, or make the posts more creative.

Creators can now also tweak thumbnails and reorder posts for a cleaner profile look, helping brands stand out visually.

Instagram is working on AI-powered tools that let creators edit videos by changing backgrounds outfits, and adding effects, making it easier for brands to create eye-catching, dynamic content.

Creators can now test Reels with a small group of non-followers before a full release, helping marketers fine-tune content based on fresh audience reactions.

A dislike button for comments

is on the way. It will let users downvote harmful or misleading replies, helping brands and creators manage conversations and keep their comment sections positive.

The new 'Edits' app is being rolled out. It will allow creators to fine-tune their posts without relying on pro editing tools, helping them save time and get content ready faster.

The platform is introducing in-chat translation for DMs. This feature lets users instantly convert messages into their preferred language, making it easier for creators and brands to connect with global audiences.



LinkedIn is expanding its test of a news banner on the mobile app, surfacing top stories above the feed, helping users stay updated on industry news without endlessly scrolling.

The platform is revamping its "Top Voice" blue badge program, recipients now hold the badge for six months, with performance reviews ensuring only active voices keep the recognition.

It is experimenting with larger, rounded-corner video panels in the main feed, designed to make video content pop and grab attention as the platform focuses more on video.

A new AI-powered "Job Match" tool on job listings now shows users how well their skills align with a role and offers suggestions to boost their chances, simplifying the job search process.

It is introducing an AI recruitment agent, aiming to streamline hiring by assisting recruiters in identifying the right candidates more efficiently.

The platform is bringing its mobile-style, vertical full-screen video format to desktop, making video viewing consistent across devices and giving creators more ways to engage audiences.

X (FORMERLY TWITTER)

X is expanding its 'Communities' feature, allowing users to create and join more niche, topic-specific groups. Brands can use these spaces to engage with highly targeted audiences while users enjoy connections with like-minded individuals.

The platform is introducing a 'Trend Tracker' feature, sending users real-time notifications about breaking trends and viral topics. Brands can use this to stay ahead of conversations while users stay informed without constantly refreshing their feeds.

It is testing an AI tool that suggests tweet ideas based on trending topics and user interests. This helps creators and brands stay relevant while users see more engaging and timely content.

The platform is launching a new revenue-sharing model for micro-creators, allowing users with smaller but highly engaged followings to earn from their content. This encourages more creators to join the platform while users benefit from diverse and authentic content on the app.

The platform has started experimenting with augmented reality (AR) tweets, allowing users to overlay digital elements in real-world environments. Brands can create interactive campaigns while users enjoy a more engaging and visually dynamic experience.

It is also launching premium, invite-only live audio rooms for verified users and brands, creating exclusive spaces for high-profile discussions. This gives brands a new way to connect with top-tier audiences while users gain access to exclusive content.

The platform is introducing 'Sustainability Badges' for brands and users who actively promote eco-friendly practices. This helps brands showcase their commitment to sustainability while users can support environmentally conscious accounts.

While social media marketing now offers more tools than ever, from automated scheduling to AI-powered content enhancement, the future will not be defined by platforms alone but by the stories brands and creators choose to tell. In a landscape driven by algorithms, it is originality and relevance that will ultimately capture and hold attention.

A QUICK CHAT WITH FCB KINNECT'S CHANDNI SHAH

Chandni Shah, Founder and COO, FCB Kinnect speaks to Karuna Sharma about the agency's roadmap for 2025 and the challenges that lie ahead for ad agencies.



Chandni Shah

The advertising industry is grappling with a growing challenge—its fixation on short-term wins at the expense of long-term impact. Since the digital revolution, metrics like likes, shares, and comments have become the benchmarks of success, while priorities such as market share, consumer loyalty, and trust are increasingly sidelined.

This shift in focus has also transformed the client-agency dynamic. As Chandni Shah observes, the preference for short-term projects is eroding opportunities to craft enduring brand narratives and culturally relevant campaigns. While these quick wins may deliver immediate results, they often come at the cost of building brands that stand the test of time.

In this interview, Shah tells us about FCB Kinnect's vision for 2025, focusing on how India can elevate its global standing by blending cultural relevance with cutting-edge tech craft and fostering an integrated mindset. The conversation also highlights the increasing strain on agencies as clients expand project scopes without proportional budget increases, amplifying the need to balance creative excellence with sustainable operations.

KS: Looking back at 2024, how would you assess FCB Kinnect's growth and new business? Could you share some key highlights, including notable client wins or standout campaigns?

CS: 2024 was a landmark year for us - a period of growth, transformation, and creative breakthroughs. The year began with landmark client wins like SBI and project wins with Flipkart, which allowed us to focus on maximizing the potential of our existing client partnerships. Instead of aggressively chasing new accounts, we concentrated on strengthening relationships with our 65 clients, cementing our role as a trusted, long-term partner.

At FCB Kinnect, integration is our soul, not just a strategy. By harmonising our homegrown verticals - media, tech, creative, and influencer marketing - we delivered cohesive, impactful solutions. This approach drove a 38% growth, eclipsing the industry's average of 6-12%.

One of our proudest achievements was winning a Cannes Lions for an integrated campaign where we put more than two years of effort, blending influencer strategy, cutting-edge technology, creative strategy and AI-tech. Another standout was the Perry Powerful Punch campaign, during the Women's Premier League, where we turned Ellyse Perry's six that smashed a Tata.ev window into a cultural celebration, sparking conversations and elevating the brand narrative.

We were honored with six 'Agency of the Year' awards across categories like Integrated, Creative, Influencer (twice), and Digital Innovation (twice). These accolades are a testament to the collective brilliance

of our teams and their relentless pursuit of excellence.

KS: How does the performance of India's advertising industry in 2024 compare to top creative markets like the US, France, the UK, and Canada? What lessons can we take from these markets, and what are some key areas India should focus on to elevate its creative benchmarks in 2025?

CS: While India has had standout years on international platforms, 2024 highlighted areas for growth. First and foremost, everyone is embracing integration. Campaigns are no longer medium-first but idea-first, with seamless execution across platforms.

Another standout lesson is the power of quick to market ideas that are deeply rooted in culture, like Heinz's 'Ketchup and Seemingly Ranch' campaign, which cleverly targeted Taylor Swift's fans. Such campaigns demonstrate how tapping into cultural moments drives powerful engagement. Additionally, international markets leverage data-driven insights and seamlessly execute ideas through technology.

“ While India excels in tech, there's a need to elevate the craft and creativity in tech-enabled campaigns. To elevate our global standing in 2025, India must prioritize cultural relevance, hone our tech craft, and continue fostering an integrated mindset. ”

What are some major goals you've set for FCB Kinnect in 2025, both in terms of business growth and evolving agency culture?

In 2024, we prioritised building strong creative leadership, bringing on board Neville Shah as our CCO and Priyanka Nair as National Strategy Director. Both have a proven track record in building legacy brands and driving transformative change.

For 2025, our focus is on winning market share - for both our clients and ourselves. With creative leaders like Yogesh Pradhan (Group ECD, West) and Nishant Pratap (Group ECD, South), we aim to deliver idea-first, platform-agnostic work.

Evolving agency culture is equally crucial. Through Kinnect EDGE, we're making significant investments in learning and development (L&D) to ensure every Kinnecter's growth. In an industry evolving at breakneck speed, continuous learning is non-negotiable. Our Chief Talent Officer, Neha Mishra, will lead Kinnect EDGE, ensuring it and the agency culture evolve to meet the needs of our team. We've even introduced individualised coaching for our leadership to guide the next generation of talent effectively.

Our guiding principle remains: sustainable growth fuels quality work. We're determined to not just sustain but surpass the remarkable growth trajectory we've achieved so far.

KS: What challenges do you foresee in 2025 for the advertising and marketing industry?

“Clients are increasingly favouring short-term projects over long-term relationships, limiting our ability to deliver sustained impact.”

While this may offer short-term gains for brands, it hampers the development of long-term brand stories. This shift often limits budgets for culturally relevant, real-time campaigns. Additionally, agencies face rising competition from boutique players, heightened client expectations for the same value, and the commodification of services, all of which squeeze margins. Another challenge lies in staying ahead of the curve as AI continues to redefine advertising. Upskilling remains critical, and we've addressed this through our structured L&D program, Kinnect EDGE, to ensure our team is always future-ready.

KS: The cost of acquiring and retaining good talent also remains a challenge across the industry. On an industry level, how do you think we can address this challenge?

CS: Attracting and retaining top talent starts with fostering a culture of growth, recognition, and

empowerment. With clients often renewing contracts at the same cost but with expanded scopes, the pressure on talent costs increases. Good talent understandably comes at a premium, but when utilised efficiently, they deliver exceptional returns through quality work.

KS: How important is it for agencies to embrace the convergence of digital and traditional strengths in today's market? What is FCB Kinnect's approach to striking this balance?

CS: The convergence of digital and traditional is no longer a luxury - it's imperative. In today's fragmented media ecosystem, clients seek holistic solutions, and consumers engage with campaigns on multiple touchpoints.

While other established agencies struggle to pivot, integration has been our foundation from the start. We've built service verticals - media, influencer, video, tech, web, creative, and strategy - all designed to work seamlessly together. This allows us to deliver integrated campaigns effortlessly. As other agencies work to catch up, we're well-positioned to lead the market.

KS: AI is both an opportunity and a concern for the advertising industry. How is FCB Kinnect leveraging AI while mitigating risks in creativity and talent?

CS: AI is an enabler, not a replacement. It enhances creativity by processing vast amounts of data, automating mundane tasks, and

offering fresh perspectives. At FCB Kinnect, we've embraced AI to improve efficiency and creativity.

Through IPG's global rollout of Interact, we've integrated cutting-edge AI tools into our processes. Strategic partnerships with Adobe, Amazon, Google, Nvidia, and Microsoft further strengthen our AI capabilities. Our in-house AI tool, My Bot, powered by Google's Large Language Models, streamlines tasks and enhances creativity through the Interact platform.

KS: What is the one leadership quality you believe will be most crucial for success in the coming year, and how are you nurturing it within yourself and your team?

CS: Continuous learning is a cornerstone of effective leadership, and it's something we deeply value at Kinnect. Building an agency from the ground up taught us the importance of staying curious and adaptable. As the industry evolves, so do our learning priorities.

Inclusive problem-solving is another vital leadership trait. Solutions should benefit all stakeholders - clients, employees, and the broader community - while aligning with our values. By investing in mentorship and promoting shared growth, we aim to empower our teams to lead with resilience and creativity.

HOW MUCH GEN Z IS TOO MUCH GEN Z?

With Gen Z's growing influence and loyalty, brands have rushed to target this cohort, but have they missed the mark in trying to stay relevant? Sneha Medda speaks to young ad agencies to understand whether the obsession with Gen Z in brand campaigns is overdone.

Ai Generated



In 2024, it felt like every brand was trying to crack the Gen Z code. Whether it was a fashion label, a food delivery app, or even a mattress company, everyone wanted to be the brand that 'gets' Gen Z. Some nailed it, and others tried a little too hard.

From slang-filled ads to meme-inspired campaigns, marketers scrambled to keep up. But in the rush to stay relevant, did brands actually connect with Gen Z, or just throw buzzwords at them? Did the obsession with this generation lead to fresh, relatable storytelling, or just a wave of trend-chasing that missed the mark?



Harshit Sharma

Founding Member and Sr. Brand Strategist at Youngun

Experts think there was a Gen Z overkill. Harshit Sharma, Founding Member and Sr. Brand Strategist at Youngun summed it up, “I feel in 2024, brands really went overboard with Gen Z targeting.”



Srishti Pandey

Creator & Founding member of The New Thing

The surge in campaigns wasn’t an illusion. “The sheer number of campaigns targeting Gen Z definitely increased in 2024,” said Srishti Pandey, Creator & Founding member of The New Thing. “From brands like Duolingo, who engaged with Gen Z throughout, to conventional brands like Uber or Google, everyone seemed to want a piece of the Gen Z pie this year.”

So, why is there a collective obsession with Gen Z? Experts point to two key reasons: their spending power and loyalty. By 2030, this generation is set to make up 36% of India’s workforce, driving \$730 billion in direct spending and influencing up to \$1.4 trillion in total spending.

“It’s simple math,” said Srishti Pandey. “Gen Z, typically aged 18-24, are the primary consumers of the internet and pop culture. In a sense, they’re rewriting the rules of consumer behaviour. Soon, this generation will make up one-third of India’s workforce, with significant buying power. It only makes sense to target them and win them over.”

Additionally, this generation is fiercely loyal. According to Medallia Market Research, 61% of Gen Z shoppers identify as ‘forever customers,’ making them a prized audience. “Gen Z are the new customers and buyers, so why not tap them early to build lifelong loyalty?” said Harshit Sharma. “Their early independence allows them to try different brands and eventually commit to one.”

But was all this targeting justified? Or did brands miss the mark by trying too hard to align with Gen Z?

DID IT GO TOO FAR?

Here’s the catch: not every campaign aimed at Gen Z hit the mark. Previously, while speaking to Social Samosa, many Gen Z industry folks had mentioned that they were over the dramatic portrayal of their everyday language and felt it was a big misrepresentation of the generation.

Take an Indian automobile brand’s attempt to use Gen Z slang like ‘GRWM’, ‘OMW’, and ‘SMH’. They twisted these terms into brand-specific versions. ‘Go riding with me,’ ‘On my wheels,’ and ‘Set my helmet’, which felt forced and inauthentic.

Srishti Pandey explained, “Trying too hard and viewing an entire generation with a linear mindset leads to narratives that feel like a force fit. A campaign using terms like ‘vibe check,’ ‘YKYK,’ and ‘throwing shade’ won’t work because it’s one-dimensional and unappealing.”



Gauri Burma

Founding Member and Creative Director, Fundamental

In contrast, she pointed to a footwear brand that succeeded by partnering with talent, resonating with a larger audience.

For Gauri Burma - Founding Member and Creative Director, Fundamental, the problem is brands ticking boxes they shouldn't. "In their pursuit of appealing to Gen Z, brands check all the boxes they shouldn't be checking: slang, memes, and embodying Steve Buscemi's 'How do you do, fellow kids?'"

So, how can brands maintain that balance? Gauri Bumrah said, "Trying to speak to Gen Z doesn't have to mean trying to speak like Gen Z. I would urge brands to dig a little deeper and speak to people, no matter what letter is appended to 'Gen' like they're actual people."

THE NEGLECTED CROWD

A recent study done on myths about Gen Z and Gen X notes that 41% of Gen X felt that their generation is not at all well-represented in the ads today.

One question looms large: Does this Gen Z obsession come at the cost of alienating older demographics?

Srishti Pandey believes it all comes down to who the brand is speaking to. "If the brand's primary audience and buyers are Gen Z, then why not?" she says.

For brands like Birds of Paradyes, whose main crowd is Gen Z and Millennials, it's all about speaking directly to that cohort. Their social media is proof of this, where every post is crafted to resonate with the younger generation.

However, this approach doesn't work for every brand. Take Flipkart, for instance. It's an e-commerce platform catering to every age group, so marketing to just Gen Z wouldn't make sense.

"If it's a brand that caters to a larger audience set, it's imperative they strike a balance so that both cohorts can coexist," Pandey suggests.

This means brands like Flipkart must find a way to appeal to both younger and older consumers without alienating either group.

A good example of a brand maintaining balance was YouTube India's 'Ganji chudail' campaign which included the viral meme and onboarded Neena Gupta, a well-known actor across age groups.

On the other hand, Harshit Sharma views the focus on Gen Z as a strategic decision. Brands honestly do not overlook other demographics because this is a great strategy and not a short-sighted one," he said.

For Sharma, targeting Gen Z is about future-proofing the brand. "Gen Z's opinions are now influential within their family and friend circles. Targeting them is a smart move to build long-term customer loyalty, as they can sway others to buy the brands they prefer."

HOW CAN 2025 BE BETTER?

The experts unanimously agree that authenticity should trump trend-chasing in 2025.

"Prioritising authenticity over trends is the first step," says Srishti. She urges brands to focus on universal themes like humour, resilience, and relationships. themes that resonate across generations.

Tailoring content for each platform is equally important. "In 2025, platform-specific content is crucial," she notes. "No one wants to see a 16:9 film on Reels anymore."

Gauri Burma emphasises the need for better storytelling. "The ingredient that makes a good ad has and will always be the same: the idea. Brands need to dig deeper and connect emotionally with their audience."

Looking ahead at 2025, the key lesson from Gen Z-focused campaigns so far is clear: authenticity and balance matter. While Gen Z's influence is undeniable, brands must avoid surface-level trends and instead focus on meaningful connections.

FROM IPs TO PODCASTS: INFLUENCER MARKETING TRENDS THAT ARE TRENDIER THAN FYP ALGO!

Shubham Singhal, CEO and Co-founder, Dot Media, shares insights on the trends that are set to dominate the social media landscape, including real-time content, comedy, vox pops, and shorter podcasts.



SHUBHAM SINGHAL

CEO and Co-founder, Dot Media

Trends change super fast. With our 30-second attention span, we also have a very short attention span for trends because influencers latch on to very few things when it comes to trends. But what's in store for 2025? The influencer marketing trends that are about to take over the industry this year are going to be huge.

Have you ever noticed how trends emerge, spread like wildfire, and then fade away? That's basically the trend cycle in a nutshell. It's no secret that trends start in the West

and eventually make their way to India. Influencers quickly latch on to these trends, and before we know it, they're everywhere. Then, of course, there are seasonal trends like Valentine's Day, wedding season, New Year's and so on. These trends are short-lived, but they create a lot of buzz while they're around. Music is another trendsetter in the influencer marketing world. With over 1.5 lakh songs being released every day, it's no wonder that music plays a huge role in creating and promoting trends. Whether it's a new song latching on to an existing trend or creating its own, music is a powerful influencer marketing tool.

Formats are another exciting area to explore. What's going to be hot in 2025? For starters, latent formats and real-time shows are expected to dominate the industry in 2025, and for good reason. This type of content has already gained popularity with shows like India's Got Latent, where contestants perform live, and voting happens in real-time. Comedy and non-scripted content are also expected to be big winners in 2025. Shows like Escape Room by Harsh Gujral and Ashish Solanki's Pretty Roast Show have already gained traction, and we can expect to see more comedians and content creators experimenting with non-scripted formats. Comedians will start curating their own IPs or shows online and offline, creating a

new wave of content that's hilarious and engaging. This format will allow comedians to connect with their audiences well, creating a more intimate and interactive experience that's unlike anything else out there. Voxpop content has already proven to be successful. In 2025, we can expect to see more content creators experimenting with vox pop formats, incorporating real-time conversations, debates, and discussions into their content.

Another trend that's going to continue to grow is podcasting. Every other creator seems to have their own podcast or talk show these days. But with so many podcasts out there, it's getting harder to stand out. Hence, we might see a shift towards shorter, more concise podcasts or even quick game quizzes. The long-form podcast might become a thing of the past as creators look for new ways to engage their audiences.

Lastly, 2025 is going to be an exciting year for influencer marketing. With new formats, trends, and technologies emerging all the time, it's going to be a wild ride. Whether you're a creator, a brand, or just someone who loves staying on top of the latest trends, there's never been a more exciting time to be in the influencer marketing space. So, let's see what the future holds!

DONNING MULTIPLE HATS: CMO PREDICT CHALLENGES OF 2025

Marketers speak to Shamita Islur on the evolving role of CMOs in 2025, highlighting challenges, consumer behaviour shifts and the need for strategic adaptability.



For years, the role of the Chief Marketing Officer (CMO) has been a topic of debate. Is a dedicated CMO still essential in today's business environment? We have seen countless articles debating the same. Over the past year, several companies, including Starbucks, Etsy, UPS, Nykaa, Walgreens, and The Good Glamm Group, have bid farewell to the traditional CMO role. Some have redistributed these responsibilities across other executive roles. Brady Brewer

transitioned from Starbucks' CMO to leading the company's international business as CEO, while Nykaa's CEO Falguni Nayar took on the role of the marketer when Shalini Raghavan stepped down from the role.

Today, the role of a CMO demands more than just marketing expertise. It requires donning the hat of a customer, a CEO, and a technologist simultaneously. CMOs need to keep pace with the rapid digital and technological evolution

while managing brand strategy, customer engagement, and cross-functional collaboration. But the challenges extend far beyond juggling responsibilities.

As marketers brace for 2025, they anticipate a year of unpredictability and complexity. To understand how CMOs are navigating the marketing landscape, we spoke with three seasoned marketing leaders. Their insights shed light on the future of the CMO role and the challenges they foresee in 2025.

NAVIGATING FRAGMENTED MEDIA AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOURS

For Raja Chakraborty, CMO at Continental Coffee, the landscape ahead looks unpredictable. “2025 is a year of uncertainty and volatility,” Chakraborty says, noting the challenges that will arise from a slowing economy, low consumer confidence and rising input costs. “While digital, e-commerce, and social commerce will continue to grow, CMOs will face a market environment more volatile than ever before.”



Raja Chakraborty

CMO, Continental Coffee

One of the most significant challenges, Chakraborty emphasises, is the fragmentation of media and content. “Consumer media habits have shifted dramatically. Digital is no longer an elite medium; its usage is now agnostic of consumer demography and socio-economic status,” he explains. As such, CMOs will need to design more sophisticated, multi-channel strategies to capture fragmented audiences.

“The days of just a TVC are certainly gone. In 2025, deeper and sharper definitions of target consumers will be required than ever before to be able to design a sharper communication strategy.”

With the explosion of online and offline worlds, Chakraborty sees another challenge for CMOs—understanding consumer behaviour across both. He shares that the brand construct in the offline world is quite different from the online world, in many cases. As e-commerce continues to penetrate new markets, he points out, “CMOs will need to understand these worlds well to be able to have a correct picture of the category dynamics to be able to develop the correct portfolio strategy.”

He also mentions that E-commerce and Q-commerce can act as an opportunity for CMOs if they embrace and provide new competitive strengths.

ADAPTING TO CONSUMER DISTRUST AND TALENT RETENTION

Ashish Nair, Chief Marketing Officer at Kotak Life Insurance, also sees 2025 as one of rapid evolution. With this, consumer behaviour is also changing. “Marketing is evolving at an unprecedented pace,” he says, acknowledging the growing awareness and savvy

of today’s consumers. In a world swamped with content and choices, one of Nair’s primary concerns is engaging the distracted consumer. “Building trust and relevance in such an environment will require creating meaningful connections that resonate deeply and stand out amidst the noise.”



Ashish Nair

CMO, Kotak Life Insurance

Additionally, with the fragmented landscape in the picture, Nair points out the demand for omnichannel presence and the struggle to balance content quality and quantity.

“The pressure to produce content at scale can sometimes lead to a compromise in quality and insight,” he shares. For 2025, he advises brands to prioritise thoughtful, data-driven storytelling over sheer volume, ensuring innovation within tighter budgets.

When it comes to human resources, Nair indicates that the younger generation of professionals prioritises work-life balance and flexibility. “This shift in priorities means that traditional workplace models are no longer enough to attract and retain talent,” according to him. Marketers will need to focus on retaining and nurturing this talent.

EMBRACING TECHNOLOGICAL CHANGE AMID ECONOMIC UNCERTAINTY

Pratik Mazumder, CMO of Mahindra Holidays & Resorts, adds another layer to the conversation, particularly regarding the external challenges that CMOs will face in 2025. “Economic uncertainty, rapidly advancing technologies, and stricter data privacy regulations will impact how brands reach and engage customers,” Mazumder shares. The increasingly stringent data privacy laws will require marketers to rethink their data strategies and ensure they are compliant while still engaging consumers effectively.



Pratik Mazumder

*CMO, Mahindra Holidays
& Resorts*

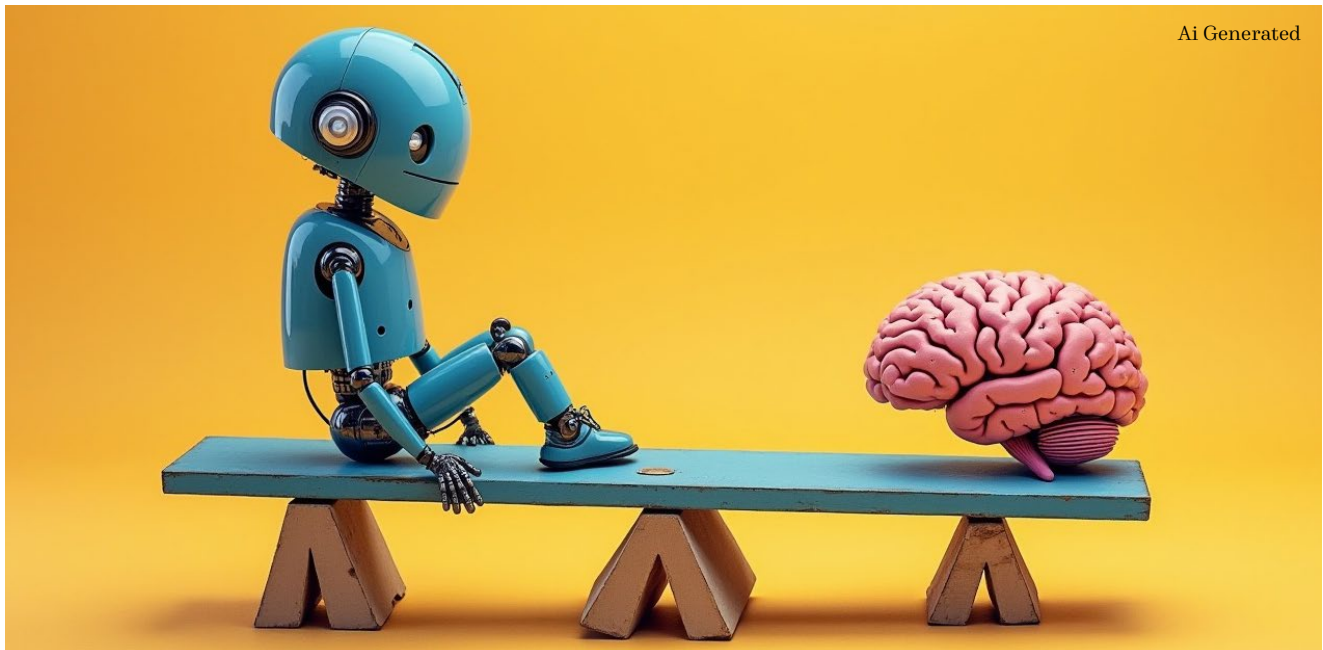
Mazumder also stresses the importance of internal factors that could affect marketers’ goals. “Internally, marketers will need to align their strategies with business objectives while managing tighter budgets and ensuring cross-functional collaboration,” he says. According to him, the challenge is not just understanding external dynamics but integrating those insights into the broader organisational goals.

The marketers’ opinions are making one thing clear – the role of the CMO will continue to evolve, requiring both agility and foresight. From navigating media fragmentation and e-commerce dynamics to managing economic uncertainty and the changing workforce, CMOs will need to not only adapt but lead with creativity and strategy.

Chakraborty believes that a CMO has to wear the hat of a consumer as well as that of a CEO in order to strike a balance, while Ashish Nair alludes that challenges, much like garden weeds, can never truly be eliminated. As marketing continues to face unprecedented challenges, CMOs must embrace these shifts with adaptability and a keen eye on long-term goals, ensuring that both the brands they represent and the industries they shape can thrive in the years ahead.

TO AI OR NOT TO AI?: AN ADVERTISER'S DILEMMA

To answer the question, Shamita Islur dives into some AI-generated advertising controversies from last year, exploring how brands risk losing authenticity, creativity and public trust when AI is not used thoughtfully.



I asked ChatGPT about its thoughts on AI-generated advertisements. Here's what it had to say: "AI-generated advertisements are a fascinating evolution in marketing, but they come with significant ethical, creative, and societal challenges."

Well, no arguments there. The question is why, despite these challenges, are brands still flocking to AI-generated ads like moths to a flame?

AI'S BUILT-IN BIAS

One of AI's biggest flaws is its inherent bias, which seeps into advertising as well. AI models are trained on vast amounts of existing data, reinforcing existing

stereotypes rather than challenging them. Whether it's gender, race, or socio-economic status, AI-generated content could potentially make problematic assumptions, and in the world of advertising, this can quickly turn into PR nightmares.

For example, Amazon's hiring algorithm initially favoured applicants based on words like 'executed' or 'captured,' which were more commonly found on men's resumes. The brand stopped using the algorithm once it realised the flaw.

Similarly, independent research revealed that Google's online advertising system displayed high-paying positions to men more often than to women. Given its

bias, businesses cannot possibly benefit from systems that produce distorted results and foster mistrust among people of colour, women, individuals with disabilities, the LGBTQ community and other marginalised groups.

AI'S CREATIVE THEFT

AI-generated content is built on the backs of artists, writers and publications—many of whom never consented to their work being used in the first place. This has sparked lawsuits and larger ethical debates. In India itself, news agency ANI, along with other publications, is battling with OpenAI over copyright violations.

The advertising industry thrives on originality, yet AI, by its very nature, is remixing existing works. The irony? The brands rooting for AI ads also pay hefty sums to agencies claiming to protect intellectual property.

IS IT INNOVATION OR THE DEATH OF CREATIVITY?

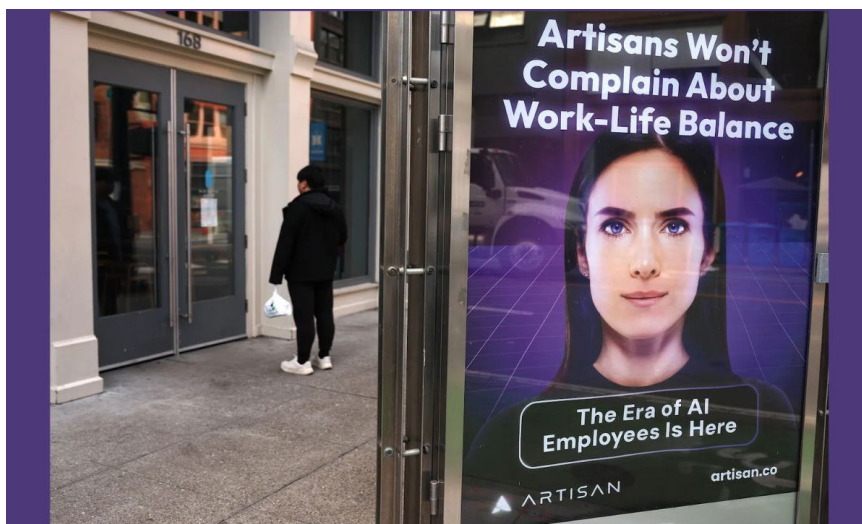
I know you might think that those aren't the only two possibilities. But hear me out.

Despite its flaws, 79% of organisations in India are ramping up their AI budgets in 2025. However, advertising is about emotion, storytelling and human connection—qualities AI is still struggling to replicate convincingly.

Since 2020, we have seen AI-generated ads that have made a positive impact, such as Cadbury's Diwali ad. But soon after, the herd mentality kicked in, with everyone wanting a piece of the AI pie. It didn't matter how AI is utilised – just incorporating it in an ad is enough to make it 'innovative.' And that's where things start going wrong.

Take AI start-up Artisan's 'Stop Hiring Humans' billboard campaign. The billboards featured messages like "Hire Artisans, Not Humans" across San Francisco—a city already struggling with economic disparities.

The backlash was immediate. While Artisan reportedly gained over \$2 million in revenue from the campaign, the public outcry over AI displacing human jobs raised ethical concerns. Is this the future we want? A world where companies exploit human anxieties to sell their AI products? Oh wait, they already do that with non-AI products.



Because let's be honest, marketing has always had a habit of pushing boundaries—sometimes too far. Take fear-based marketing, for instance. It's an age-old trick—convincing you and me that without a certain product, we are somehow incomplete, unprepared or even socially unacceptable.

Brands love jumping on the latest trends, hoping it will make their campaigns feel fresh and forward-thinking. But there's a fine line between innovation and alienation. When marketing loses sight of human instincts, things go sideways. AI advertising is no different. If Artisan's billboards implied that humans are easily replaceable, Google's Olympic ad 'Dear Sydney' made it seem like human sentiments needed AI's help to be meaningful.

The ad sparked outrage by suggesting that a heartfelt fan letter should be AI-generated. It featured a father helping his daughter write a letter to her favourite athlete. Instead of encouraging her to put pen to paper, he turned to Google's Gemini AI to "get it just right."

Many slammed the ad as "the worst, saddest, most bummer of a use of AI". Viewers felt using AI stripped the ad of authenticity. Test Your Ad data showed that while audiences liked the father-daughter storyline, their emotional connection dropped the moment AI got involved. It suggested that audiences like the story but not the message. The lesson? AI can enhance experiences, but when it replaces human effort with something deeply personal, it turns people off.



That's the problem. The basics of good advertising—emotion, authenticity and relatability – get tossed aside when brands use AI just because they can.

Apple's Crush ad faced similar criticism. The ad depicted various creative tools like musical instruments, paintbrushes and cameras being crushed into the brand's new iPad. Its message? The iPad can replace all these creative tools. But the response led to outrage. The ad was seen as a metaphor for AI replacing human creativity, and it left a sour taste among creatives who felt their craft was being trivialised.



While AI ads have talked about replacing human creativity, what about the ads that attempt to take inspiration from existing creativity? Coca-Cola's AI-generated Christmas campaign was meant to be nostalgic, but it ended up feeling soulless. The ad, created by three AI studios—Secret Level, Silverside AI and Wild Card, attempted to recreate the magic of the brand's 1995 'Holidays are coming' ad. Instead, it was met with criticism for lacking warmth and authenticity. What was meant to be a holiday tribute ended up looking like a cheap imitation.



That's not all, Spotify's largest marketing phenomenon comes from its Wrapped campaign but was accused of being an AI-generated slop in 2024. Users were frustrated with its bizarre, seemingly AI-generated genre names like 'Pink Pilates Princess Strut Pop.' Reddit and X were flooded with complaints about how the experience felt impersonal. One user even said that AI is a tool, but "it needs quality control."

According to research from NielsenIQ, consumers can easily recognise video ads created with generative AI and find them to be annoying, boring and confusing.

WHAT DOES IT SAY ABOUT ADVERTISING'S FUTURE?

The advertising industry is at a crossroads. While AI is here to stay, how it's used will determine whether it's a breakthrough or a gimmick. The biggest missteps happen when brands use AI to replace human connection rather than enhance it.

People don't want AI telling them how to feel. They don't want their creativity crushed into an iPad, their holiday nostalgia AI-generated, or their heartfelt fan letters outsourced to a chatbot. AI in advertising should be an aid, not a replacement. The future of advertising isn't AI or humans; it's AI with humans. Get that balance wrong and you have got another controversy on your hands.

THE NON-BUSINESS OF CONTRACTS

Prathap Suthan of BITM breaks down why small agencies keep getting the short end of the stick. No contracts, no limits, just endless work and shrinking pay. His fix? Ironclad contracts and an industry watchdog to keep things fair. Because in advertising, creativity should thrive, not just survive.



Prathap Suthan

Managing Partner & Chief Creative Officer, BITM

The advertising industry runs on ideas.

Big ideas and small ones - ideas that shape brands, campaigns, and conversations.

But the foundation is shaky when it comes to smaller, independent agencies. Not because the ideas aren't there but because the structure isn't.

Let's start with contracts. Or the lack of them.

Sometimes, small agencies are strong-armed into signing vague, open-ended agreements. Or worse, none at all.

There's no clear scope of work. No limits. Some clients refuse even to entertain the conversation.

It's a take-it-or-leave-it scenario. Too bitter to swallow. Too sweet to spit out.

And so, agencies leap. They take a calculated risk to win the business.

But more often than not, the gamble backfires. Work piles up, the scope creeps like a silent intruder, and the financial strain tightens its grip.

This is not sustainable.

The answer is simple: tighter contracts.

Contracts that protect agencies from being overrun by unrealistic demands. Contracts that define, in no uncertain terms, what is expected, how much, and within what timeframe.

But a contract is only as strong as the teeth behind it. That's where an industry body comes in.

This is a support system for smaller agencies, a collective voice, a registry where contracts are filed and disputes are resolved, and a watchdog to ensure fair play in an increasingly ruthless market.

Starting such a body is no small task, and I've been writing about it for some time now.

Of course, there are challenges, but a step must be taken. Small agencies can no longer navigate this terrain alone; they need a lifeline.

Because the landscape has changed.

Social media has reshaped the rules of the game. Platforms like Facebook, Instagram, X, and LinkedIn each demand their own language, triggers, and formats.

A creative that works on one platform fails spectacularly on another.

And with each new platform comes more work. More deliverables. More pressure.

The clients don't always understand this. Even if they do, they prefer not to acknowledge.

They expect one-size-fits-all solutions; when that doesn't work, the agency falls.

AI could help, eventually. But for now, it's not there yet.

The complexity of this space requires human intervention, creativity, strategic thinking, and, most of all, talent.

But talent isn't cheap. Talent is the cornerstone of every agency. It's what wins business, shapes campaigns, and builds brands.

Talent needs to be paid. Properly. Consistently. Without that, the whole structure crumbles.

Today, smaller agencies are stretched thin. They're expected to be jacks of all trades, handling everything from packaging to scripts to full-fledged campaigns.

But when you try to be everything, you end up undervalued. Clients demand more while paying less, and the bottom line suffers.

The solution calls for a collective shift.

Contracts that are filled, not fudged. Contracts that prioritise fairness over desperation. Contracts that recognise the scope of modern advertising, from the ever-evolving formats of social media to the intricacies of talent management.

Agencies also need to specialise. To lean into their strengths instead of trying to do it all.

To say no when a project stretches its limits beyond reason. It's about working smarter, not harder.

But none of this happens in isolation. It needs a push, a movement.

An industry body to lead the charge. A body that supports, protects, and advocates for small, independent agencies. That's what I aim to build.

Once I've resolved some of my own challenges, it's a fight I plan to take on. Because without structure and support, the industry risks eating itself alive.

Independent agencies are the heart of this business. Agile. Fearless. Relentlessly creative.

They deserve better. They deserve a framework that works for them, not against them. And it all starts with contracts.

Tighter, smarter, fairer.

It's not just the foundation of a business. It's the future of the industry.

AND, POSITIONS...

After a year of mergers and shifting client demands, agencies are refining their game. Some are doubling down on creativity, others on integrated solutions. Sneha Medda speaks to agency leaders on their 2025 game plan.

The advertising industry in 2024 was a balancing act. Agencies had to juggle creativity and commerce while also navigating a wave of consolidation. Some of the biggest names in the business joined forces, reshaping the agency landscape to offer more integrated solutions.

This wasn't just about getting bigger; it was about staying relevant. Clients weren't just looking for great campaigns anymore, they wanted strategic partners who could drive real business impact, blending creativity with data and technology. In response, agencies spent the year sharpening their positioning. Some leaned into full-service models, while others doubled down on pure creative thinking, abandoning redundant work and prioritising impactful work.

So, what's next? Industry leaders break down how they're positioning themselves for the year ahead.



Gaurav Arora

Co-Founder of Social Panga

For us at Social Panga, 2025 is all about AI taking centre stage, but if there's one thing we need to re-look, it's our mindset: "Question Everything. Change Anything."

AI is amazing—it's changing how we work, create, and connect. But real creativity? That's still human. It's the spark, the gut feeling, the bold idea that no algorithm can replicate. We don't see AI as competition—we see it as a tool to help us move faster, think bigger, and push boundaries in ways we never could before.

Great ideas don't come from playing it safe. They come from taking risks, breaking rules, and seeing the world differently. At Panga, we mix human imagination with cutting-edge tech to create work that actually matters.

We are looking forward to seeing how AI and Creativity can be played with and used to build path-breaking campaigns, in 2025.



Mehul Gupta

Co-Founder & CEO at SoCheers

SoCheers is setting the stage to become the most sought-after creative growth partner for brands by 2025, redefining the digital space with bold ideas and measurable impact. We're not just executing campaigns anymore—we're forging deep, strategic partnerships that go beyond the brief, tackling business challenges head-on and uncovering new growth opportunities through a seamless fusion of creative, media and technology. We aren't running the race to have the next trending campaign, but we are walking through with our partners, where we build long-term impact instead.

With a strong commitment to data-driven innovation, we ensure that every strategy isn't just groundbreaking but also delivers tangible results. With the digital world evolving at lightning speed, we're driving headfirst into the pulse of culture, mastering short-form video, redefining influencer collaborations and exploring next-gen technology and platforms to keep brands not just relevant but unforgettable.

At SoCheers, our vision is simple: when brand leaders face tough marketing challenges, we want to be their go-to partner, helping them drive meaningful, sustainable growth that stands the test of time.



Neeraj Bassi

Chief Growth Officer at Cheil X

Cheil pioneered the concept of Business Connected Agency—BCA, and in 2025 we will be taking the philosophy to the next level with more award-winning connected campaigns that bring in business results.

Our existing clients like MG Motor, TVS X, JK Tyre & Luminous already see us as an integrated partner for all their GTM requirements. We have handled multiple launches for them from the idea conceptualization down to the last element of execution on the ground. In 2025, our attempt would be to take the BCA philosophy to a wider audience and become the reference point for result-oriented integration in the industry.



Pallavi Chakravarti

Founder & CCO at Fundamental

We're positioning ourselves exactly the same as we have since the one-point-something years we've been around. And a large part of our clarity comes from knowing what we definitely are not.

We're not a one-stop-shop-power-of-one setup. We don't do BAU. We don't go looking for "creative" ideas that spike vanity metrics and ephemeral virality.

And we're definitely not "chuffed and stoked at being able to deliver to clients the efficiencies of holistic creative solutions that harness the power of data-driven technologies for transformative business results."

We speak simple English, Hindi and a handful of other languages and understand how advertising actually works, an art that has been lost or clouded by the word salads agencies serve up on the regular nowadays.

Which brings me to what Fundamental definitely is. A group of creative strategists who understand and can calibrate the fine balance between logic and magic. We deliver on persuasion, engagement, affinity, awareness or consideration creation every time we get behind a brief. Our work gives brands disproportionate ROI and a business advantage in the real world, when an actual problem or goal presents itself. For us, creativity is the means to an end, not the end in itself.



Prashant Puri

Co-Founder & CEO at AdLift

At AdLift, we're proud to celebrate 16 years of driving digital success for brands worldwide. In 2025, we're not just keeping pace with the digital revolution—we're leading it. AI is redefining marketing; we're at the forefront of this transformation. Our AI-driven tools and advanced data analytics empower businesses with real-time, predictive insights, ensuring every marketing move is backed by intelligence. As data-driven decision-making becomes the norm, we are positioning ourselves as the go-to experts in leveraging AI to decode consumer behaviour, optimise campaigns, and deliver measurable growth.

Beyond automation, we are pioneering hyper-personalization—crafting dynamic, AI-powered content strategies that adapt to individual user preferences. Our goal is to help brands create deeper, more meaningful engagements with their audiences.

At AdLift, we're not just adapting to change—we're driving it. By fusing AI, personalisation, and data-driven strategies, we're setting new benchmarks for marketing innovation and ensuring our clients don't just compete but lead in the digital-first world.



Rohan Bhansali

Executive Chairman & Co-founder at Gozoop Group

In 2025, agencies are evolving beyond traditional models, positioning themselves as dynamic, leadership-driven organisations that embrace agility and innovation. Gozoop Group is at the forefront of this transformation, positioning itself as an independent creative advertising agency. It is expanding across multiple verticals, fostering entrepreneurship, and exploring joint ventures and mergers and acquisitions to drive sustainable growth.

As part of this evolution, HAWK, the Online Reputation Management (ORM) arm of Gozoop Group, will continue to enhance customer experiences and ensure brands build meaningful, lasting connections while proactively mitigating potential risks. On the digital creative front, we are focusing on effective advertising and delivering integrated 360-degree campaigns across TV, DVCs, print, and media, crafting seamless brand narratives that drive impact.

At Gozoop, people are at the heart of everything we do. A strong, purpose-driven work culture is essential to fostering creativity, innovation, and long-term success. By investing in leadership development, continuous learning, and an environment that nurtures strategic thinking, we empower our teams to thrive. Prioritising employee well-being and growth not only enhances talent retention but also strengthens our ability to deliver effective, business-driven marketing solutions. In an ever-evolving industry, a motivated and engaged workforce is our greatest competitive advantage.



Ramanuj Shastry

Creative Chairman & Co-Founder at Infectious Advertising

In 2025, Infectious plans to position itself as the most 'interesting' independent agency in town. We intend to leverage Insightful creativity with the power of data and tech to create impact. This year, we aim to delight our partner clients and build deep, authentic connections with customers. As storytellers, we will harness the power of AI to tell stories in whole new ways.

No matter how hyper-personalised we get, we will never lose sight of the fact that we are in the business of magic. We will remain ethical and inclusive because it's important to be nice.

In 2025, we plan to stay agile and keep learning. As culture constantly shifts, the brands in our care have to stay current and relevant. Our goal is simple: do great work, stay connected to the people and embrace the new.



Saurabh Varma

Founder & CEO at Wondrlab Network

In 2025, Wondrlab will continue to redefine what it means to be a marketing network. We are moving beyond the traditional agency model to become a full-scale marketing ecosystem—combining Martech, Adtech, and Digital Business Transformation to drive real business impact. Unlike legacy networks that operate in silos, Wondrlab is built to integrate creativity, technology, and media through a full-funnel approach, ensuring brands get not just campaigns but measurable growth solutions.

What sets us apart is our hybrid model—we are not just a service-led agency but a network that is also building proprietary marketing products. This allows us to scale innovation, optimise efficiencies, and deliver performance-driven solutions at a global level.

As the industry shifts toward outcome-based marketing, our approach ensures that brands can connect with consumers more effectively, leverage AI and automation, and unlock new digital business opportunities. Wondrlab is not just keeping pace with change; we are shaping the future of marketing networks from India to the world



Vanaja Pillai

President, 22feet Tribal Worldwide and Head - DEI at DDB Mudra Group

It has been an exciting couple of years for 22feet with brave clients, challenging briefs and diversity in the kind of work we have had the opportunity to do. Going into 2025, we will stay true to our ambition of being the growth agency—one that partners our clients to drive growth for their businesses. The route to that will continue to be disruptive and creative approaches that we have had success with. Creative solutions will continue to be at the heart of our work and our joy.



Vikas Chawla

Co-founder of Social Beat

In 2025, we are doubling down on our advanced media capabilities with a focus on integrating media with the right strategy, creative approach and analytics. The second key focus is marketing automation and leveraging the best of automation and Gen AI to drive Aim is to drive business outcomes for large consumer brands in India.

AD FILMMAKERS ON VISUAL AD TRENDS IN 2025

The flux in storytelling and type of humour in 2024 accompanied striking visuals in some ads—some, however, maintained a formulaic approach. Harshal Thakur of The Pulse asked ad filmmakers to share visual storytelling trend(s) they would like to see in 2025.

If 2024 was the year of advertising's humour renaissance, 2025 might be the year it finds its soul again. The industry, always in a tug-of-war between substance and spectacle, seems to be at a crossroads. While last year saw punchlines take center stage so much so that comedy earned its own category at Cannes, there's a growing restlessness among filmmakers. The laughter is wearing thin, and the real question looms: What comes next?

For many ad filmmakers, the answer isn't about abandoning humour but refining it. The craving now is for storytelling that feels intentional—humour that isn't just a string of gags but is woven into the narrative fabric. There's a collective call for advertising that doesn't just entertain at the moment but leaves an imprint long after the scroll.

The bigger shift, however, is towards storytelling that moves beyond gimmicks, celebrity endorsements, and AI-driven gloss. Filmmakers are yearning for a return to emotionally resonant, well-crafted narratives—

the kind that once defined iconic campaigns. They want ads that don't just chase virality but build lasting brand identity. They want the kind that once gave us the Titan jingles, the Hutch pug, or the surreal explosion of colours in Sony Bravia's legendary campaign.

At the heart of this conversation is a rejection of homogeneity. There's visible fatigue with visually overprocessed ads, where rapid-fire cuts, exaggerated transitions, and an obsession with "trendiness" have made everything look eerily the same. Many directors are calling for visual storytelling that respects stillness, composition, and emotion—less about how fast an image moves and more about how deeply it resonates. They want to see a sense of individuality, risk-taking, and artistic vision emerge in 2025.

Technology's role in advertising will, of course, continue to expand, but there is scepticism about letting AI dictate creative choices. While AI-generated visuals are making their way into the mainstream, filmmakers agree that true storytelling still needs a human touch—something raw, imperfect, and emotionally charged. Personalisation through AI may be inevitable, but without authentic narrative depth, it risks becoming just another layer of noise.

Perhaps the most striking undercurrent in the discussions is a call for advertising that matters—beyond selling products, beyond fleeting engagement metrics. It's not necessarily about purpose-driven campaigns in the traditional sense but about brands daring to create work that feels meaningful. Whether through nostalgia, cultural reflection, or sheer creative audacity, the industry is at a moment where it must decide: Will 2025 be another year of interchangeable content or will advertising find its way back to bold, unforgettable storytelling?

One thing is certain: ad filmmakers are ready to push for the latter. The question is, will brands follow?

Ad directors and filmmakers share their thoughts on the visual storytelling trend(s) they would like to see in 2025:



Aarti Neharsh

*Film Director and Writer, Green
Chutney Films*

“More story-first ads where the writing is the real hero and not the influencer/ celebrity. Ads that work even without a ‘known face’ pull.

Well-crafted humour, less gags.

Well-written emotional narratives, less preachy manipulations.

More storytelling with emotional, honest insights that give brands an identity. Our versions of the Titan jingles, Pond’s googly-woogly-woosh and Hutch’s ‘You and I’. This would mean ads not just for short-lived scroll-and-forget consumption but actually building a brand story that stands the test of time.”



Aleya Sen

*Director/Co-Founder, Chrome
Pictures & Minikin DGWorks*

“In 2025, I’d like to see visual storytelling in ads continue to evolve with a focus on staying rooted in the emotional power of narrative. AI will undoubtedly shape personalisation and creativity, but the core of effective storytelling remains in the ability to connect emotionally with the audience.

Though nostalgia will continue to be a powerful tool, I’m inquisitive to explore the era of technology we’re stepping into. Additionally, there will be a stronger emphasis on inclusivity and diversity in visual narratives, ensuring that ads reflect a wide range of perspectives. Ultimately, the most successful campaigns significantly strike a balance between visually stunning aesthetics and the emotional depth that drives engagement.”



Arunima Sharma

Director, Colour Palette Films

“Less of the same old. More self-expression. I’d love to see more risky, individualistic storytelling emerging from writers and directors. Visual language is defined by the story, not trends. No stylisation/ camera movements/ transitions for the sake of it. Because all ads looking like each other are boring.”



Disha Rampal

Director-Creative Producer

"I'd love to see a more sophisticated merger between nostalgia & connective storytelling. An entire generation being able to collectively reminisce an iconic moment in history/art or culture "of their time" by feeling immersed in or feeling a part of an ad - that sounds like a vibe! It's ironic, though because it's like remembering our old raw, authentic (pre-tech ruined selves) using nuanced technology.

The other one I would love to see is "Stripped down" ads—more focus on narrative—a hold on a moment. Giving the audience a chance to actually feel something without throwing dopamine bombs of crazy camera movements or VFX/SFX."



Joshua Upputuru

*Founder Joshua Tree Films,
Filmmaker, VFX Producer
/Consultant*

"I would love to see brands and their clients summon the courage to create and release work that truly matters—work that resonates and leaves a lasting impact. Advertising has the power to influence society at large, and it's high time brands harness this influence in meaningful ways.

I'm not just talking about taking a stand on serious societal issues—though that's important, too. Even beyond that, brands can use their voice to make a difference, whether through small gestures that inspire positivity or bold campaigns that challenge the status quo.

There was a time when some of the biggest brands led the way, setting examples of advertising with purpose. But lately, it feels as though many are holding back, hesitant to take risks or step outside their comfort zones. It's time to bring back that fearless creativity and remind the world what purposeful advertising can achieve."



Kopal Naithani

Founder/Director, Superfly Films

"2024 was the year humour made a big comeback, even getting its own category at Cannes, which it richly deserved. But the folly always lies in flooding the market and while humour is lovely to see, the storytelling is beginning to feel a little repetitive.

This year I hope to see more in terms of human-centric narratives...stories that resonate deeply and reflect the complexities of our society. We need more evocative storytelling that not only entertains but also offers introspection and mirrors the world around us."



Mahesh Gharat

Director, Hungry Films

“We have seen the evolution of AI being used for visual storytelling in advertising and marketing in 2024. Some major brands are incorporating AI into their communications. However, it is still at an initial stage, with much to learn and implement. I foresee a mix of AI and live shooting happening in 2025. While we are still far from capturing real motion with AI, I believe it will be increasingly used for more dramatic visualisations and animations.”



Shirsha Guha Thakurta

Director, Oink Films

“Ads with some story please. Less gimmicks and more idea driven. Somewhere we have lost the stories and ideas which were so strong earlier in advertising.”



Tarannum Pasricha

Filmmaker-Writer

“I’d personally like to see more fashion films. And I don’t mean the regular TVCs and DVCs for fashion brands. I mean real fashion films where experimental creativity can go a little berserk. The ones that look like Bjork music videos but are only showing off the new autumn-winter collection by Dior.

I’d also really like good storytelling to return to the present, when adverts told stories that were larger than life. It’s been a while since we had those. Just yesterday, YouTube reminded me of the craziest commercial for Sony Bravia, which featured colours exploding out of monstrous buildings. Just to say that their TV had a beautiful colour display.

When it comes to visual storytelling, I’d love to see more static frames. balanced and composed like works of art. Stillness feels so undervalued these days, lost in the race to cater to shrinking attention spans. Everything hurtles forward at breakneck speed, leaving little space for tranquillity. But perhaps that’s just my perspective. The masses seem to revel in the frenzy, in the chaos. As for me? I’d love to depict even violence with deliberate elegance and a Beethoven score underscoring the intensity - much like Kubrick.”

WHEN LEADERS BECOME BRANDS

In today's digital age, engaging with audiences and embodying brand values is becoming non-negotiable for leaders. Joe Sinha explores how CxOs are redefining brand leadership through social media.



There was a time when youth role models in India were limited to sportspersons, primarily cricketers, who continue to command massive fan bases. However, a new wave of role models has emerged in recent years—entrepreneurs and CEOs who actively engage with audiences through social media and address customer concerns directly. Unlike earlier eras, where founders like MDH's Late Dharampal Gulati or KFC's Colonel Sanders became the face of their brands through traditional mediums, modern leaders use platforms like Instagram and LinkedIn to embody the brand's values and build trust in real-time.

Social media is no longer optional for brand leaders. It enables them to connect directly with customers and effectively handle crises by addressing issues transparently and promptly. One such example is Zomato CEO Deepinder Goyal, who frequently takes to social media to

respond to grievances, clarify controversies, and assure customers of corrective action. His proactive approach not only strengthens customer trust but also demonstrates accountability, especially in situations that could otherwise harm the brand's reputation.

This shift reflects a broader trend of moving beyond celebrity endorsements to emphasise authentic leadership, where founders become an extension of their brand. In an age where much of the content is repurposed or derivative, this originality allows brand leaders to carve out unique identities for themselves and their businesses, standing apart in a crowded marketplace. In today's digital era, it is a necessity for leaders to step in, actively engage with their audience, and reinforce the values that their brands stand for, especially during critical moments. Here's a look at some of the leaders who have turned into brands.



AMAN GUPTA

*Co-founder and CMO
of audio brand boAt*

Aman Gupta, Co-founder and CMO of audio brand boAt has taken charge of the brand's marketing strategies, especially following his rise to fame on 'Shark Tank India.' In December 2022, boAt partnered with Netflix to launch new wireless headphones in India, featuring a campaign with celebrity Kiara Advani and a special [appearance](#) by Gupta. His involvement in the [campaign](#) helped increase the brand's visibility and strengthened its connection with a wider audience. His hands-on approach to marketing, alongside the brand's celebrity endorsements, reflects the growing trend of CEOs and co-founders becoming the face of their brands, creating authentic connections with consumers.



ANUPAM MITTAL

Co-founder of Shaadi.com

Anupam Mittal, Co-founder of Shaadi.com, has become a key figure in shaping the brand's marketing, particularly with his appearance in a campaign where he takes on a superhero persona. He has led initiatives like [Shaadi Live](#), a regular event offering singles the chance to meet up to 10 potential matches through 5-minute video calls every 10 days. Mittal also starred in the '[Anupam ki Shaadi](#)' campaign, where he shared his personal journey, highlighting the platform's evolution from its inception to its current success. Mittal's active involvement in campaigns not only humanises the brand but also strengthens the connection with users, making him an integral part of the platform's ongoing success.



BHAVISH AGGARWAL

Co-founder and CEO of Ola

Bhavish Aggarwal, Co-founder and CEO of Ola Electric has recently increased his presence on social media, engaging openly with users and responding to feedback on platforms like X (formerly Twitter). Known for his direct approach, he has become a more visible figure in tech and mobility discussions, often sharing updates on Ola Electric's progress alongside personal insights. Aggarwal's candid and sometimes witty posts have made him a more approachable figure, allowing followers to see the human side of the CEO. In October 2024, his online interactions sparked a brief [controversy](#) with comedian Kunal Kamra over service quality, leading to a 9% drop in Ola Electric's stock. Despite this incident, Aggarwal's active engagement has continued, demonstrating his commitment to connecting with his audience and maintaining transparency.



DEEPINDER GOYAL

Co-founder and CEO of Zomato

Deepinder Goyal, Co-founder and CEO of Zomato, has become a highly visible and relatable [figure](#), not only through his leadership but also his active engagement with both consumers and employees. His transparency on social media, where he shares personal moments, company updates, and candid reflections, has helped build a strong personal brand that resonates with the public. Whether addressing criticisms head-on or interacting with customers and employees, Goyal's open, honest communication has played a crucial role in earning trust and loyalty.



KUNAL SHAH

Founder of CRED

Kunal Shah, the founder of CRED, has become an influential figure in the fintech space by cultivating a strong personal brand while leading the company. Known for his candid [thoughts](#) shared on social media, paired with relatable memes, Shah engages directly with his audience, giving a human touch to the business. His approach to marketing has made CRED stand out, with quirky, nostalgic ads such as Rahul Dravid as [Indiranagar ka Gunda](#) and [Kumar Sanu](#) as an insurance seller. This, combined with his online presence and candid opinions, has positioned him as a relatable and influential figure, particularly among the youth.



NIKHIL KAMATH

*Indian entrepreneur & investor
best known for co-founding Zerodha*

Nikhil Kamath is an Indian entrepreneur and investor best known for co-founding Zerodha, India's leading retail stock brokerage firm. Despite dropping out of school after the 10th grade, Kamath's passion for finance led him to establish Zerodha in 2010 with his brother, Nithin Kamath. Since then, the firm has changed India's brokerage market, serving over 10 million clients. In recent years, Kamath has grown his influence through social media, where he actively engages with his audience. He has also ventured into podcasting, interviewing a diverse range of influential figures, from tech giants like [Bill Gates](#) to Bollywood [actors](#), and even the [Prime Minister of India](#). His platform offers valuable insights into entrepreneurship, leadership, and personal growth, extending his influence beyond the finance sector.



PEYUSH BANSAL

CEO of Lenskart

Peyush Bansal, the laid-back and observant CEO of Lenskart, took a unique approach to the brand's [campaign](#) with Karan Johar, aiming to position himself as the face of the brand. The campaign highlighted Lenskart's direct-to-consumer model, eliminating middlemen to offer stylish, affordable eyewear. Bansal's understated persona, combined with a casual and humorous conversation with [Johar](#), made the brand more accessible and connected with a broader audience. His rise to fame following his appearance on 'Shark Tank India' amplified this connection.



SHASHANK MEHTA

CEO of The Whole Truth

Shashank Mehta, CEO of The Whole Truth, has strategically positioned himself as the face of the brand, using [educational](#) content to foster trust and drive sales. Known for his hands-on approach, Mehta leads the brand's ad [campaigns](#), incorporating a personal touch that resonates with consumers. This authentic, no-nonsense attitude has made Mehta a key figure in the health food sector, with his personal values aligning with The Whole Truth's ethos. Mehta's role as both CEO and brand ambassador exemplifies the growing trend of leaders becoming integral to their brands, forging deeper connections with audiences and building lasting consumer trust.



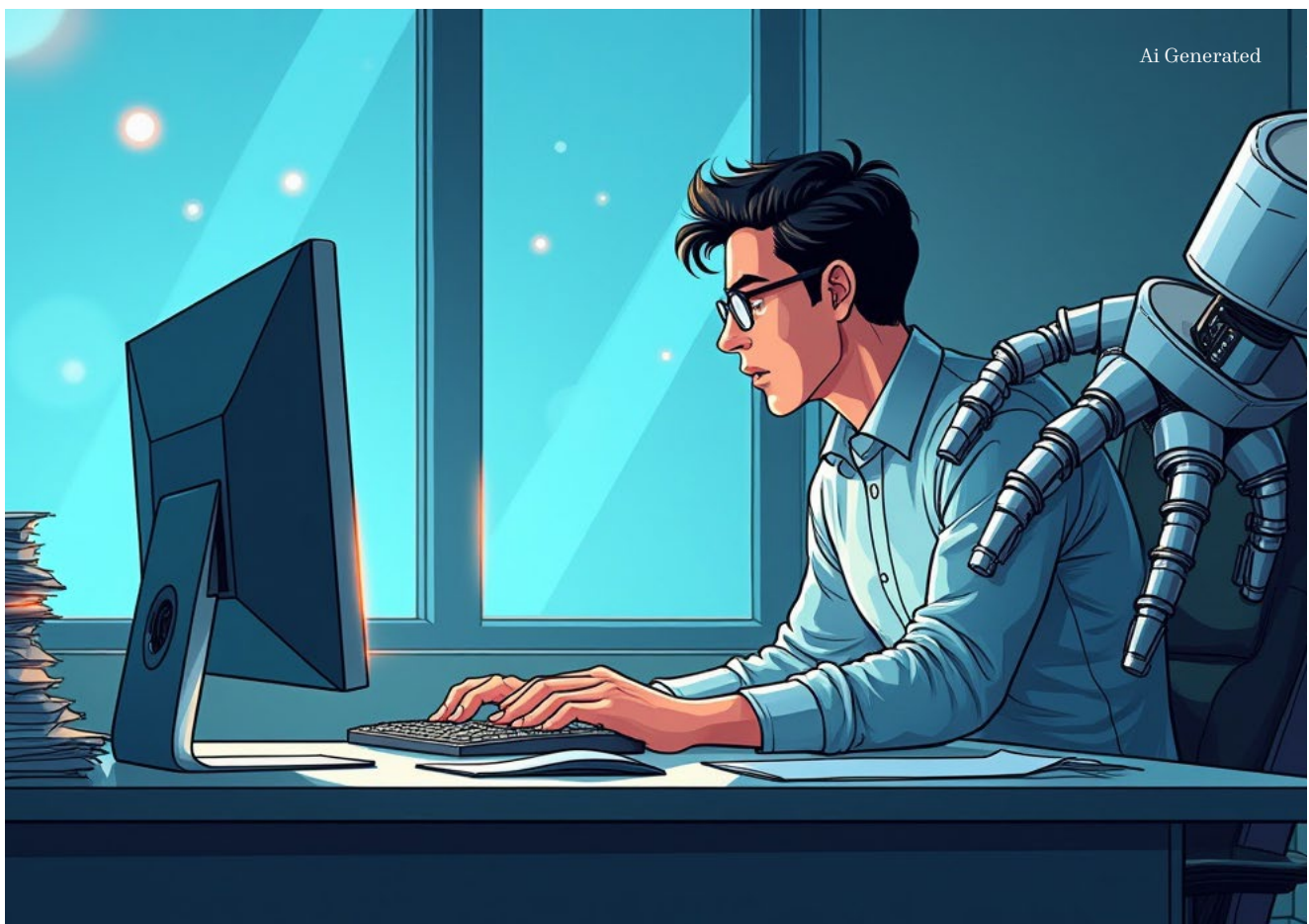
VINEETA SINGH

CEO of SUGAR Cosmetics

Vineeta Singh, CEO of SUGAR Cosmetics, has become synonymous with the brand, blending her personality with its identity. Known for her lighthearted yet serious business approach, Vineeta's active role on Shark Tank India showcased her sharp entrepreneurial skills while allowing her relatable, fun side to shine. She has embraced internet [memes](#) about herself, using them to engage with her audience, even recreating one of them humorously. In one of SUGAR Cosmetics' [campaigns](#) featuring Ranveer Singh, Tamannaah Bhatia, and Vineeta, the brand's smudge-proof and waterproof products were cleverly highlighted, directly associating the CEO with the product's qualities.

In an era where authenticity and transparency are paramount, brand leaders have evolved from merely being the face of their companies to becoming integral in shaping their brand's narrative. By embracing social media and directly engaging with consumers, they foster stronger, more relatable connections, ensuring their companies stay relevant and resilient in a rapidly changing marketplace. Moreover, many of these leaders are stepping into the role of CMO, driving their brands' marketing strategies and aligning their values with company messaging.

REACHING THE END OF THE NEVER-ENDING AI JOURNEY



While AI is often touted as a game-changer, Shamita Islur explores how the pressure to adopt it intersects with real business needs. In this article, marketers share how they are navigating the pressure to adapt to AI, balancing its potential as an enabler with the need to maintain authentic consumer connections and thoughtful adoption.

Fifteen years ago, marketers used to be asked about their five-year digital marketing plans. For Dhimant Bakshi, CEO of Imagicaa World, who has been in the industry for 30 years now, long-term planning feels like a relic of the past.

You would believe that digital marketing was still evolving at a manageable pace back then. However, it evolved so fast that any long-term plan quickly became outdated. The same can be applied to the AI-driven world. “AI is evolving rapidly, and no one can claim to be an absolute expert,” Bakshi reflects. If you don’t adapt to technology and instead stick to the old ways of doing things, it will be our loss more than anything else.”



Dhimant Bakshi

CEO of Imagicaa World

THE MOUNTING PRESSURE ON MARKETERS

The pressure to adapt is real. According to Adobe’s report, 81% of consumers expected brands to fully embrace generative AI by the end of 2024. But while consumers are anticipating AI-

powered experiences, marketers are struggling with its rapid advancement. A LinkedIn survey found that 72% of marketers feel overwhelmed by how quickly their jobs are changing, while over half (54%) worry that failing to master AI will leave them behind in their careers.

Philip Kotler, the father of modern marketing, once said, “The preferences of always-on customers constantly change, putting pressure on businesses to profit from a shorter window of opportunity.” In this AI age, that window is getting even smaller.



Kiran Giradkar

Chief Marketing Officer of BN Group

Kiran Giradkar, Chief Marketing Officer of BN Group, notes, “2024 was a year where the promise and challenges of AI became clearer than ever for marketers. While AI is often hailed as a game-changer, the pressure to adopt it can sometimes feel like jumping into a race without knowing the finish line.”

BALANCING AI’S ROLE AS AN ENABLER

For marketers, the challenge is not just about using AI but using it wisely. “The goal is to embrace AI as a strategic enabler while ensuring it complements—not overshadows—the human touch that defines great marketing,” says Ayesha Huda, Chief Marketing Officer of Mars Pet Nutrition India. “In India, where emotional storytelling, authenticity, and human connection are deeply ingrained in consumer behaviour, AI can be a powerful ally but must be used thoughtfully.”



Ayesha Huda

Chief Marketing Officer of Mars Pet Nutrition India

AI’s biggest promise lies in hyper-personalised consumer engagement, predictive analytics, and automation. However, it also presents a conundrum. According to Giradkar, while AI has increased the speed and efficiency of content creation, it has also shifted the expectations of creative teams.

“The biggest balancing act has been maintaining authenticity,” Giradkar adds. “AI excels at efficiency but often struggles to replicate the emotional depth of human storytelling. As marketers, we must ensure our reliance on AI doesn’t compromise the genuine connections we build with consumers.”

DO MARKETERS NEED TO IMPLEMENT AI IMMEDIATELY?

To ensure that AI doesn’t compromise genuine connections, there’s a simple truth: not every area needs immediate AI adoption. Marketing might have seen its impact in content creation, but it has yet to figure out how to leverage it in other disciplines. It’s about making thoughtful choices rather than succumbing to hype.

Despite the challenges, companies are finding practical ways to integrate AI into marketing. For instance, Pedigree’s ‘Fosterverse’ campaign leveraged AI to create custom ads featuring adoptable shelter dogs, tailoring each ad to the viewer’s location.

The ads were designed to reflect the characteristics of each dog and the viewer’s local environment, making them highly relevant and emotionally engaging.

“This innovative use of AI not only enhanced consumer engagement but also aligned perfectly with Pedigree’s purpose-driven mission,” says Huda. “It demonstrated how AI can be a powerful enabler in addressing real-world challenges and creating a deeper connection between brands and audiences.”

AI helped the brand bridge an emotional gap, making adoption feel more personal and accessible. But for brands operating in more experiential domains, the role of AI is shifting toward precision marketing and operational efficiencies.

Imagicaa’s Dhimant Bakshi shares how his team is leveraging AI to refine marketing efforts and improve customer experiences.

He explains, “Google and Meta have powerful personal identification algorithms that help us reach the right audience more effectively. This sharpens our communication”.

His team has also improved chatbot functionality, CRM tools, and customer feedback segmentation. In payments, aggregators and gateways are using AI to detect fraud. Additionally, Imagicaa is piloting AI-based customer profiling to improve its internal campaigns.

SMART AI ADOPTION, NOT BLIND ADOPTION

AI adoption is inevitable, but it must be approached methodically. “Unlike giants like Reliance or Tata, we don’t have to be first in everything. Instead, we focus on methodical adoption, ensuring there is proof of concept before making large commitments,” Bakshi notes.

Some people fail to differentiate between generative AI, standard AI, and machine learning. According to Bakshi, most AI applications today rely on machine learning, which is effective and practical.

While AI adoption is essential if marketers want to stay in the business, Giradkar has noticed that it doesn’t always live up to its promises.

“Poor-quality data has led to disappointing results, and overhyped claims from AI tools have fallen flat.” In 2025, he believes what marketers need is a mindset of continuous learning.

“The key will be to stay curious, embrace change, and keep learning. AI is a rapidly evolving field, and by fostering collaboration within AI-focused communities and learning from experts, we can turn challenges into opportunities. Ultimately, it’s about using AI to enhance—not replace—our ability to tell meaningful stories.”

As AI continues to reshape marketing, one thing remains clear – the brands that will thrive are the ones that understand AI is not a magic trick but a tool that can amplify creativity, efficiency, and consumer engagement when wielded wisely.

This is why marketers like Ayesha Huda, Dhimant Bakshi, and Kiran Giradkar are encouraging their teams and themselves to become proficient in digital marketing. AI sits on top of that layer.

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