



LOOKBOOK

The trends reshaping brand-consumer dynamics

Today's consumers control their platforms, content, and brands. As marketers compete for attention and approval, they must create a consistent brand identity that withstands consumers' constant reinvention of the narrative.

Consumers are trimming their budgets, raising expectations for brands, and feeling fatigued by digital messaging. And with social sharing trends pushing even the average consumer to emulate influencer culture, the landscape has grown even more complex. To combat this, marketers must take an omnichannel approach that connects a range of touchpoints, from social media ads to pop-up activations, through a clear and consistent value proposition that meets consumers where they are.

MADE POSSIBLE BY



Consumers set their own engagement terms

Whether skipping ads or sharing their brand experience on TikTok, multiplatform media has made consumers less passive in their marketing engagement.

Dive deeper

Consumers are used to media multitasking

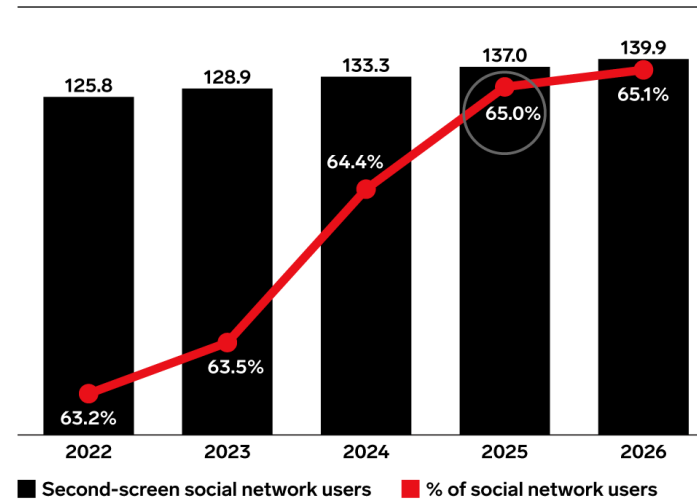
- Some 65% of social network users watch streaming content or TV while scrolling, EMARKETER forecasts. When marketers rely on one screen to reach their target audience, it's easy for that message to be missed.
- US consumers are overwhelmed by marketing content, with 40% unsubscribing from brand emails and texts at least once a week, significantly higher than the global average of 25%, according to GetApp.
- With high turnover rates and channel churn, staying memorable requires seamless visibility without bombarding your audience. An omnichannel strategy helps marketers deliver an integrated experience that follows the consumer, helping cut through the noise.

Consumers control digital discourse

- Compelling messaging and storytelling (64%) and brand consistency (63%) are the top-performing creative tactics for US brands and agencies, per Digiday.
- Social platforms, where consumer voices drive discourse, have shifted power away from brands. While marketers can't control where their brand appears, they can invest in upper-funnel messaging that tells a cohesive story across platforms.
- When brands have a solid and consistent identity, they are more resilient to negative or off-brand representation.

Nearly Two-Thirds of Social Network Users Are Watching Streaming Content or TV While Scrolling

% of US second-screen social network users, 2022-2026



Note: ages 18+; individuals who use a social network via desktop/laptop computer or mobile device (browser or app) while watching digital video or traditional TV content on a TV set at least once per month
Source: EMARKETER Forecast, Jan 2025

352963

EM | EMARKETER

What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

“Brands can’t always control the conversation, so they should lean into it. An omnichannel approach empowers consumers to engage and express themselves naturally, in the channels they prefer. Ensuring consumers can engage with brands everywhere they are is helpful in creating that consistency and helps build momentum.”



Heidi Waldusky

VICE PRESIDENT
OF BRAND MARKETING,
QUAD

“Consumers are co-authoring the narrative. The strongest brands aren’t pushing a message from the top down; they’re building it with their customers in real time. Consistency is even more powerful when it’s shaped by the people living it. That’s how brands can really deliver authenticity.”

Consumers want to make more thoughtful purchases

Consumers are becoming more intentional with their spending, led by younger generations.

Dive deeper

Younger generations are setting budgets

- More than half (55%) of Gen Zers use advanced budgeting tools—a greater share than any other generation, according to PYMNTS Intelligence.
- Even when spending remains steady, consumers are questioning what makes a product worthwhile—especially in social-shopping-driven categories like beauty. Increased consumer scrutiny on perceived value for money (56%) is the biggest theme for beauty executives, according to Business of Fashion and McKinsey & Company.

Consumers are critical of the fast-moving trend cycle

- Some of today's top TikTok trends celebrate spending less: 3 in 5 Gen Z consumers follow “underconsumption core” on TikTok, a trend encouraging less spending in categories like dining, clothing, and subscriptions, per Chain Store Age.
- This pressure to justify purchases has implications for brands. To influence purchase decisions, brands must have a consistent and clear value proposition across all platforms.

Gen Z Leads the Pack in Budgeting Tool Adoption

% of US adults, on their use of budgeting tools, by generation, May 2025

Gen Z (1997 or later)



Millennials (1981-1996)



Gen X (1965-1980)



Baby boomers (1964 or earlier)



Total



- **Advanced budgeters:** Use at least 1 advanced tool* or financial advisor
- **Basic budgeters:** Use at least 1 basic tool or bank app for budgeting
- **Nonbudgeters:** Do not use budgeting tools

Note: n=2,040; numbers may not add up to 100% due to rounding; *e.g., expense trackers, specialized budgeting apps
Source: PYMNTS Intelligence, “New Reality Check: The Paycheck-to-Paycheck Report,” June 23, 2025

What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

“Intentionality means different things to different consumers. Whether it’s cutting back to reduce waste, choosing sustainable or organic products, buying only from brands that align with their values, or simply managing a tighter budget, brands need to know exactly who their core customer is and ensure their ethos aligns with what that customer prioritizes.”



Heidi Waldusky

VICE PRESIDENT
OF BRAND MARKETING,
QUAD

“People crave real, tactile experiences that feel authentic and meaningful, and younger consumers are no exception to that. Our research shows 63% of Gen Z and millennials have a strong interest in catalogs, direct mail, and other types of physical media from brands. They’re asking to be surprised and delighted.”

Consumers are making it harder for brands to win their trust

As options expand, earning consumer trust becomes harder and losing it becomes easier.

Dive deeper

Consumers have more choices and higher expectations

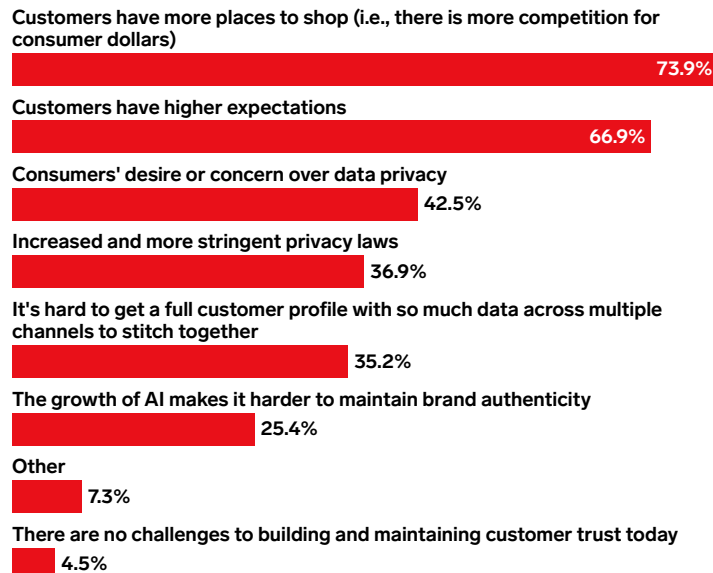
- Marketers have felt the impact of expanded consumer choice. Brand marketers and agencies say that consumers having more places to shop (73.9%) is the top challenge in building and maintaining their trust, per EMARKETER and Klaviyo.
- As options expand, so do expectations for pricing, experience, and credibility. To meet these expectations, brands can show up with purpose and consistency across every touchpoint. Offering a seamless experience reinforces trust and encourages long-term engagement.

Credibility drives consumer confidence

- As consumers prioritize mindful spending, they seek genuine brand partnerships and endorsements. This is clear in influencer marketing—authentic reviews, including negative ones, are what makes consumers most likely to trust creator recommendations, according to impact.com and EMARKETER.
- To win trust in this environment, consumers must reinforce their credibility through consistent, transparent messaging across all channels influencing purchase decisions.

Top Challenges in Building and Maintaining Customer Trust Among Brand Marketers/Agencies Worldwide, Sep 2024

% of respondents



Note: n=287

Source: EMARKETER and Klaviyo, "Building Customer Trust Survey," Sep 10, 2024

288647

EM | EMARKETER

What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

"As the marketplace gets increasingly crowded, it truly comes down to the basics: the right product, at the right price, in the right channel. An omnichannel strategy ensures brands show up consistently across touchpoints, staying top of mind for consumers. To break through the noise, brands need to step back and assess the combination of channel and consumer intent. A thoughtful mix of brand and performance messaging can help: Use benefit-led content to build brand love and product-focused messaging to drive more immediate sales."



Heidi Waldusky

VICE PRESIDENT
OF BRAND MARKETING,
QUAD

"Today's consumers are more empowered than ever. They have more choices and a sharper eye for authenticity. That means brands can't just show up occasionally or inconsistently; they have to behave with purpose and deliver a seamless, consistent experience across touchpoints. Consumers' 'BS detectors' are strong, so any mismatch between what a brand says and does quickly erodes trust."

Consumers want to get offline, and brands can meet them there

Social media users will keep growing, but time spent will peak this year, EMARKETER forecasts.

Dive deeper

Consumers are spending less time scrolling

- As scrolling slows, marketers can focus on real-world interactions instead of competing against digital noise.
- This is especially true for younger consumers, who are the most digitally engaged and the most fatigued. Most (81%) Gen Zers say, “I often wish I could disconnect from digital devices more easily,” according to The Return of Touch report by The Harris Poll and Quad. While younger consumers drive social platform growth, many are actively trying to reduce screen time.

In-person experiences strengthen consumer connections

- As consumers seek intentional, offline interactions, brands can stay memorable by investing in physical touchpoints.
 - 78% of consumers prefer in-person social experiences to digital-only.
 - 60% of Gen Z and millennials say waiting in line at a hyped retailer is part of the fun.
 - 65% of consumers look forward to receiving catalogs and mailers from brands.
- Offline experiences let brands connect with consumers more deeply and without distraction. In a fragmented digital landscape, an effective omnichannel strategy with physical touchpoints can strengthen brand memorability and trust.

Types of Brand Experiences Noticed and Remembered by US Adults, Feb 2025

% of respondents



Note: top 3 responses (sometimes/often/always)

Source: Quad, “The Return of Touch: Reimagining Consumer Engagement in 2025” conducted by The Harris Poll, May 13, 2025

What the experts say



Suzy Davidkhanian

VICE PRESIDENT, CONTENT,
EMARKETER

“As digital interactions dominate much of our day (whether for work, entertainment, or communication), it’s no surprise that consumers of all ages are excited about physical experiences that surprise and delight. This is where a well-executed omnichannel strategy shines. Success doesn’t come from leaning into one channel alone, but from seamlessly connecting them all to deliver a cohesive brand experience.”



Heidi Waldusky

VICE PRESIDENT
OF BRAND MARKETING,
QUAD

“When people meet one another, the first impression usually comes through a handshake. It’s how you show up and set the tone. For brands, your first real, physical touchpoint is your brand’s handshake—whether it’s the smooth slide of a product box, the glossy pages of a catalog, or the crisp edges of a mailer. In a world tired of endless scrolling, these IRL connections are the handshake that breaks through digital fatigue and makes your brand truly memorable.”

The experts



Suzy Davidkhanian

Vice President, Content, EMARKETER

Suzy Davidkhanian is a principal analyst, covering retail and ecommerce. Suzy has nearly 15 years of experience in retail—from store level to buying and planning—and marketing, where she most recently led the consumer insights and market trends team at Macy's. Suzy earned her MBA at the University of Chicago Booth School of Business and prior to that was an in-house public relations executive for five years.



Heidi Waldusky

Vice President of Brand Marketing, Quad

Heidi Waldusky is the vice president of brand marketing at Quad, helping to architect Quad's transformation as a marketing experience company. Before going brand-side, Heidi spent over 15 years in the agency world, using her creative and strategic skills to create ownable business ideas and help clients win over audiences.

Related resources

Watch industry thought leaders on webinars, and ask questions live
Check out our [upcoming and on-demand events](#).

Stay informed with daily newsletters
[Sign up for timely digital trends](#) delivered straight to your inbox.

Hear us analyze news and trends on podcasts
Tune in to [Behind the Numbers: The Daily](#) and [Reimagining Retail](#).

Get the bigger picture
Our research is trusted by industry leaders. Over 100,000 business decision-makers, including many of the Fortune 1000 and most major media companies and agencies, subscribe to EMARKETER research. Learn if your company [subscribes](#).

We are here to help

If you are an EMARKETER research client and have questions, please contact ii-help@emarketer.com

If you are not a research subscriber, please send inquiries to ii-sales@emarketer.com



EM Studio is EMARKETER's premier design and content studio delivering custom multimedia experiences. By marrying data-driven insights with superior design and production value, we help our clients tell actionable stories for business decision-makers engaging with our media channels.

EM Studio—where intelligence meets invention.

[Learn More.](#)