



# 2026 TOP 10 TECH & MARKETING TRENDS

## 1

**HYPER-PERSONALISATION ACROSS TOUCHPOINTS**

Brands will increasingly deliver highly personalised content, offers, and experiences across every customer touchpoint. Leveraging data on behaviours, preferences, and past interactions, marketers can tailor messaging and recommendations to individual segments, creating relevant and timely experiences. Hyper-personalisation strengthens engagement, builds loyalty, and drives conversions, ensuring each interaction feels meaningful while enhancing overall customer satisfaction and long-term brand affinity.

## 2

**HEALTHY MEETS CONVENIENT:  
THE RISE OF SMART FOOD CHOICES**

For marketers, healthy yet convenient food demand is accelerating. Consumers seek nutritious options that fit fast paced lives. Winning brands simplify health through ready to eat formats, functional benefits, and clear messaging. Convenience, transparency, and taste drive adoption and loyalty.

3

## SHORT-FORM VIDEO AND LIVESTREAM SHOPPING AS THE PRIMARY ENGAGEMENT CHANNEL DRIVING PURCHASES



Short-form videos on TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts will dominate engagement, particularly among younger audiences. Snackable content combined with livestream functionality will act as interactive storefronts, accelerating live shopping adoption. This enables real-time product discovery and purchases, allowing brands to connect, engage, and convert consumers instantly on digital channels.

4

## CREATOR ECONOMY & MICRO-INFLUENCER DOMINANCE



There will be more brand collaborations with micro-influencers and creators who have highly engaged niche communities. Authenticity, co-creation, and community relevance will outperform traditional celebrity endorsements or scripted campaigns. Leveraging these trusted voices allows brands to foster deeper connections, enhance credibility, and drive engagement, creating meaningful interactions that resonate with target audiences and support long-term loyalty.

5

## PURPOSE DRIVEN MARKETING BACKED BY VISIBLE PROOF



Consumer preferences will lean toward brands that demonstrate sustainability through tangible actions rather than broad claims. Visible proof such as eco-friendly packaging, product durability, affordability, wellness benefits, and measurable social impact will drive trust and loyalty. In 2026, marketers should focus on communicating clear, authentic evidence of purpose, linking initiatives directly to everyday consumer benefits to strengthen credibility and foster meaningful, long-term brand relationships.

6

## ADAPTING VIDEO CONTENT AUTOMATICALLY FOR MULTILINGUAL AUDIENCES



Online videos are increasingly adapting to each viewer's language through AI dubbing, voice cloning, and real time translation. A single video can now scale across markets without reshoots while preserving natural tone and accurate lip synchronisation. This unlocks faster global reach and more inclusive communication. Marketers should design video strategies around language flexibility, supported by reliable AI localisation tools.

7

## GEN Z GOES VIRAL: HOW CO-CREATION SHAPES 2026 MARKETING



Younger audiences thrive on creating viral content using trending audio, filters, clips, and dance challenges. Marketers can tap into this by providing shareable templates, sounds, or prompts, enabling authentic co-creation, driving virality, and resonating with participatory, creative youth.

8

## BUILDING TRUST THROUGH INTERNAL BRAND ADVOCACY



Influencer marketing based on reach and follower counts is reaching credibility limits, as audiences increasingly value the trust and authenticity behind a message. As we enter 2026, attention is shifting toward employees, marketers, customers, and local communities. Companies are activating employees as internal brand influencers, delivering product-led, credible messaging while reducing reliance on external creators. Effective internal creators combine product expertise, audience insight, and storytelling skills, turning marketing into authentic “relationship media” that builds trust over time.

9

## THE RISE OF “AI-SELECTED BRANDS”



By 2026, generative AI will fundamentally transform search, shifting consumer behaviour from comparing websites to relying on AI-generated summaries, recommendations, and conversational guidance. Traditional keyword SEO will give way to Answer Engine Optimisation (AEO) and Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO), where visibility depends on being a trusted source cited by AI rather than ranked in links. Consumers increasingly use AI to explore ideas, plan, and compare products, making search bars creative, interactive canvases. Brands must provide clear, credible, and human-centred content structured with FAQs, schema, and strong topical authority so AI can accurately extract, summarise, and recommend it.

10

## SUPERCHARGING SALES WITH AI PROSPECTING



AI cold calling is reshaping pipeline generation at scale. AI powered voice agents identify ideal prospects, personalise conversations with natural language, and deliver credible local accents. Compared to traditional cold calling, AI enables high volume outreach with consistent quality and rapid optimisation. This allows sales teams to focus on closing, while marketing and sales collaborate on compliant, value driven scripts and precise audience segmentation.



# 2026

## TREND FORECAST

BY ASIA MARKETING  
FEDERATION ASSOCIATIONS



# BANGLADESH

## Marketing Society of Bangladesh

A human-centered view of how consumers and brands are changing.

### 1. Living For The “Now”: Consumers Want Joy Today, Not Promises Tomorrow

Life has felt uncertain for too long, and people across Asia — especially young adults — are done waiting for someday. They want moments of joy right now. Small wins. Tiny holidays. Affordable treats. Loyalty rewards that don't take years. This isn't impulsiveness. It's survival. And it's smart.

For brands, the message is clear: Make progress feel immediate. Break big rewards into small, meaningful steps. Celebrate inchstones, not milestones.

### 2. AI Becomes The New Starting Point For Everyday Decisions

More Asians now turn to AI not just to search, but to think with them. People use conversational tools to explore ideas, design their homes, plan trips, or compare products — visually, verbally, intuitively. Search bars are becoming creative canvases.

What brands must do in 2026: Show up with helpful, human content that AI can understand and recommend. If AI can't “read” your brand, consumers won't see it.

### 3. Your Next Customer May Not Be Human — It Might Be An AI Agent

AI agents are quickly becoming part of people's daily routines — from shopping assistants to personalised planners. Consumers will soon say: “My AI will pick the best option.”

So brands must speak two languages: The emotional language of people. And the structured, clear language that AI agents can process. If AI agents don't know your brand, they won't choose it.

### 4. Young People Don't Just Watch — They Want To Create With You

Gen Z and Gen Alpha grew up making content, not just consuming it. For them, creativity is participation. They want to remix your brand, reinterpret your stories, and help shape your universe.

#### Smart brands in 2026 will:

- Invite audiences into the creative process
- Release characters, sounds, templates, and worlds
- Let creators take the lead instead of scripting them tightly

This is the era of **co-creation, not broadcast.**

### 5. Nostalgia Returns — Not As A Memory, But A Remix

When the world feels unstable, people reach for familiar comforts. But in 2026, nostalgia isn't about re-running old commercials — it's about **reinventing them.**

- A classic jingle reimaged.
- A beloved character redesigned.
- A vintage product brought back with a modern twist.

It's comfort meets creativity.

The brands that win will: Blend old emotions with new ideas to create shared joy across generations.

### 6. Sustainability Becomes Practical, Personal, And Prove-It-Now

People want to make better choices — but they don't want lectures, guilt, or vague promises. In 2026, sustainability wins when it feels:

- Tangible
- Useful
- Good for the wallet

Durability, repairability, reduced bills, long-lasting products — these matter more than grand slogans.

**The new rule:** Don't tell people to save the planet. Show them how your product saves *them* time, money, and stress.

### 7. Micro-Communities Become The Heart Of Social Media

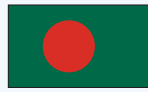
Large social platforms feel too noisy, too commercial, too impersonal. People are gathering in **small, interest-driven communities** where they feel understood. These spaces reward authenticity, not advertising.

#### In these communities, brands succeed when they:

- Show up genuinely
- Offer real value
- Partner with trusted community voices
- Participate in conversations, not dominate them

It's no longer about reaching everyone — it's about mattering to the right ones.





# BANGLADESH

## Marketing Society of Bangladesh

A human-centered view of how consumers and brands are changing.

### 8. Inclusion Evolves From “Good Intent” To “Everyday Reality”

Diversity and inclusion are no longer marketing themes — they are expectations. Consumers want to see:

- Products that fit real bodies
- Shades that match real skin tones
- Languages and stories that reflect daily life

Representation is no longer symbolic. It's practical.

**Brands in 2026 must:** Move beyond performative messaging towards products, experiences, and teams that reflect the real Asia.

### 9. Synthetic Data And Digital Twins Make Insight Faster (And More Human)

Marketers are discovering that AI-generated “digital twins” — virtual versions of customers — can help understand needs before launching anything. Instead of waiting for surveys or expensive studies, teams can simulate how different groups might respond.

#### This helps brands:

Test faster.  
Learn faster.  
Reduce risk.  
Stay closer to real customer behaviour. It makes insights more human, not less.

### 10. The Most Successful Brands Will Be The Ones That Experiment

Playing safe feels comfortable — but it's no longer enough. The brands shaping Asia's future are the ones that try new ideas constantly, break patterns, and learn faster.

Innovation is no longer tied to big budgets. AI tools now let small teams create big things.

In 2026, brands grow by:

- Testing more ideas
- Rewarding experimentation
- Allowing creative risks
- Letting data shape, not dictate, bold moves

The biggest risk now is not taking any.

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Contributed by: Marketing Society of Bangladesh





# INDONESIA

## Indonesia Marketing Association

### 1. AI-Driven Hyper-Personalization

AI enables brands to deliver highly personalized content, offers, and experiences in real time. By analyzing customer behavior and preferences, marketers can increase relevance, loyalty, and conversion rates across digital touchpoints.

### 2. Integrated Omnichannel Experience

Customers expect seamless experiences across online and offline channels. Marketers are aligning data, messaging, and interactions across stores, apps, websites, and social platforms to create consistent and frictionless customer journeys.

### 3. Social Commerce as a Sales Engine

Social media platforms are evolving into full commerce ecosystems. Features like live shopping, in-app checkout, and creator-led selling make social channels a primary driver of discovery, engagement, and direct sales.

### 4. Short-Form Video as Primary Content

Short-form videos dominate attention in a mobile-first market. Brands use concise, authentic, and entertaining videos to communicate value quickly, boost engagement, and stay culturally relevant, especially among younger audiences.

### 5. Trust-Led Influencer Marketing

Brands prioritize micro- and niche influencers with strong audience trust. Authentic storytelling and real-life product usage outperform celebrity endorsements, helping marketers build credibility and influence purchasing decisions more effectively.

### 6. Automation & Conversational Marketing

Marketing automation and AI chatbots streamline engagement at scale. Brands use automated workflows and messaging apps like WhatsApp to deliver instant responses, personalized follow-ups, and efficient customer support.

### 7. Immersive AR & Interactive Experiences

Augmented reality enhances customer experience through virtual try-ons, product visualization, and interactive storytelling. These immersive tools reduce purchase hesitation, increase engagement, and differentiate brands in competitive markets.

### 8. Community-Based Brand Building

Brands invest in communities to deepen relationships beyond transactions. By fostering two-way engagement, shared values, and user-generated content, marketers turn customers into advocates and sustain long-term brand loyalty.

### 9. Purpose-Driven & Sustainable Branding

Consumers favor brands with clear social and environmental commitments. Marketing strategies increasingly highlight sustainability, inclusivity, and impact, aligning brand values with consumer beliefs to build emotional connection and trust.

### 10. Privacy-First & First-Party Data Marketing

With rising data awareness, marketers focus on ethical data usage. First-party data, transparency, and consent-based personalization become essential to maintain trust while still delivering relevant and effective marketing experiences.

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## JAPAN

# Japan Marketing Association

## Ten Structural Changes Redefining Marketing

### 1. The Shift to Fully Automated, AI-Led Marketing Operations

Toward 2026, marketing operations will undergo a decisive transition: from a model in which humans design campaigns and AI supports execution, to one in which AI takes the lead while humans supervise and make strategic judgments. Advertising platforms envisioned by Meta and Google aim to automate the entire value chain—creative generation, media planning, targeting, bidding, measurement, and optimization—end to end.

Japan will not be an exception to this trend. In performance-driven advertising especially, the value of manual optimization will rapidly decline. This transformation goes beyond operational efficiency; it fundamentally reshapes industry structures. Agency models built on operational expertise and craftsmanship will face consolidation, while corporate marketing departments will be forced to evolve from execution-focused units into decision-making bodies.

Although AI can rapidly identify optimal solutions, it cannot determine *what* should be optimized or *which trade-offs* matter—such as short-term performance versus long-term brand equity. As a result, the value of marketers will shift away from execution skills toward the ability to decide what should and should not be delegated to AI. In an era of full automation, the human role does not disappear; it moves upstream.

### 2. The Transformation of Search and the Rise of “AI-Selected Brands”

As generative AI becomes embedded in search, consumer behavior itself is being redefined. Instead of comparing multiple websites, users increasingly rely on AI-generated summaries and recommendations as their primary decision triggers. This fundamentally challenges the assumptions behind traditional SEO.

Looking toward 2026, success will be determined not by search rankings, but by whether a brand becomes a trusted source that AI systems choose to cite. The growing focus on GEO (Generative Engine Optimization) and AEO (Answer Engine Optimization) reflects a new reality: the quality, credibility, and consistency of information directly influence how brands are represented by AI.

In Japan, this requires more than optimizing product information. Companies must communicate their expertise, values, and social context in a coherent manner. Search is no longer merely a traffic channel—it is becoming an evaluation mechanism. How AI describes a brand increasingly reflects how that brand is positioned in society. As a result, marketing, PR, and content strategy will converge, and brands must evolve from being “searched for” to being “recommended by AI.”

### 3. Redefining Customer Understanding Through Multimodal AI

Advances in multimodal AI are ushering in a new phase of customer understanding. By integrating text, images, audio, video, and behavioral data, customers can be understood not as static profiles but as individuals embedded in specific contexts and situations. In Japan, this shift will accelerate across OMO and CX initiatives toward 2026.

Traditional segmentation relied on fixed attributes such as age, gender, or purchase history. Multimodal AI, by contrast, can infer a customer’s current state and underlying motivations in real time. Marketing therefore moves from pre-designed scenarios to adaptive, real-time engagement.

However, deeper understanding also raises ethical questions. Where should companies draw the line between insight and intrusion? This boundary is not defined by technology, but by corporate values. Marketers will increasingly be judged not only on analytical skill, but on interpretive judgment and restraint.

### 4. Hyper-Personalization and the Shift Toward “Decision-Free” UX

Improved predictive accuracy is pushing personalization to its limits. By 2026, marketing will shift from presenting choices to presenting optimal answers. Japanese consumers, in particular, exhibit strong sensitivity to information overload and decision fatigue, increasing demand for experiences that minimize cognitive effort.

In e-commerce, subscriptions, finance, and healthcare, one-click purchases, AI chat-based support, and pre-optimized recommendations will become standard. The competitive axis of UX will no longer be feature richness, but the extent to which decision-making burdens are reduced.

Trust, however, becomes critical. While decision-free UX offers convenience, it can easily feel coercive. Unless consumers believe “this brand has my best interests in mind,” personalization will be rejected. At its extreme, personalization is not a technical challenge but a question of brand philosophy.

### 5. The Changing Role of Marketers and the Reevaluation of Human Judgment

As AI automates core marketing processes—analysis, planning, execution, and optimization—human-driven differentiation in operations will become increasingly difficult. This is not merely an efficiency shift; it forces a fundamental reconsideration of what it means to be a marketer.





## JAPAN

# Japan Marketing Association

Skills once valued—tool proficiency and KPI optimization—are easily replicated by AI. What remains uniquely human is the ability to determine what should be optimized and which metrics truly matter. In Japanese organizations, this includes navigating implicit assumptions, organizational boundaries, and competing interests.

By 2026, marketers will evolve from practitioners into “editors of judgment,” shaping the quality of organizational decision-making rather than executing tactics themselves.

### 6. Post-Cookie Data Strategy and Trust-Based Data Utilization

The demise of third-party cookies represents more than a technical shift; it fundamentally alters the relationship between companies and consumers. Toward 2026, Japanese firms must clearly articulate the legitimacy under which they collect and use data.

While first- and zero-party data will become central, basic membership programs are no longer sufficient. Consumers will share data only in exchange for tangible value, such as improved convenience or experiences. Fragmented organizational structures—where marketing, product, and customer support operate in silos—are incompatible with trust-based data strategies. Data strategy will therefore become a core organizational design issue, not merely a marketing initiative.

### 7. The Decline of Influencer Dependence and the Rise of Relationship Media

Influencer marketing based on follower counts and reach is approaching its credibility limits. Audiences increasingly value not who speaks, but the nature of the relationship behind the message. This trend will intensify in Japan toward 2026.

As a result, attention shifts to employees, customers, experts, and local communities—actors with long-term relationships to the brand. These voices function not as advertisements, but as “relationship media,” where trust accumulates over time. Marketing will move away from purchasing exposure and toward designing environments that cultivate authentic voices.

### 8. D2C and Retail Restructuring Through AI-Led Commerce Experiences

As generative AI converges with social platforms, live commerce, and payments, purchasing behavior breaks away from linear funnels. In Japan, searching and comparing will increasingly be delegated to AI, while consumers encounter products through conversations and contextual interactions—often purchasing immediately.

Competition will shift from assortment and price to contextual recall: which brand is surfaced first in a given situation. The boundaries between marketing, sales, and customer experience will dissolve, requiring companies to design end-to-end experiences rather than optimize isolated channels.

### 9. Well-Being and Ethics as Prerequisites for Brand Choice

As AI adoption accelerates, consumers become more sensitive to corporate values and ethical stances. When convenience and efficiency become commoditized, brand choice increasingly depends on how companies treat people and society. In Japan by 2026, well-being, accessibility, and environmental responsibility will be baseline expectations, not differentiators.

Crucially, these values must be embedded into product design, UX, and communication—not isolated as CSR activities. Marketing will evolve from articulating values to demonstrating them through lived experiences.

### 10. The Emergence of the Trust Economy as Marketing's End State

Across all nine trends, one principle stands out: trust becomes the ultimate competitive resource. While AI maximizes efficiency and optimization, consumers ultimately rely on the belief that “this company will not betray me.” In an automated, information-saturated society, trust is both the scarcest and most difficult asset to replicate.

Trust cannot be purchased through advertising nor built through short-term campaigns. It emerges only through consistent behavior, transparency, and sincere dialogue over time. By 2026, marketing will be fully integrated into management itself—as an activity that not only delivers results, but accumulates trust as corporate capital.

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## SOUTH KOREA

### Marketers Society of Korea

**1. Hyper-Personalization at Scale: Using AI and first-party data for tailored customer journeys.**

Deliver hyper-customized content, dynamic pricing, and AI-driven recommendations across all touchpoints.

**2. AI and Automation Revolution: Efficiency, content creation, and predictive analytics.**

Leverage Generative AI for content, use AI for ad optimization, and implement AI-driven chatbots for customer service.

**3. ESG (Environmental, Social, Governance) Marketing: Consumer demand for corporate social responsibility and sustainability.**

Highlight eco-friendly practices, social impact, and transparent corporate governance. Align brand values with consumer ethics.

**4. K-Culture and Global Expansion: Leveraging the worldwide appeal of K-Content (K-Pop, K-Drama, K-Food).**

Integrate K-Culture themes into campaigns and use global K-Content popularity to drive both domestic and international sales.

**5. Social Commerce & Live Commerce: Turning social platforms into direct sales channels.**

Utilize platforms like KakaoTalk and Instagram for immediate purchases, and invest in engaging livestream shopping events.

**6. Subscription Economy Expansion: A consumer shift toward valuing experiences and convenience over ownership.**

Offer diverse and highly personalized subscription models for products, content, and services (e.g., home appliances, cars).

**7. Immersive and Interactive Content: Utilizing advanced technology for engaging customer experiences.**

Implement AR (Augmented Reality) and VR (Virtual Reality) experiences (e.g., virtual try-ons, pop-up stores, gamification).

**8. The Rise of the 'YONO' Consumer (You Only Need One)**

Economic pragmatism and a focus on value, quality, and essential purchases. | Market products emphasizing durability, multifunctionality, and long-term value over impulsive or fast-fashion consumption.

**9. Target Generations (Teens vs. 50+s Focus): Catering to two high-value, distinct consumer groups.**

Develop mobile-first, trend-sensitive campaigns for teens, and premium, self-development/wellness-focused campaigns for those in their 50+s.

**10. Omnichannel and Offline Experiences: Seamlessly connecting digital (online) and physical (offline) retail.**

Strategically use engaging offline events and pop-up stores to drive brand awareness and digital traffic, ensuring a consistent brand experience across all channels.

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Contributed by: Marketers Society of Korea

**Masok**  
marketers society of korea



# MALAYSIA

## Institute of Marketing Malaysia

### Introduction

Malaysia's marketplace has undergone significant digital acceleration over the past five years, shaped by increased smartphone penetration, rapid e-commerce expansion, stronger sustainability narratives and the normalization of hybrid work arrangements. The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated digital behaviors, prompting consumers to adopt mobile-first engagement, prioritize wellness and develop online purchasing routines. These developments align with global shifts, yet Malaysia presents a distinctive context shaped by its multicultural society, policy-driven innovation agenda and youthful digital adoption patterns.

Interconnected technological, socio-cultural and macroeconomic forces will shape Malaysia's marketing landscape in 2026. The convergence of AI influence, mobile-first behavior, sustainability expectations and policy-driven digital transformation forms a holistic ecosystem. Brands that adopt integrated, culturally grounded and technology-enabled strategies will be best positioned to lead in Malaysia's dynamic marketplace.

These are twelve (12) key Marketing Trends that are expected to shape Malaysia's business landscape in 2026, offering valuable insights for brands, marketers and industry leaders as they plan ahead.

### 1. AI-Driven Campaigns & Content Generation

- Generative AI (e.g., ChatGPT, image-AI) will be deeply integrated into content creation — from ad copy to social media posts — helping marketers scale creative work.
- Predictive AI models will be used to forecast customer behavior, optimize campaign timing and personalize user journeys.

### 2. Privacy-First Marketing & First-Party Data

- With rising regulatory attention and consumer awareness, brands will rely more on first-party data (data directly collected from their customers) rather than third-party cookies.
- Transparency and trust-building around data collection (opt-ins, clear privacy policies) will become a key differentiator.

### 3. Hyper-Personalisation Across Channels

- Using AI + CRM data, brands will deliver highly personalized experiences (in emails, ads, websites), tailoring content not just by broad segments but by individual behavior.
- This could extend to product recommendations, dynamic content and personalized customer journeys.

### 4. Rise of Micro-Influencers & Creator Partnerships

- Rather than big celebrity influencers, there will be more collaboration with micro-influencers (smaller, niche audiences) who offer higher engagement and authenticity
- More performance-based influencer contracts, where remuneration is tied to measurable outcomes like conversions or engagement.

### 5. Short-Form Video Dominance

- Platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts will continue to dominate in Malaysia, with brands leveraging snackable, bite-sized video content to engage audiences.
- Local brands may lean into culturally resonant short stories, memes and challenges to build connection and drive viral reach.

### 6. Conversational Marketing & Messaging Apps

- Real-time customer engagement via chat — through WhatsApp Business, Messenger, or website chatbots — will become more mainstream.
- Chatbots powered by AI will handle lead qualification, customer service and even sales, creating seamless one-on-one journeys.

### 7. Interactive & Shoppable Content

- Usage of interactive formats like AR filters, quizzes, polls, and gamified experiences to drive engagement.
- Immersive experiences (e.g., virtual try-ons, 360° campaigns) as 5G infrastructure improves, enabling more Malaysians to access richer, interactive content.

### 8. Voice Search & Multilingual Optimization

- Optimizing for voice search will grow, especially since Malaysians often use voice assistants and mix languages (English, Malay, Chinese and others) in their queries.
- Brands will need to think conversationally and optimize for natural, question-based search phrases across languages.

### 9. Social Commerce & Livestream Shopping

- Shopping directly via social media (live streams, shoppable posts) will continue to surge.
- Brands in Malaysia will integrate commerce more tightly into their social content — live demos, “shop-in-reel” and instant checkout will be more common.





# MALAYSIA

## Institute of Marketing Malaysia

### 10. Connected Ecosystems & Culturally-Rooted Creativity

- Agencies and brands will move away from isolated campaign silos; instead they'll build connected ecosystems where data, media, CX (customer experience) and storytelling work together.
- Cultural relevance will be a central creative driver. According to Malaysia agency leaders, insight-led and culturally aware storytelling will be more important than just "tech for tech's sake."

### 11. Omnichannel Integration

- Customer expect a smooth experience across all touchpoints (website, social media, retail, chat). Brands require unified messaging and connected data insights to deliver a consistent, strong customer journey.

### 12. Sustainability & Purpose-Driven Marketing

- Malaysian consumers (especially younger segments) are increasingly valuing sustainability, ethical business practices and social purpose.
- Brands that authentically demonstrate environmental or social impact (e.g., via eco-packaging, CSR stories) will gain in trust and differentiation.

Contributed by: Institute of Marketing Malaysia



INSTITUTE OF MARKETING MALAYSIA



# PHILIPPINES

## Philippine Marketing Association

### 1. Digital Marketing - AI-Powered Personalization & Content Automation at Scale

Across platforms, from Meta to Google to TikTok to Lazada/Shopee, AI integration is accelerating faster in the Philippines than ever before.

### 2. Rise of “Healthy Convenience”

Filipinos want healthier but fast—RTD protein drinks, fortified snacks, air-fried food lines, gut-health beverages. Convenience + wellness = growth.

### 3. AI Safety & Ethics Marketing

Brands highlight “human+AI” messaging to build trust as Filipinos remain cautious about deepfakes.

### 4. Short-Form Video Dominance

TikTok, YouTube Shorts, IG Reels remain king—snackable content > long campaigns.

### 5. 5G-Driven Content Consumption

Higher 5G adoption pushes gaming, AR filters, livestream shopping, HD remote work.

### 6. Retail Media Networks (RMNs)

Supermarkets and e-commerce platforms sell ad inventory to brands.

### 7. Sustainability in Packaging

Brands shift to refill packs, recycled PET, minimalist packaging, driven by retailer & regulatory pressure.

### 8. “Experience First” Positioning

More Filipinos value service consistency + human warmth over price.

### 9. Local Brands Climbing Upmarket

More Filipino brands compete with global beauty, home care, and lifestyle brands.

### 10. Tourism - Revenge Travel 2.0: Wellness + Soft Adventure

Retreats, spa tourism, forest therapy, and quiet escapes replace the 2023–2024 party-style revenge travel

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Contributed by: Philippine Marketing Association





# SINGAPORE

## Marketing Institute of Singapore

### 1. Healthy Meets Convenient: The Rise Of Smart Food Choices

For marketers, the shift toward healthy yet convenient food is accelerating. Consumers want nutritious options that fit fast paced lives. Brands that succeed will simplify health through ready to eat formats, functional benefits, and clear messaging. Convenience, transparency, and taste will drive adoption, loyalty, and relevance in an increasingly wellness focused market.

### 2. Optimising AI-First Search (AEO & GEO)

With the rise of generative AI in search, consumer behaviour is shifting toward conversational, AI-driven experiences. Traditional keyword SEO is evolving into Answer Engine (AEO) and Generative Engine Optimisation (GEO), where content is cited directly in AI responses. As consumers make faster decisions through AI conversations, visibility depends on trust, not rankings. Marketers should prioritise clear answers, FAQs, schema markup, and strong topical authority to succeed in zero-click environments.

### 3. Adapting Video Content Automatically For Multilingual Audiences

Online videos will increasingly adapt to the viewer's language automatically through AI dubbing, voice cloning, and real-time translation. A single video can be delivered across markets without reshoots while preserving natural tone and lip sync. This enables instant global reach and more inclusive communication. Marketers should plan video strategies around language adaptability using AI localisation tools.

### 4. Turning Marketers Into Internal Brand Influencers

Marketers are increasingly becoming on-screen brand influencers for their organisations, activating employees to create social and digital content. This reduces reliance on external influencers, whose credibility can be diluted when promoting multiple brands, and delivers more authentic, product-led messaging. As marketing and content creation converge, effective internal creators combine product expertise, audience insight, and storytelling skills, building trust and turning features into clear, engaging value narratives.

### 5. Transforming Accounting With AI Large Language Models (LLMs)

AI large language models (LLMs) are transforming accounting by automating routine tasks and enhancing analytical capabilities. They can process invoices, receipts, and financial statements with minimal errors, generate reports, summarise insights, and highlight anomalies or trends. In auditing, LLMs review contracts, flag inconsistencies, and detect fraud patterns that humans might miss. They also support regulatory compliance, tax preparation, and predictive analytics for cash flow and financial planning. As a result, accounting firms are increasingly developing proprietary LLMs tailored to industry-specific needs, improving accuracy, security, and specialised insights while allowing accountants to focus on strategic decision-making.

### 6. Gen Z Goes Viral: How Co-Creation Shapes 2026 Marketing

The younger audiences thrives on creating viral content, using trending audio, filters, clips, and dance challenges to express themselves. For marketers, this presents an opportunity: by providing shareable templates, sounds, or creative prompts, brands can tap into authentic co-creation, drive virality, and resonate deeply with young audiences who value participation over passive consumption.

### 7. Supercharging Sales with AI Prospecting

AI cold calling is transforming how sales teams generate pipelines at scale. AI-powered voice agents identify ideal prospects, personalise conversations using natural language, and deliver local accents that sound authentic and credible. Unlike traditional cold calling, which is time-consuming and exhausting, AI enables high-volume outreach with consistent quality and rapid learning. This lets sales teams focus on closing rather than prospecting. Marketing and sales professionals must collaborate on targeted scripts and audience segmentation to ensure AI-driven calls are compliant and value-driven, effectively converting cold leads into qualified, sales-ready opportunities.



## SINGAPORE

### Marketing Institute of Singapore

#### 8. Engaging Consumers Through Corporate Blind Boxes As Merchandise

Consumer brands are expected to increasingly adopt corporate blind boxes featuring brand mascots as branded merchandise to boost engagement and loyalty. These curated surprise boxes, containing exclusive products or limited edition items, tap into consumers' love of discovery and gamification. The trend may extend across F&B, lifestyle, beauty, and tech sectors, creating new ways to excite audiences, drive repeat purchases, and encourage social sharing. This offers for marketers an opportunity to turn ordinary transactions into memorable experiences. To leverage this trend, blind box initiatives should combine clear value, engaging storytelling, and ethical pricing to enhance brand affinity and foster long-term loyalty.

#### 9. Creating Inclusive Events with AI Sign Language

Live events are becoming more inclusive and can be enhanced further through AI-powered sign language avatars that can translate presentations, panel discussions, and narration in real time for deaf and hard-of-hearing attendees. This reduces reliance on human interpreters while meeting rising accessibility expectations at conferences, exhibitions, and corporate events. For organisers and marketers, inclusive design signals professionalism and social responsibility. Event planners should integrate AI accessibility tools carefully, ensuring seamless functionality, accurate translation, and clear visual placement so all participants can engage fully with the content.

#### 10. Protecting Brand Trust against AI-Driven Scams

Scams are set to reach unprecedented scale as cybercriminals leverage AI for automation, personalisation, and realism. Fraudsters can create AI-driven personas, deepfakes, and multi-channel campaigns that move seamlessly across social media, chat apps, and payment platforms. Marketers play a critical role in countering these threats by strengthening trust, transparency, and consumer education. Brands should maintain consistent visual identities, verified accounts, and official communication channels, using clear disclaimers and secure links. Marketing teams must also collaborate with cybersecurity teams to monitor impersonation risks, act swiftly against misleading content, and respond promptly to public verification inquiries.

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### 1. Introduction

The transformation of Sri Lanka's marketing landscape between 2020 and 2025 represents one of the most rapid digital behavioural shifts in South Asia. In a period marked by economic turbulence, including the COVID-19 pandemic, the 2022 sovereign-debt crisis, and ongoing fiscal restructuring, the marketing ecosystem evolved more quickly than many other sectors of the national economy. This paradoxical digital acceleration during macroeconomic contraction illustrates the extent to which Sri Lankan consumers and firms now rely on digital channels, mobile platforms and algorithmic content systems to navigate uncertainty.

Digital transformation literature suggests that socio-economic disruptions often accelerate technological adoption, as organisations and consumers search for flexible, low cost and high efficiency alternatives to traditional channels (Abdulquadri, 2021; Thomas & Hedrick-Wong, 2019). Sri Lanka exemplifies this pattern. Instead of delaying digital adoption, crisis conditions pushed both consumers and firms into mobile first transactions, social commerce interactions and AI-mediated content environments. These trends do not merely represent temporary adaptations; they reflect structural changes in digital behaviour that continue to influence marketing practice in 2025.

The emergence of a densely networked, mobile driven consumer base has intensified the need for marketers to think holistically about digital ecosystems, platform economies, payment infrastructure and data driven decision making. As internet penetration increases, smartphone usage rises and e-commerce becomes embedded in consumer routines, marketing strategies in Sri Lanka are shifting from mass-media orientation toward precision, platform specific, algorithm aware and conversational models of engagement. These shifts parallel global developments but evolve with a distinctly local flavour shaped by linguistic diversity, cultural nuance, infrastructural asymmetries and the unique demands of a postcrisis economy.

This conceptual review examines the emerging data-driven trends shaping Sri Lanka's marketing environment, focusing particularly on social media adoption, e-commerce expansion, real-time payments, AI-driven content creation and the rise of the creator economy. The review synthesises findings from global datasets, national statistics, industry insights and practitioner reports, adopting the thematic, narrative-driven style characteristic of conceptual chapters in organisational and marketing scholarship. The aim is not to test a particular hypothesis but to generate a structured understanding of the forces reshaping the marketing ecosystem and to identify the strategic, organisational and policy implications arising from these trends.

### 2. Digital Foundations of the Sri Lankan Market

Sri Lanka's digital infrastructure expanded significantly over the past five years, forming the foundation upon which new marketing trends are being constructed. Social media penetration increased steadily, rising from approximately 6.4 million users in 2020 to an estimated 16.2 million by 2025. These trends align with global evidence that emerging markets are experiencing accelerated digital uptake driven by smartphone affordability, platform accessibility and behavioural changes following the pandemic (DataReportal, 2024). The increase in social media usage corresponds with rising digital literacy across age groups. National statistics indicate that by 2023, 63.5 per cent of Sri Lankans aged 5-69 were digitally literate, a significant increase from earlier decades (Census and Statistics, 2023). Importantly, over 80 per cent of Sri Lankans who use the internet access it through smartphones, a pattern consistent with the mobile-first behaviour observed in many developing markets (DataReportal, 2024). This widespread mobile access influences the nature of marketing content, reinforcing the role of short-form video, vertical storytelling and conversational messaging.

The structural shift toward digital behaviour is also reflected in changes in communication norms, content consumption habits and trust dynamics. Consumers increasingly rely on social platforms for news, entertainment, product discovery and customer service. The implications for marketers are profound: digital channels are no longer peripheral but central to brand-consumer interaction. As these foundational shifts take root, they enable and, in many ways, necessitate the emergence of new marketing logics explored in subsequent sections.

### 3. The Expansion of E-Commerce and Social Commerce in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka's e-commerce ecosystem between 2020 and 2025 reflects a period of accelerated adoption, driven initially by movement restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic and later by structural transitions in consumer behaviour. Prior to 2020, e-commerce penetration in Sri Lanka was modest compared with regional peers. However, the pandemic-induced necessity of online purchasing catalysed a behavioural shift that has since consolidated into a stable pattern of digital-first consumption (Mukherjee, 2024).

By 2023, industry analyses estimated the Sri Lankan e-commerce sector to be worth approximately LKR 777.6 billion, serving 5.5 million online shoppers (Robocash, 2023). Global datasets such as Statista forecast revenue growth to USD 2.54 billion by 2025, reflecting a compound annual growth rate of over 6 per cent (Statista, 2025). Although these projections vary depending on methodological



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assumptions, they converge on a clear conclusion: Sri Lanka's digital marketplace has moved from a niche phenomenon to a central pillar of consumer spending. Based on synthesised and triangulated market sources, demonstrates a continuous upward trajectory in e-commerce revenues from 2020 to 2025, even during the acute 2022 economic crisis. This resilience highlights the degree to which digital commerce has become embedded in routine consumption. While macroeconomic contraction reduced discretionary spending power, the relative convenience and reduced search costs associated with online purchases appear to have compensated for this downturn, particularly in urban Centres.

However, what distinguishes Sri Lanka from larger Asian markets is the dominance of informal digital commerce commonly referred to as social commerce over structured, platform-based e-retailing. Small retailers, home businesses, micro-entrepreneurs and even mid-sized brands increasingly rely on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok and WhatsApp as their primary sales channels. In contrast to Chinese or Southeast Asian models, Sri Lankan social commerce is heavily conversational: buyers and sellers negotiate through messaging apps, exchange multimedia product demonstrations and complete transactions through direct bank transfers or QR codes.

This mode of commerce is culturally compatible with Sri Lankan norms of trust-building, bargaining and personalisation. It also reduces barriers to entry because merchants need not invest in standalone websites or inventory management systems. As a result, the digital marketplace is populated by thousands of micro-retailers, whose marketing strategies rely on informal influencer networks, vernacular content and hyper-local targeting.

From a marketing-trend perspective, social commerce introduces several notable shifts. First, it strengthens the role of short-form video and ephemeral content, which function as the primary discovery mechanisms. Second, it elevates the importance of aesthetic consistency and storytelling, as merchants rely on visuals rather than formal branding to differentiate themselves. Third, the absence of structured marketplaces increases dependence on digital payments, particularly QR-enabled transfers and JustPay integrations.

These developments reinforce the broader conceptual argument that Sri Lanka's marketing ecosystem cannot be examined solely through frameworks developed in Western economies. Instead, domestic marketing practices reflect a hybridisation of global platform tools and localised relational norms a pattern consistent with digital adoption in other constrained environments (Perera, 2023).

#### 4. Payment Rails and the Rise of a Cash-Lite Marketing Ecosystem

Digital marketing trends cannot be understood independently of payment infrastructure. As consumers shift to mobile first consumption, the final step in the conversion pathway increasingly depends on frictionless payments that complement platform-based discovery. Sri Lanka's national payment system, highly interoperable and bank-integrated, has been a critical enabler of emerging marketing practices.

The LankaPay suite including CEFTS, LankaQR and JustPay has grown substantially since 2020. Data from Q4 2024 indicate 7.5 million JustPay transactions valued at LKR 35.9 billion, with QR-based payments exceeding LKR 1.53 billion (LankaPay, 2024). The first quarter of 2025 marked a historic inflection point: JustPay transaction values surged to LKR 142.2 billion, representing nearly a fourfold increase over the previous quarter (LankaPay, 2025).

This increase reflects not merely a rise in digital adoption but a reconfiguration of consumer expectations around speed, convenience and transparency. Younger consumers, accustomed to instant messaging and real-time notifications, increasingly view instant payments as the default mode for both retail purchases and peer transfers. Merchants, in turn, have aligned their marketing strategies around QR codes embedded in video content, influencer campaigns and social commerce pages.

Digital payments also enhance attribution capabilities. Unlike cash, account-to-account transfers can be timestamped, categorised and linked to specific marketing interventions. This is particularly impactful in a market where advertising budgets are constrained and return on investment is scrutinised carefully. For performance marketers, payment data offers an opportunity to move beyond impression-based evaluations toward more precise models that tie exposure directly to revenue generation.

Furthermore, the linking of payment apps to loyalty systems, cashback promotions and gamified incentive schemes elevates the strategic role of fintech in marketing. Banks and payment providers increasingly function as co-marketers, offering promotional credits that complement brand campaigns. This evolving relationship blurs the traditional distinction between financial services and consumer marketing, suggesting the emergence of hybrid business models in the coming years.



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### 5. Platform Dynamics and the Restructuring of Audience Attention

Sri Lanka's platform ecosystem has matured into a multi-polar environment where consumer attention is distributed across several dominant networks. Facebook, YouTube, TikTok and Instagram collectively form the nucleus of this ecosystem, each fulfilling distinct functional and cultural roles within the digital economy. According to national platform statistics, Facebook maintained approximately 15 million Sri Lankan users by late 2024, YouTube reached 14.5 million, TikTok expanded to 10.5 million and Instagram recorded 8.5 million active users (TRCSL, 2024). Although platform counts overlap substantially since individual users maintain presences across several networks these numbers reflect a market in which digital consumption is not merely widespread but central to daily routines.

YouTube continues to function as the hegemonic platform for long-form content and entertainment. The prevalence of comedy channels, cultural commentary, independent cinema and music-based productions has created a coherent vernacular media ecosystem that operates parallel to traditional broadcast television. SLIM (2025) digital trends report notes that Sri Lankan audiences frequently engage with YouTube through connected TVs, reinforcing its position not merely as a mobile platform but as an at-home entertainment medium. This convergence of digital and living-room media consumption carries significant implications for brand storytelling, as marketers increasingly consider YouTube a primary channel for high-attention formats such as long form advertisements, documentary style campaigns and branded content series.

TikTok, by contrast, represents a distinct shift toward algorithmically mediated attention. With 10.5 million active users in 2024, TikTok has rapidly become the platform of choice for Gen Z and younger millennials. Its recommendation system is not based on social graphs but on a behavioural attention model that responds dynamically to user preferences. This model compresses the feedback loop between content creation and content performance, enabling previously unknown creators to gain substantial visibility within short periods. TikTok's rising dominance in Sri Lanka is consistent with global patterns in which short-form video consumption displaces traditional social networking as the primary mode of digital engagement (Kemp, 2024).

However, these algorithmic mechanisms also produce constraints that shape emerging marketing trends. As SLIM (2025) observes, hyper-personalised content curation restricts creators from achieving broad audience penetration beyond their established clusters. A viewer who shows little interest in sports content, for instance, will rarely encounter cricket-related videos, regardless of their popularity. This

phenomenon has implications for marketers accustomed to mass reach campaigns, as the probability of organic virality declines and the need for platform-specific creative diversity increases. Marketing teams in Sri Lanka now create multiple variations of campaigns tailored to the micro-segments that algorithms recognise, a practice that aligns with broader theoretical models of audience fragmentation in algorithmic media environments (Napoli, 2019).

While YouTube provides stable, broad digital reach, TikTok delivers intensity and recency of engagement. Instagram, positioned between these poles, has emerged as a hybrid. It supports aesthetic, aspiration-driven content while simultaneously functioning as a transactional micro-commerce platform through direct messaging. Facebook, once dominant across all age groups, now serves older demographics, community groups and SME-driven commerce, maintaining relevance through its Marketplace and Groups features. Together, these platform types generate an ecosystem in which no single channel can satisfy all marketing objectives, necessitating sophisticated cross-platform orchestration.

### 6. The Rise of AI-Mediated Marketing and Creative Automation

The global acceleration of generative AI since late 2022 has profoundly reshaped marketing practice in Sri Lanka. Although large scale surveys are still emerging, multiple industry reports and practitioner commentaries indicate that Sri Lankan agencies and brands are incorporating AI into creative development, media optimisation, predictive analytics and customer-interaction management. AI's impact is particularly visible in content production workflows, where tools for language generation, image synthesis and automated video editing enable small businesses and micro-creators to produce output that previously required agency-level resources.

Small enterprises in regions such as Jaffna, Kurunegala and Galle increasingly utilise multilingual generative tools to create Sinhala- and Tamil-language captions, product descriptions and social media narratives. This democratisation of creative production lowers entry barriers and intensifies competition across the digital marketing landscape. The diffusion of AI also compresses the time needed to generate content variations for A/B testing, enabling marketers to adapt more rapidly to real-time trends and platform algorithm changes. These shifts mirror global empirical findings that AI improves creative efficiency, reduces costs and enhances message personalisation (Huang & Rust, 2018).

AI's role extends beyond content creation. Sri Lankan brands are increasingly adopting AI-based analytics systems that integrate with social platforms and payment gateways to provide more



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granular insights into consumer behaviour. Predictive models assist in forecasting campaign performance, identifying high-propensity customer segments and recommending optimal content-release times. These developments illustrate the fusion of AI with marketing analytics competencies, similar to the integration of AI with financial decision systems documented in the banking literature (Dewasiri, 2023).

Yet AI integration is not without challenges. As generative tools proliferate, concerns surrounding authenticity, misinformation and intellectual property become increasingly salient. Many Sri Lankan content creators rely on AI-generated assets built from datasets that may include copyrighted work, raising potential legal complications. Moreover, the ease of producing polished content can lead to oversaturation, diminishing the distinctiveness of brand messages. Consequently, strategic differentiation increasingly hinges on narrative originality, cultural resonance and consumer insight rather than production quality alone. Brands that fail to recognise this distinction risk losing relevance in an environment where AI-generated content grows exponentially.

From a labour perspective, AI reshapes skill expectations within marketing organisations. Routine production tasks are increasingly automated, shifting demand towards roles requiring conceptual thinking, audience understanding, ethical judgment and data interpretation. This parallels findings in AI-augmented service industries, where human expertise evolves to complement rather than replicate automated capabilities (Payne, 2018). Sri Lanka's marketing labour market is gradually undergoing this transformation, although capacity-building gaps remain. Upskilling in data analytics, AI literacy and platform fluency has become a strategic priority for agencies and corporate marketing teams.

#### 7. The Expansion and Professionalisation of the Creator Economy

Few developments have influenced Sri Lankan marketing trends more profoundly than the rapid rise of the creator economy. Between 2020 and 2026, thousands of Sri Lankan creators established meaningful digital presences across YouTube, TikTok and Instagram. These creators produce content in diverse genres including comedy, food, beauty, education, religion, technology and gaming, reflecting the cultural heterogeneity of the domestic audience. They serve both as entertainers and as decentralised distribution channels through which brands can reach specific demographic, linguistic or interest-based communities.

Micro-influencers in Sri Lanka frequently achieve engagement rates far exceeding those of celebrity influencers. In many campaign analyses, micro-creators generate interaction rates between 20 and 60 per cent, compared with the 2–5 per cent typical for conventional endorsements (SLIM, 2025). Their credibility derives from perceived authenticity, linguistic familiarity and shared socio-cultural experiences with their audiences. This authenticity effect aligns with global research that highlights the power of parasocial trust and community belonging in influencer-based marketing (Abidin, 2021).

A notable evolution within this ecosystem is the emergence of creator-led brands. The success of ventures such as Wild Cookbook's restaurant "WILDISH" demonstrates how digital fame can be converted into tangible economic enterprises. These entrepreneurial models combine online influence, offline commercial activity and culturally anchored storytelling, creating hybrid forms of brand-building that transcend traditional advertising. Such creator-led brands mirror global trends exemplified by creators like MrBeast, whose products and ventures operate at the intersection of media and retail (Lewis, 2023).

Real-time influencer marketing is another defining feature of Sri Lanka's digital trend landscape. Brands increasingly collaborate with creators to produce content responding to viral audio tracks, trending comedic formats or culturally resonant events. The strategic premise behind such collaborations is speed: in a fast-moving attention economy, campaigns must be initiated, produced and distributed within hours or days to capture trend-associated engagement. TikTok's trend cycles, often measured in days rather than weeks, reinforce this need for agility. The practice represents a significant shift from traditional campaign planning, which typically favoured long production timelines and broad-target messaging.

However, the professionalisation of the creator economy also raises regulatory and ethical considerations. As brands rely more heavily on influencer content, the need for clear guidelines surrounding disclosure, intellectual property, metadata usage and content authenticity increases. Some creators express concerns about platforms suppressing reach, while marketers face challenges in verifying audience quality and preventing fraudulent engagement. Addressing these issues will require collaboration between industry bodies, regulators and platform operators to develop a governance framework that protects both consumers and creators while enabling innovation.



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### 8. Gaming and Esports as Emerging Marketing Arenas

Although historically overlooked in Sri Lankan marketing discourse, gaming has become one of the most significant cultural and commercial developments in recent years. Industry estimates consistently report that Sri Lanka hosts approximately 4.4 million gamers nearly one-fifth of the population and this figure spans a diverse demographic spectrum including teenagers, university students, young professionals and even mid-career adults (SLIM, 2025). The ubiquity of low-cost smartphones, widespread mobile broadband coverage and the popularity of titles such as PUBG Mobile, Free Fire and Mobile Legends contribute to this expansion.

From a marketing perspective, gaming is not simply a leisure activity but a multi-layered digital ecosystem offering unique engagement opportunities. Gaming environments produce intensely participatory media cultures, where users simultaneously consume entertainment, create content and interact socially. These affordances transform gaming into a hybrid marketplace of attention, community and creativity. For example, Sri Lankan esports tournaments whether locally organised or integrated into regional leagues attract large viewership across YouTube and Facebook Gaming streams. Brands that have sponsored such events have observed measurable increases in brand salience among younger segments, reflecting the power of targeted cultural immersion.

The theoretical significance of gaming as a marketing channel lies in its highly interactive and co-creative nature. Traditional advertising models, based on unidirectional communication, are less effective in gaming contexts where audiences expect agency, immersion and authenticity. Rather than interruptive advertising, gamers respond more favourably to in-community participation, influencer collaboration and narrative-driven brand integrations. International evidence supports this shift: gaming-based brand placements and esports sponsorships consistently produce elevated engagement compared with conventional ads (Hamari & Sjöblom, 2017). Although Sri Lankan literature is still emergent, the behavioural parallels are evident.

Moreover, gaming intersects with several other emerging trends in Sri Lanka. Many local gaming influencers operate across TikTok, YouTube and Instagram, creating cross-platform visibility that amplifies their commercial value. Some creators, particularly in competitive gaming and live streaming genres, command substantial followings, driving the rise of hybrid influencer identities that merge entertainment, coaching, lifestyle branding and product endorsements. As the country's digital infrastructure improves particularly with anticipated enhancements in latency and bandwidth the potential for real-time gaming activations, augmented reality (AR) experiences and in-game collaborations will expand further.

Despite these opportunities, gaming remains largely underexploited by mainstream Sri Lankan brands. A combination of limited institutional knowledge, perceived risk and generational unfamiliarity contributes to this underinvestment. Yet the early adopters who have aligned with esports communities demonstrate how effectively gaming can shift brand relevance, making it a strategic area for future marketing innovation. As global markets reposition gaming as a central cultural domain, Sri Lanka is poised to follow similar trajectories, especially given its youth-dominant demographic structure.

### 9. Organisational Shifts: The Rise of In-House Creators and the Decline of Traditional Media Planning

As the digital environment evolves, marketing organisations in Sri Lanka are undergoing structural realignments that reshape capability requirements and workflow configurations. One of the most notable shifts is the rise of in-house creator teams within brands. Traditionally, content production was outsourced to advertising agencies or boutique creative firms. However, the combination of rising content volume, platform speed, cost pressures and the availability of AI-enhanced creative tools has encouraged brands to internalise content production.

In-house creators offer several advantages: they accelerate content turnaround times, enable rapid responses to viral trends, maintain consistent brand voice and reduce dependency on external agencies. This organisational shift mirrors global trends in which brands increasingly adopt newsroom-style creative structures to fulfil the demands of realtime digital culture (Arriagada & Ibáñez, 2020). In Sri Lanka, the move is particularly pronounced among retail, fashion, food-service and technology sectors, where the velocity of content is directly tied to sales cycles.

However, these shifts introduce new organisational vulnerabilities. The reliance on small creator teams increases the risk of creative fatigue, skill concentration and tunnel vision. Unlike agencies that bring multidisciplinary expertise, in-house teams may lack exposure to broader cultural movements or strategic insight. This dynamic has contributed to a noticeable decline in the sophistication of media planning in Sri Lanka. As SLIM (2025) notes, many marketing professionals possess platform certifications yet lack deeper analytical or ethnographic understanding of Sri Lankan audiences. The result is an over-reliance on platform metrics, narrow optimisation loops and reduced emphasis on large-scale brand building.

Traditional media planners, historically valued for their broad-market understanding, cross-channel orchestration skills and audience segmentation expertise, are becoming less prominent in digital-first



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organisations. This decline reflects a global tension between automated optimisation systems—driven by AI and algorithmic bidding—and human strategic judgement. Yet empirical evidence in advertising research consistently shows that brand longevity and emotional resonance rely on strategic, not merely tactical, decisionmaking (Binet & Field, 2018). Sri Lanka now faces a transitional moment in which technical proficiency must be complemented by the revival of deeper planning capabilities.

At a leadership level, demographic changes further influence organisational trajectories. Millennials, currently aged 28 to 43, are increasingly assuming managerial and director-level positions within Sri Lankan firms. Their digital nativity and cultural familiarity with social media ecosystems have contributed to larger budget allocations for influencer marketing, social-first campaigns and data-driven experimentation. This generational shift reinforces digital marketing's centrality within overall brand strategy, but also necessitates renewed investments in training and research to ensure long-term brand equity is not overshadowed by short-cycle performance optimisation.

### 10. Governance, Regulation and the Institutional Context of Digital Marketing

Marketing systems in Sri Lanka operate within a rapidly evolving governance landscape characterised by simultaneous digital enablement and regulatory tightening. On the enabling side, the government's digital transformation initiatives such as the Digital Government programme, efforts to streamline electronic know-your-customer (e-KYC) protocols and telecommunications reforms aimed at improving broadband access provide the infrastructural backbone for widespread digital engagement (UN ESCAP, 2024). Efforts to broaden national connectivity, including the licensing of advanced satellite internet providers, signal policy recognition of the need for universal digital inclusion.

Conversely, regulatory measures such as the Online Safety Act of 2024 introduce complexities for the marketing sector. The Act grants authorities enhanced powers to remove online content deemed harmful and to penalise individuals or entities responsible for the creation or dissemination of "prohibited statements" (Government of Sri Lanka, 2024). While the stated objectives relate to consumer protection and misinformation control, civil society organisations and technology firms have expressed concerns about potential overreach, ambiguity in enforcement criteria and the chilling effect such regulations may have on free expression (Human Rights Watch, 2024).

For marketers, these governance shifts create both strategic constraints and opportunities. Stricter content regulation may encourage brands to adopt more cautious communication styles, avoid politically sensitive narratives and institute rigorous compliance protocols for

influencer-generated content. At the same time, increased regulatory scrutiny of data privacy offers an opportunity for brands to differentiate themselves through transparency, ethical data management and consumer education. Emerging trends in global marketing emphasise the competitive advantage of brands that foreground privacy, consent and responsible data stewardship practices that Sri Lankan firms are increasingly expected to adopt (Martin & Murphy, 2017).

Governance also intersects with intellectual property concerns, particularly in the age of AI-generated content. As Sri Lankan marketers adopt generative tools that may draw from copyrighted datasets, the risk of inadvertent copyright infringement rises. The legal ambiguity surrounding ownership of AI-generated media an issue currently debated worldwide poses additional uncertainties for Sri Lankan brands. Without clear guidelines from regulators and industry bodies, organisations may face significant reputational or legal exposure.

Taken together, Sri Lanka's governance environment represents a dual-edged landscape: progressive digital enablement paired with tightening regulatory boundaries. The degree to which organisations can navigate this environment will influence their ability to innovate, build trust and maintain competitive relevance in the digital marketplace.

### 11. Integrated Discussion: Structural Drivers of Sri Lanka's Digital Marketing Evolution

The emerging trends examined in this review highlight a marketing ecosystem that is undergoing structural transformation rather than cyclical fluctuation. Sri Lanka's digital economy, once peripheral to mainstream commerce, is now embedded within everyday consumer and organisational behavior. This transformation is driven by a convergence of factors: rising mobile penetration, improvement in digital literacy, strengthening of payment infrastructure, diversification of platform ecosystems, increasing creator influence, advancements in AI-mediated creativity and the growing cultural relevance of gaming. Each of these trends interacts with the others in ways that reinforce their collective impact.

The integration of AI tools into content development and marketing analytics further accelerates this shift, enabling efficient content production, rapid optimisation and enhanced targeting precision. Yet AI's influence extends beyond technological capabilities; it shapes the creative culture within organisations and redefines the labour dynamics of marketing departments. The repositioning of skill sets towards data literacy, cultural interpretation, ethical reasoning and adaptive creativity signals an inflection point in Sri Lanka's marketing profession.





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Simultaneously, the rise of the creator economy embodies a decentralisation of influence. Whereas brand communication was once mediated primarily through broadcasters and agencies, contemporary influence is distributed across thousands of digital creators who cultivate communities through authenticity, vernacular content and relatable storytelling. This diffusion challenges traditional hierarchies of cultural authority and compels brands to adopt more collaborative, participatory approaches to communication. Influencers no longer merely amplify brand messages; they co-construct them.

Social commerce and conversational commerce reinforce this decentralised model by facilitating direct interactions between brands (or micro-retailers) and consumers. These forms of commerce are inherently relational, aligning with Sri Lanka's cultural norms of negotiation, personal trust and community-based decision-making. They challenge the assumption that digital marketing in emerging markets should replicate Western ecommerce models. Instead, Sri Lanka's landscape embodies a hybrid form of digital transactional behaviour that blends global technologies with local consumption rituals.

Beyond these market-driven forces, broader institutional and governance factors also shape digital marketing's evolution. Regulatory frameworks, including data protection initiatives, online content regulation and telecommunications policy, will heavily influence the ethical and operational boundaries within which digital marketing occurs. As the Online Safety Act demonstrates, regulatory shifts can alter the communicative environment, potentially constraining certain forms of expression while amplifying the need for compliant and responsible content strategies. Balancing innovation with regulatory adherence is therefore essential for the long-term sustainability of Sri Lanka's digital marketing ecosystem.

Taken together, these trends reveal a marketing environment characterised by agility, hybridity and cultural specificity. Sri Lanka's transition illustrates how global digital transformations are refracted through local conditions, producing unique configurations of behaviour, infrastructure and creative practice. The country's marketers are navigating a landscape where attention is fragmented, content velocity is high, algorithmic mediation is pervasive and consumer expectations are continually evolving.

### 12. Future Trajectories for Sri Lankan Marketing Research 12 and Practice

The next phase of Sri Lanka's marketing evolution will likely be determined by how effectively organisations, institutions and educational bodies respond to the structural changes identified in this review. Several future trajectories can be anticipated.

First, the integration of AI into marketing practice will deepen as tools become more accessible, multilingual and context-aware. This will increase demand for hybrid professionals who combine data science with marketing insight. Sri Lanka's universities and professional bodies, such as the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing, will need to redesign curricula to align with these emerging competencies.

Second, the creator economy will continue to expand, but with heightened calls for regulation, standardised contracts and transparency in commercial relationships. Brands will increasingly evaluate creators not solely based on reach but on alignment with brand identity, audience authenticity and content ethics. Influencer measurement frameworks, now still nascent in Sri Lanka, will become more robust and data-driven.

Third, gaming and immersive media will shift from niche to mainstream marketing avenues. As 5G and satellite broadband expand internet capacity, Sri Lankan marketers will have greater opportunities to incorporate augmented reality, virtual events, esports partnerships and interactive consumer experiences. The ability to design marketing interventions that integrate narrative, play and community will become a differentiating competitive advantage.

Fourth, sustainability and ethical marketing will gain prominence as Sri Lankan consumers especially millennials and Gen Z prioritise responsible business practices. Marketers will need to differentiate between superficial "greenwashing" and genuineness in environmental communication. The rise of conscious consumerism may encourage brands to disclose supply-chain practices, carbon footprints and social-impact initiatives.

Fifth, data governance will become a decisive competitive factor. Organisations that build strong internal capabilities in privacy-compliant data analytics, consent-based personalisation and transparent communication will develop stronger trust relationships with consumers. As global data-protection norms influence local policy, compliance will shift from a peripheral obligation to a core marketing function.

Sixth, omni-channel integration will deepen as the distinctions between digital and physical retail continue to collapse. Consumers increasingly expect seamless interactions, where exposure to a TikTok video can lead to a conversational commerce exchange, followed by a QR-enabled payment, and finally a physical pickup or doorstep delivery. Designing such frictionless consumer journeys will require unprecedented coordination among marketing, IT, logistics and front-line service teams.





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Finally, Sri Lanka's marketing research landscape will need expansion. Many of the transformations described in this conceptual review such as AI adoption, influencer economics and platform-mediated consumer behaviour are under researched in the local context. Universities, think tanks and industry associations are uniquely positioned to generate empirical insights that inform policy, practice and strategic direction. Longitudinal studies, consumer ethnographies and cross market comparisons could significantly elevate the theoretical understanding of Sri Lankan marketing's digital future.

#### 13. Conclusion

Sri Lanka's digital marketing evolution from 2020 to 2025 represents a transformation characterised by resilience, innovation and cultural adaptation. Despite profound macroeconomic challenges, the country has cultivated a dynamic digital ecosystem shaped by rising platform adoption, accelerated e-commerce participation, frictionless payment infrastructure, AI-mediated creativity and the professionalization of the creator economy. These developments illustrate how structural constraints can catalyse, rather than impede, digital innovation when consumer behaviour, technological infrastructure and organisational incentives align.

This review highlights the need to interpret Sri Lanka's marketing trends through a lens that recognises both global influences and localised adaptations. The dynamic interplay between platform algorithms, consumer engagement patterns, regulatory shifts and technological advancements demands increasingly sophisticated marketing strategies grounded in cultural understanding, data fluency and ethical responsibility.

As Sri Lanka approaches the end of the decade, the challenge for marketers is not merely to adopt new tools or follow international best practices, but to shape an inclusive, contextually grounded and future-oriented marketing ecosystem. The country's trajectory demonstrates that even in the face of economic constraint, digital transformation can create opportunities for creativity, entrepreneurship and consumer empowerment. The future of marketing in Sri Lanka will belong to those who recognise these opportunities and respond with agility, vision and integrity.

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# THAILAND

## Marketing Association of Thailand

### 1. Agentic AI Marketing: When AI Acts, Not Assists

AI is moving from support functions to autonomous decision-making across the customer journey. Thai brands are leveraging platforms like TikTok, AWS, and Google to deploy always-on, self-optimizing marketing systems for personalization, content, pricing, and service.

### 2. Video as the New Storefront

Short-form video now serves as a digital storefront where entertainment, interaction, and instant purchase converge. TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts drive discovery and commerce through immersive live shopping and AR experiences.

### 3. First-Party Data & Privacy-First Growth

Brands are shifting from media-led to relationship-led growth using consent-based first-party data via LINE Official Accounts, loyalty programs, and brand apps. Personalization is now a signal of trust, not just compliance.

### 4. Creator-Led & Authentic Content

Everyday creators—from lifestyle storytellers to food reviewers—are shaping consumer decisions. Brands are building long-term partnerships with creators to co-create engagement rather than rely on one-off endorsements.

### 5. Conversational Shoppertainment Commerce

Commerce is live, social, and interactive. Platforms like TikTok and LINE combine conversation, entertainment, and frictionless checkout to drive attention, engagement, and sales simultaneously.

### 6. From Green Claims to Green Proof

Thai consumers demand visible sustainability proof: eco-friendly packaging, transparent sourcing, and measurable community impact. Consistency in action builds trust; vague claims do not.

### 7. Taste Is the New Targeting

Design and experience have become critical competitive advantages. Brands that simplify journeys, design empathetically, and create emotionally comfortable digital experiences stand out in a mobile-first, visually sensitive market.

### 8. Precision Is the New Scale

Marketing is moving from broad personas to micro-markets defined by location, lifestyle, language, and moments. Micro-influencers and key opinion consumers provide credibility within these communities, often outperforming mass celebrity campaigns.

### 9. Longevity Is the New Luxury

Wellness is now a lifelong strategy rather than short-term self-care. Thai consumers seek brands that support preventive health, mental well-being, and sustainable habits, aligning with Thailand's global wellness reputation.

### 10. Trust Is the Experience

Trust is built through behavior, not campaigns. Transparent pricing, reliable service, and responsible data handling shape consumer preference. Every interaction either strengthens or weakens brand trust.

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