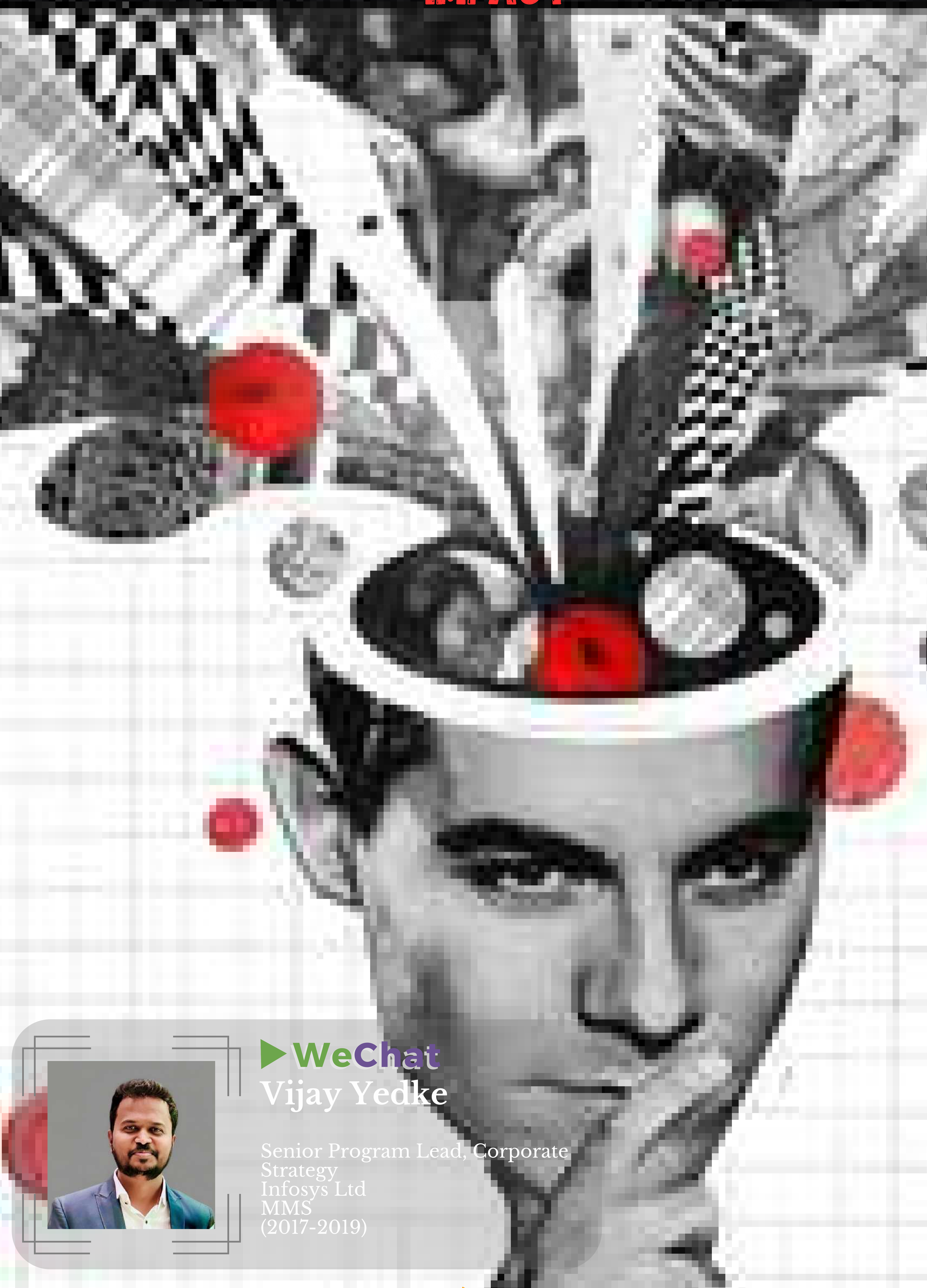
YEAR 2025 | ISSUE 164

EXECUTION, EVOLUTION, IMPACT



WeChat

Vijay Yedke

Senior Program Lead, Corporate Strategy
Infosys Ltd
MMS
(2017-2019)

MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR

Prof. Dr. Uday Salunkhe
Group Director

Dear Readers,

It gives me great pride to introduce SAMVAD's edition every month. Our SAMVAD team's efforts seem to be paying off, and our readers seem to be hooked onto our magazine. At WeSchool, we try to acquire as much knowledge as possible and share it with everyone.

As we begin a new journey with 2025, I sincerely hope that SAMVAD will reach new heights with the unmatched enthusiasm and talent of the entire team.

Here at WeSchool, we believe in the concept of AAA: Acquire Apply and Assimilate. The knowledge you have acquired over the last couple of months will be applied somewhere down the line. When you carry out a process repeatedly, it becomes ingrained in you and eventually tends to come out effortlessly. This is when you have assimilated all the knowledge that you have gathered.

At WeSchool, we aspire to be the best and unique, and we expect nothing but the extraordinary from all those who join our college. From the point of view of our magazine, we look forward to having more readers and having more contributions from our new readers.

SAMVAD is a platform to share and acquire knowledge and develop ourselves into integrative managers. Our earnest desire is to disseminate our knowledge and experience with not only WeSchool students but also the society at large.

Prof. Dr. Uday Salunkhe,
Group Director

ABOUT US

OUR VISION

"To nurture thought leaders and practitioners through inventive education."

CORE VALUES

Breakthrough Thinking and Breakthrough Execution
Result Oriented, Process Driven Work Ethic
We Link and Care
Passion

"The illiterate of this century will not be those who cannot read and write, but those who cannot learn, unlearn and relearn." -Alvin Toffler.

At WeSchool, we are deeply inspired by the words of this great American writer and futurist. Undoubtedly, being convinced of the need for a radical change in management education, we decided to tread the path that led to the corporate revolution.

Emerging unarticulated needs and realities require a new approach in both thought and action. Cross-disciplinary learning, discovering, scrutinizing, prototyping, learning to create and destroy the mind's eye needs to be nurtured differently.

WeSchool has chosen the 'design thinking' approach towards management education. All our efforts and manifestations, as a result, stem from the integration of design thinking into management education. We dream of creating an environment conducive to experiential learning.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the **164th** Issue of **Samvad!**

SAMVAD is a platform for "Inspiring Futuristic Ideas", we constantly strive to provide thought-provoking articles that add value to your management education.

We have an audacious goal of becoming one of the most coveted business magazines for B-school students as well as industry experts across the country. To help this dream become a reality, we invite articles from all management domains, giving a holistic view and bridging the gap between industry veterans and students through our WeChat section

In this special issue, we explore the theme "Execution, Evolution, Impact", which highlights how organizations translate strategy into action, adapt to change, and create meaningful outcomes in an increasingly dynamic business environment. This edition features an exclusive interaction with Mr. Vijay Yedke, Senior Program Lead at Infosys, who brings with him rich industry experience in driving large-scale programs, managing complexity, and enabling transformation through disciplined execution.

Through this insightful conversation, Mr. Yedke shares his perspectives on how effective execution acts as the foundation of success, how continuous evolution helps organizations stay relevant, and how sustained efforts ultimately create long-term impact for businesses, stakeholders, and society at large.

Execution, Evolution, and Impact are not isolated ideas—they are deeply interconnected. In today's competitive landscape, strategies hold value only when executed with precision, systems must continuously evolve to keep pace with technological and market shifts, and true success is measured by the impact created over time. Organizations are increasingly redefining leadership by focusing on agility, innovation, and value creation beyond short-term results.

However, achieving this balance is not without challenges. Leaders must navigate rapid change, align people and processes, and foster a culture that embraces learning and accountability. The real test lies in ensuring that execution remains consistent, evolution remains intentional, and impact remains meaningful. As businesses move towards outcome-driven growth, these three dimensions are becoming critical drivers of sustainable success.

We hope you have a great time reading SAMVAD!
Let’s read, share and grow together!

Best Regards,
Team Samvad.

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Vijay Yedke

Senior Program Lead, Corporate Strategy
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MMS
(2017-2019)

In today's fast-changing business environment, how do you ensure that strategy is not just well-planned but also effectively executed across teams?

In today's fast-changing environment, a strategy succeeds only when it's made actionable and adaptive. **I focus on three things — clarity, ownership, and agility.** I ensure this by linking vision to measurable goals, assigning clear accountability, and maintaining an agile review rhythm.

First, translate the strategy into a few measurable outcomes and clear KPIs so every team knows the "why" and "what." Second, assign ownership with decision rights and track progress through a regular review rhythm. And third, stay agile - test ideas through pilots, learn fast, and course-correct using real-time data.

My background in manufacturing taught me execution discipline, and in IT strategy I combine that with agility - ensuring every plan moves from PowerPoint to measurable impact.

Having worked in both operations and corporate strategy, how do you see organizations balancing the need for process efficiency with the push for innovation and agility?

Efficiency and innovation often seem at odds, but strong organizations design systems where both coexist. Efficiency gives stability and scale, while agility fuels growth and adaptation. Balancing efficiency with innovation is about building structured flexibility. Operations thrive on standard processes and predictability, while strategy demands experimentation and speed.

rom my experience, the key is modular thinking — standardize the "how" in core processes to drive consistency but keep space at the edges for experimentation. In operations, discipline and metrics ensure reliability; in strategy, we introduce agile sprints, pilot programs, and quick feedback loops to test new ideas without disrupting the base.

"In short, processes give control, agility gives speed — and a mature organization knows when to switch gears between the two."

Evolution often requires rethinking existing systems — what has been your approach to driving chang while ensuring alignment across diverse stakeholders?

Driving change starts with shared understanding. I focus first on aligning everyone around the "why" — the purpose and impact of the change. Once that's clear, the "how" becomes easier.

Change succeeds when people see its purpose and feel part of it. I begin by clearly articulating the rationale — connecting the change to strategic goals and team benefits.

"My approach combines data, dialogue, and quick wins: use facts to build credibility, engage stakeholders early through discussions, and show tangible results in short cycles to build trust."

By communicating transparently and linking every change to business outcomes, I've found that even diverse teams move in the same direction with greater ownership.

Impact today is measured not just by outcomes but by sustainability and scalability — how can young professionals learn to think in terms of long-term impact rather than short-term results?

Young professionals can develop a long-term mind-set by connecting daily work to the larger purpose — understanding how their efforts shape the organization's future. It helps to ask, "Will this create value and remain relevant a year from now?"

I always encourage linking results to end-user value, scalability, and sustainability — asking,

"Will this still create value a year from now?" Exposure to cross-functional projects, mentoring, and reflecting on lessons from execution all help develop that perspective

For example, if you are working on an internal automation project, instead of just aiming for quick cost reduction, your team can design it to be scalable across multiple business units. The upfront effort was higher, but it delivered sustained efficiency and became a reusable framework.

In essence, thinking in terms of end-user value, scalability, and sustainability rather than just short-term metrics is what turns good results into lasting impact.

You've had a diverse journey — from operations to corporate strategy. Could you share how this experience has shaped your way of thinking, and what key lessons or turning points have helped you grow as a professional?

My journey from operations to corporate strategy has been transformative it's shaped like how I connect precision with perspective. Working in manufacturing taught me the importance of efficiency, standardization, and solving problems at the root level. Every improvement had to be tangible, measurable, and sustainable. That discipline became the foundation of how I approach strategy today.

"During my MBA, I began to see how those same operational principles could scale into enterprise-level impact. It was a turning point realizing that strategy is not only about defining direction but also enabling people, processes, and systems to deliver it effectively."

In corporate strategy, I've learned to balance long-term vision with the realities of execution aligning multiple stakeholders, prioritizing initiatives, and adapting plans as markets evolve.

This blend of operational rigor and strategic agility has helped me think holistically: ensuring that every idea is both ambitious and actionable.

Overall, this diverse experience has made me value clarity, collaboration, and continuous learning qualities that help translate strategy into real, measurable impact.

MARKETING EVOLUTION IN THE AI ERA: STRATEGY, SPEED, AND STORYTELLING

Winner

AJITA AGRAWAL

ISBR Business School

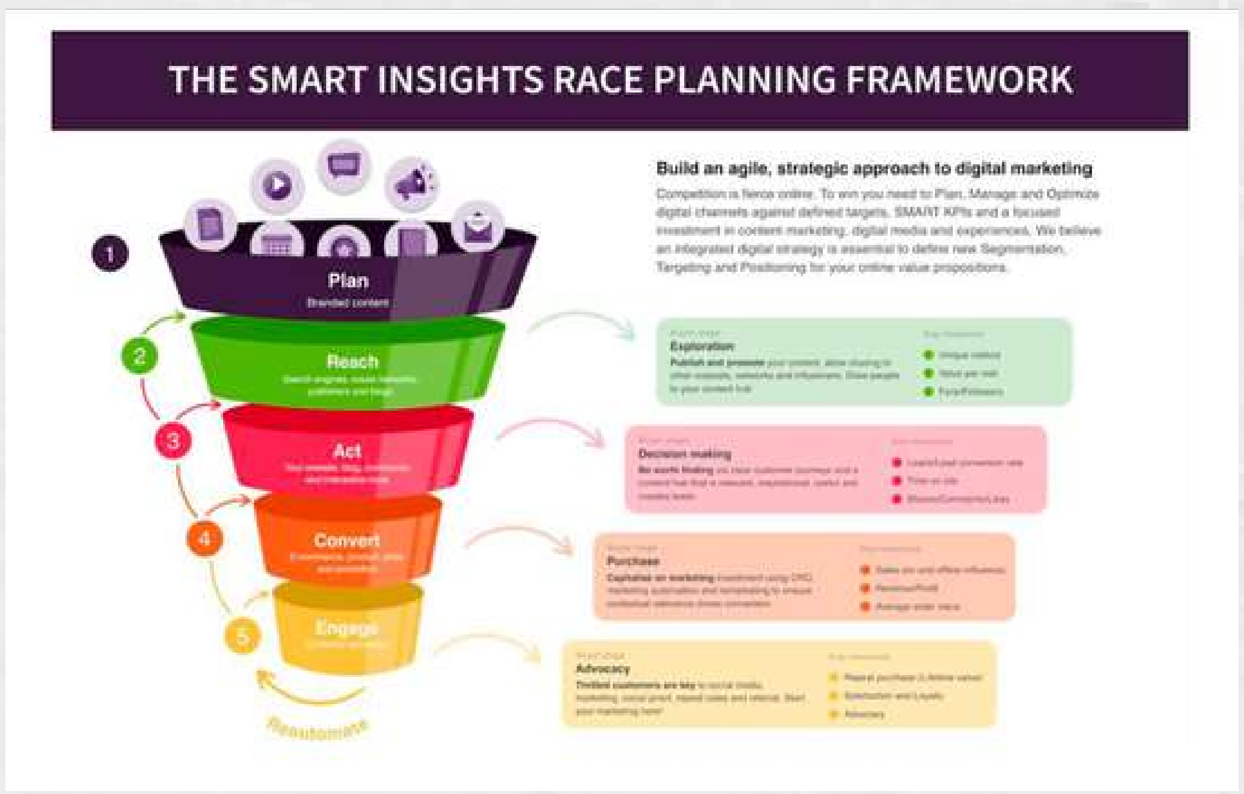
PGDM

2025-27

In an era where artificial intelligence reshapes every facet of business, marketing stands at the crossroads of unprecedented transformation. The global AI marketing industry, valued at $47.32 billion in 2025, is projected to exceed $107.5 billion by 2028, growing at a compound annual growth rate of 36.6%. This explosive growth signals more than technological adoption—it represents a fundamental evolution in how brands conceive, execute, and measure marketing impact.

Today's marketing landscape demands a trifecta of excellence: strategic precision, execution speed, and authentic storytelling. As 88% of marketers now use AI tools daily, and 98% leverage AI in some capacity, the discipline is evolving from intuition-driven campaigns to data-empowered, real-time decision- making ecosystems. Yet amid this technological revolution, the human element— storytelling that resonates, purpose that matters—remains paramount.

The Strategic Shift: From Campaign Planning to Continuous Intelligence



Traditional marketing operated in discrete campaign cycles—plan, launch, measure, adjust. AI has demolished this linear model, replacing it with continuous intelligence loops where strategy and execution merge seamlessly.

Modern marketing frameworks like the RACE model (Reach, Act, Convert, Engage) now incorporate real-time data streams, enabling marketers to pivot strategies mid-campaign based on live performance indicators.

Data-Driven Decision Making at Scale

The strategic evolution centers on three core transformations:

1.Predictive Analytics over Reactive Metrics: Machine learning algorithms forecast customer behavior, campaign outcomes, and market trends before they materialize. Tools like IBM Watson and Google Cloud AI enable marketers to predict conversion probabilities and optimize budget allocation with unprecedented accuracy.

2.Hyper-Personalization at Population Scale: What once required months of segmentation research now happens instantaneously. AI processes millions of data points—browsing history, purchase patterns, social engagement, and demographic indicators— to deliver individualized experiences to each customer while maintaining brand consistency across touch points.

3. Marketing Mix Modeling (MMM) 2.0: Advanced MMM analyzes how different marketing channels contribute to overall performance in real-time, identifying which channels delivers maximum ROI and where reallocation budget will yield the highest returns.

The strategic imperative is clear: marketers must transition from being campaign managers to intelligence orchestrators. This requires developing new competencies—data literacy, algorithmic thinking, and cross-functional collaboration skills that bridge marketing creativity with technical execution.

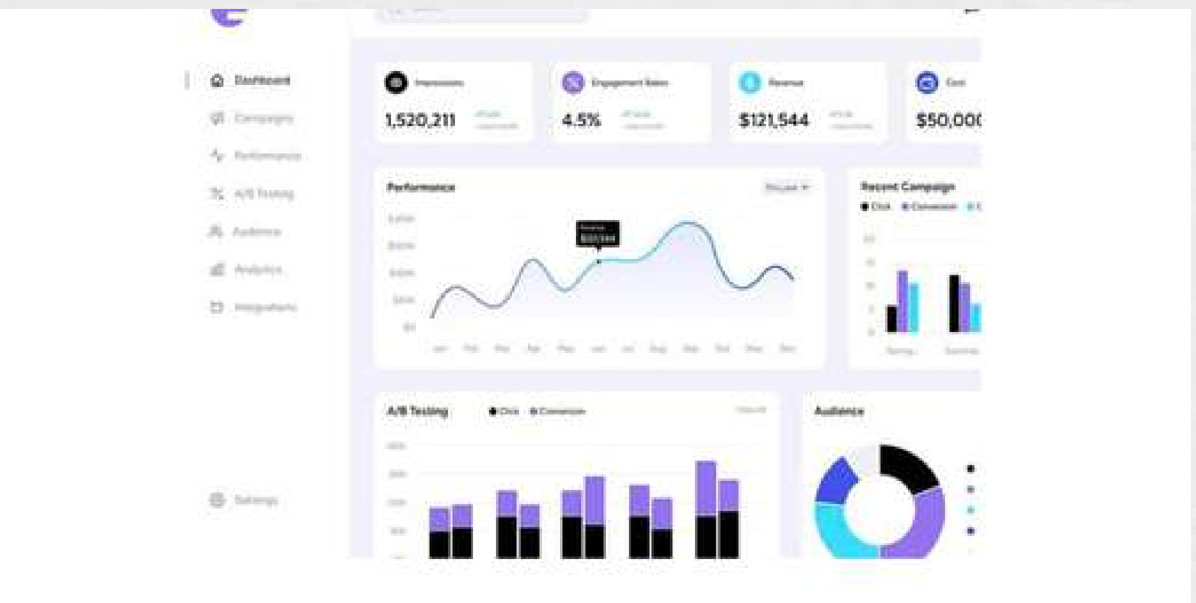


Figure 2: AI-Powered Marketing Dashboard: Real-Time Performance Intelligence

Speed as Competitive Advantage: The Execution Revolution

In 2025's hyper-competitive landscape, execution velocity separates market leaders from laggards. AI has compressed marketing timelines dramatically: 93% of marketers report creating content faster using AI tools, while 81% have boosted brand awareness and sales through AI-enhanced execution.

From Weeks to Hours: Content Generation at AI Speed

Marketing Function	Traditional Timeline	AI-Enhanced Timeline	Time Reduction
Content Ideation	3-5 days	2-4 hours	90%
Campaign Design	2-3 weeks	2-3 days	85%
A/B Testing Cycles	4-6 weeks	Real-time	95%
Performance Analysis	Weekly/Monthly	Continuous	98%
Budget Optimization	Quarterly	Daily	97%

Table 1: AI Impact on Marketing Execution Speed

However, speed without strategy breeds chaos. The most successful organizations balance AI-enabled velocity with human oversight. Consider these execution best practices:

AI for Ideation, Humans for Direction: While 54% of content marketers use AI to generate ideas, only 6% use it to write complete articles.

This reflects a mature understanding that AI excels at brainstorming and drafting, while human expertise ensures brand voice, strategic alignment, and emotional resonance and emotional resonance.

Real-Time Optimization Loops: Modern campaigns don't wait for post- mortem analysis. AI monitors performance metrics continuously, automatically adjusting bidding strategies, content delivery, and audience targeting to maximize efficiency. This real-time responsiveness is what separates growth from stagnation.

Cross-Channel Orchestration:
AI coordinates messaging across email, social media, paid advertising, and owned channels, ensuring consistent narratives while optimizing message timing and format for each platform.
This orchestration increases campaign coherence and reduces execution complexity.

The ROI Imperative: Measuring What Matters

The execution evolution demands rigorous accountability. The ROI formula—(Net Profit / Cost of Investment) × 100—remains foundational, but AI has expanded what marketers can measure and optimize. Key performance indicators now include:

- Customer Lifetime Value (CLV): Predictive models calculate long-term customer worth, shifting focus from transaction-based to relationship-based metrics.
- Attribution Modeling: Multi-touch attribution reveals which touchpoints truly drive conversions, enabling smarter budget allocation.
- Engagement Velocity: AI tracks how quickly prospects move through the funnel, identifying friction points for optimization.

Notably, 83% of sales teams using AI reported revenue growth compared to 66% of teams without AI integration, demonstrating that execution speed directly correlates with financial performance.

Storytelling Reimagined: **The Human Element in an AI World** Despite technological sophistication, marketing's soul remains storytelling—the ability to forge emotional connections that transcend transactional relationships.
The AI era hasn't diminished this need; it has amplified it. As automation handles execution mechanics, human creativity must elevate narratives that inspire, educate, and build loyalty.

Purpose-Driven Narratives: The New Marketing Mandate

Modern consumers demand more than products—they seek brands aligned with their values. Purpose-driven marketing has emerged as a critical differentiator:

• Brands perceived as purposeful report 1.4x higher purchase intent.

• Purpose-driven brands experienced double-digit growth in 2024.

• 78% of businesses used AI in at least one function by Q3 2024, with marketing among the top revenue-generating areas.

Purpose-driven storytelling requires authentic commitment, not superficial campaigns. Companies like Patagonia demonstrate this principle: their marketing doesn't merely highlight sustainability—it documents concrete actions, from material sourcing to environmental advocacy. This authenticity builds trust, the currency of modern brand equity.

The Storytelling Framework for AI-Enhanced Marketing

Element	Traditional Approach	AI-Enhanced Approach
Audience Understanding	Demographic surveys	Real-time behavioral analytics
Content Personalization	Segment-level customization	Individual-level dynamic content
Narrative Testing	Focus groups, A/B tests	Continuous multivariate optimization
Emotional Resonance	Creative intuition	Sentiment analysis + human creativity
Story Distribution	Media planning	AI-optimized omnichannel orchestration

Table 2: Evolution of Marketing Storytelling Methodology

Effective AI-era storytelling balances three dimensions:

Emotional Authenticity: AI provides insights into audience psychographics, but humans craft narratives that resonate emotionally. The most successful campaigns combine data-driven targeting with human empathy.

Contextual Relevance: AI enables dynamic storytelling that adapts to individual contexts—time of day, device type, recent behaviors, life stage—while maintaining narrative coherence.

Value-Driven Purpose: Stories must articulate how brands contribute to societal progress. This requires defining core purpose, aligning it with business strategy, and communicating it consistently across all touch points.

Content Strategy: Quality at Velocity

The tension between content quality and production speed has defined modern marketing. AI resolves this paradox by handling repetitive tasks—data analysis, initial drafts, format optimization—freeing creative professionals to focus on strategic thinking and narrative refinement.

Consider email marketing: 51% of email marketers believe AI-supported campaigns outperform manual efforts, yet the most effective strategies combine AI efficiency with human judgment. AI optimizes subject lines, send times, and segmentation; humans ensure message authenticity and brand voice consistency.

Measuring Impact beyond Revenue: The Triple Bottom Line

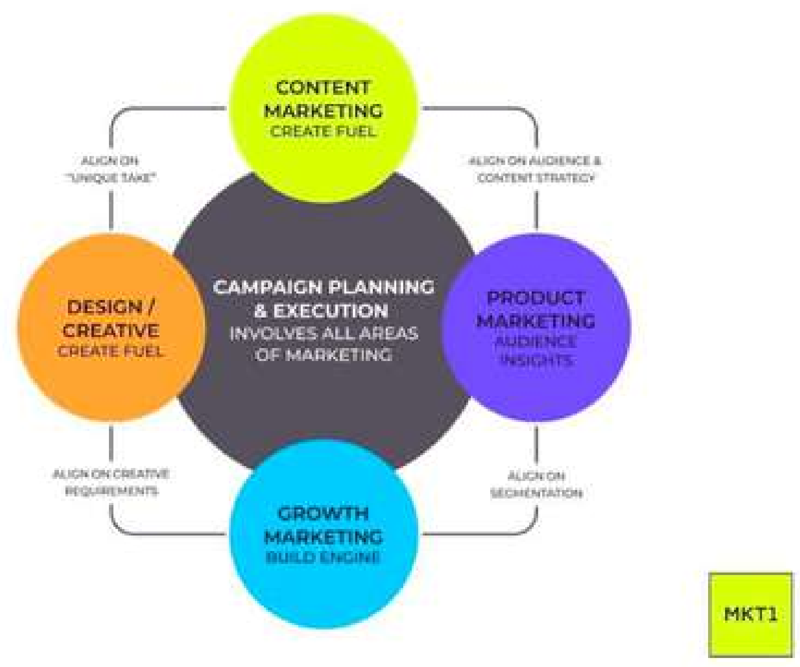


Figure 4: Integrated Marketing Campaign Planning & Execution Model

As marketing evolves, so must impact measurement frameworks. Progressive organizations adopt triple bottom line accounting—evaluating campaigns across financial, social, and environmental dimensions.

Expanding Impact Metrics

- Financial Impact: Traditional ROI, customer acquisition cost (CAC), CLV, revenue attribution
- Social Impact: Brand perception shifts, community engagement levels, employee advocacy rates
- Environmental Impact: Carbon footprint of campaigns, sustainable supply chain communication effectiveness

The 5P Framework—Purpose, People, Process, Platform, Performance— provides a structured approach to holistic impact measurement:

1.Purpose: Define specific, measurable goals aligned with business objectives and societal value creation

2.People: Assess team competencies, training needs, and organizational readiness for AI adoption

3.Process: Establish workflows integrating AI tools with human decision- making checkpoints

Platform: Deploy integrated technology stacks enabling data flow across marketing functions

Performance: Implement continuous monitoring using predictive analytics and real-time dashboards

This framework ensures marketing evolution serves strategic objectives while maintaining ethical standards and societal responsibility.

The Road Ahead: Strategic Imperatives for Marketing Leaders

As we navigate 2025 and beyond, marketing leaders must embrace several strategic imperatives to remain competitive:

1 . Invest in AI Literacy and Infrastructure

Organizations allocating resources to AI training report significantly higher performance. With 92% of businesses planning AI investments in the near term, competitive advantage accrues to early adopters who build robust data infrastructure and develop team competencies systematically.

2. Balance Automation with Human Judgment

AI handles execution mechanics brilliantly but lacks contextual wisdom, ethical reasoning, and creative intuition. The most successful marketing organizations establish clear decision frameworks delineating where AI drives autonomously and where human oversight is mandatory.

3. Prioritize First-Party Data Strategies

As privacy regulations tighten and third-party cookies phase out, first-party data becomes the strategic asset differentiating leaders from followers. Brands mustbuild direct relationships with customers, earning permission to collect and leverage data through value exchange.

4. Commit to Purpose beyond Profit

Gen Z and Millennial consumers—the dominant market segments—demand authentic purpose. Marketing must evolve from persuasion to partnership, from selling to serving. This requires organizational commitment extending far beyond marketing departments into operations, supply chains, and corporate governance.

5. Cultivate Agile Marketing Organizations

The velocity of change demands organizational agility. Marketing teams must adopt iterative development methodologies, cross-functional collaboration models, and continuous learning cultures. Hierarchical approval chains give way to empowered teams making data-informed decisions rapidly.

Conclusion: Execution, Evolution, Impact - the Marketing Mandate

The AI era presents marketing with unprecedented opportunities and formidable challenges.

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Impact-Driven Decision Making: The New Metric of Success

Runner Up

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A Legacy of Purpose

The Swadeshi movement, which began in 1905, sought to boycott British products and support local hand craft. A demand for Indian products exploded and local businesses emerged. Entrepreneurial industrialists like Godrej and Tata became champions of people and purpose long before it was popularized. Impact-driven decision making occurred in India way before a dictionary entry existed on the topic.

Today, to consider companies purely through the production and expenditures implications is narrow-minded. Impact-driven decision-making shifts the conversation away from identifying and maximizing profitability to considering what measurable positive impact we can make to our stakeholders- employees, community, environment and business viability. This represents a seismic shift in how organizations assess business opportunities, resource allocations and evaluate success. Impact-driven decision-making is about identifying what ESG (environmental, social, governance) factors materially impact our brand's long-term value outside of checking generic lists of items.

<u>Understanding Impact-Driven Decision Making and Stakeholder Capitalism</u>

These movements are now being codified through a movement called stakeholder capitalism - recognizing that companies deliver value beyond retailer profits (Ebrahim & Rangan, 2014). In 1970, Milton Friedman wrote in the New York Times Magazine that "in a free-enterprise, private-property system, a corporate executive is employee of the owners of the business. The responsibility for his actions is to his employers" (Friedman, 1970). Following Friedman's argument, in 1997, John Elkington introduced the triple bottom line - profiting, people, planet (Elkington, 1997). Clearly, this is a shift and evolution in how business creates value over the past fifty years. COVID-19 forced executives to recognize that supply chain vulnerabilities, social, inequity, and environmental degradation directly threaten business sustainability

Lund et al., 2020). Companies realized impact isn't a luxury—it's survival. This accelerated the restructuring of decision-making frameworks across industries.

ESG: The Foundation

ESG, a measurement approach quantifying organizational impact across environmental, social, and governance issues, emerged as the most prominent framework (Friede et al., 2015). In the 1970s, companies selectively divested from South Africa, protesting racial segregation. Modern organizations now evaluate market entry, M&A targets, and capital allocation through ESG lenses: environmental risk (carbon exposure, water scarcity), social risk (labour practices, community impact), and governance risk (board diversity, corruption exposure). This transforms ESG from post-hoc reporting into predictive decision-making criteria. Today, 69% of CEOs worldwide have embedded ESG initiatives (KPMG, 2024). Global ESG assets are predicted to hit $40 trillion by 2030 (Bloomberg Intelligence, 2024).

The Measurement Arsenal

Impact Assessment scores companies across five dimensions- governance, worker, community, environment, and customer, out of 200 points (B Lab, 2023). This structured approach forces organizations to quantify impact across operations, not just charitable initiatives. The fashion industry has produced overwhelming liabilities: 97 billion cubic meters of water use each year and 35% of oceanic microplastic pollution. Additionally, over 85% of marketed clothing ends up in a landfill or incinerated (Ellen MacArthur Foundation, 2017). Companies such as Patagonia pioneered the fashion industry by supporting environmental projects and sponsoring internships. Their 'Worn Wear' program allows its customers to return clothing in exchange for points for used gear.

Social Return on Investment (SROI) converts social value into monetary terms and calculates ratios against investment (Nicholls et al., 2012). Companies also try to align with the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, scoring +/- 10 points per goal alignment.

Figure 2 – United Nations Sustainable Development Goals, 1-17 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2021)

All these metrics have come in the backdrop of countries scrutinizing companies for their social initiatives. In the EU, starting from 2024- approximately 50,000 companies are being mandated to publish sustainability reports. Even India has introduced Business Responsibility and Sustainability Reporting (BRSR) in 2021, making it compulsory for the top 1,000 listed companies in SEBI to draft sustainability reports. (KPMG, 2024)

How Impact-Driven Decisions Help Organizations Thrive

In his 2011 study, Edmans reported that "Fortune 100 Best Companies to Work For" firms achieved a 2-3% margins advantage over their competitors each year from 1984-2009 (Edmans, 2012). Employers that integrate impact metrics into their decision-making processes and workplace culture tend to obtain better talent, are more innovative, and often outperform competitors in financial returns.

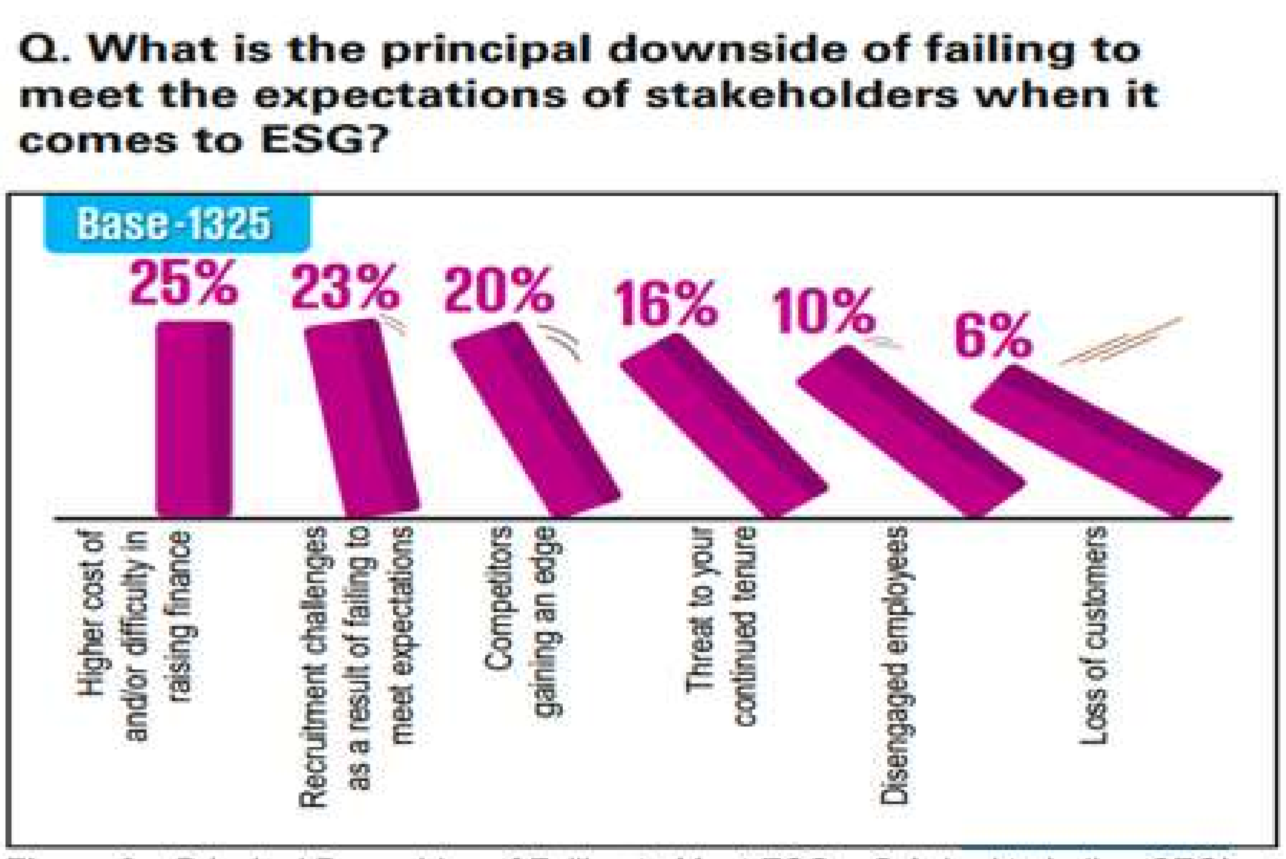

Figure 3 – Principal Downsides of Failing to Meet ESG – Q Asked to Indian CEO's (KPMG, 2024)

Tata exemplifies impact-driven decision making. Jamsetji Tata stated: "In a free enterprise, the community is not just another stakeholder, but is the very purpose of its existence." Impact is embedded in their DNA. Every investment- healthcare, minerals, environmental projects- has measurable community benefits and sustainability components. This makes Tata one of India's most trusted brands. Gujarat Mineral Development Corporation (GMDC), a mining PSU, embeds impact metrics in carbon-intensive sectors.

Through renewable energy investments- solar power in reclaimed Panandhro mines (5MW) and coastal wind turbines (200.9 MW) and water conservation through ETP, STP, and desalination, GMDC quantifies environmental restoration. Gram Vikas Trust alleviates affected communities through mid-day meals, school equipment, skill training, and waste management. Organizations like GMDC prove that profitability and environmental stewardship are not mutually exclusive when impact metrics guide strategic choices. These initiatives align with India's Panchamrit climate commitments and net-zero 2070 roadmap.

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Beyond Segmentation: Understanding the Human Behaviours Driving Marketing 3.0

National Finalist

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When we consider what actually attracts consumers to brands, many interpret it as the functionality of the product, but in reality, it is how the brand makes the consumer feel. In the 1930s, marketing centred on the product life-cycle. Marketers could not differentiate their customer segments and targeted the masses, which proved to be ineffective. Now, marketers are taking a more personalised approach, resulting in more human-focused, value-driven marketing campaigns. This shift in the consumer mindset can also be viewed from a psychological lens, utilising the Self-Discrepancy theory, which explains the gap between the actual self (who we are), the ideal self (who we want to be), and the ought self (who we believe we should be). The constant need of consumers to bridge the gap between their actual and ideal selves plays a significant role in the way they interact with brands.

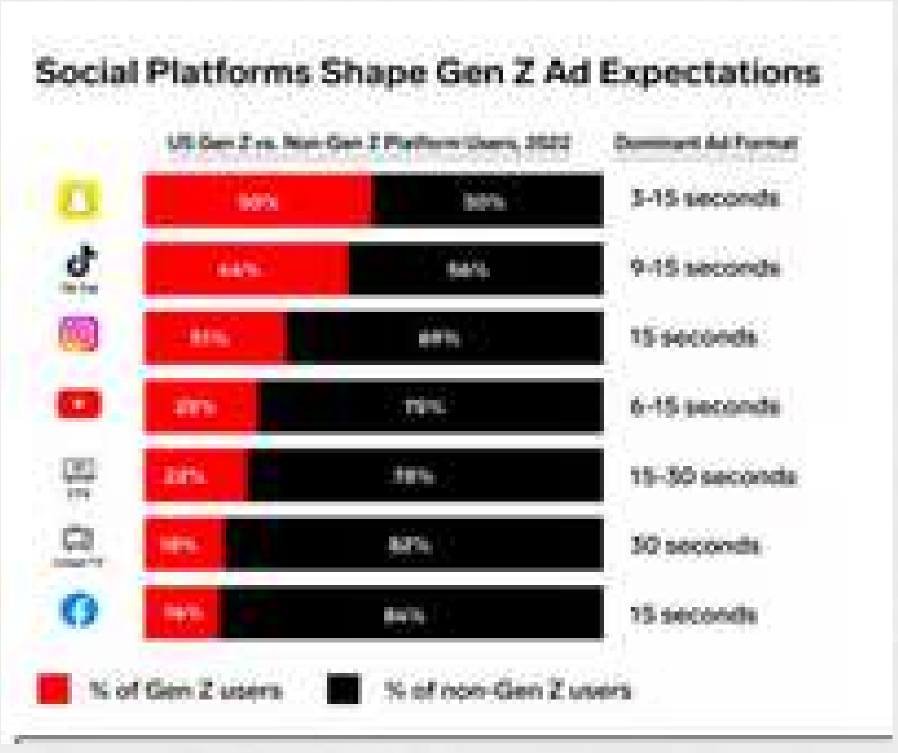
These shifts in consumer behaviour and thinking define marketing 3.0. There is a growth of fragmented consumers, a strong dependence on the trust that is builtwithin communities, and an increase in conscious contradictory behaviour.

The Fragmented Consumer: Multiple Identities in a Digital World

A fragmented consumer refers to an individual whose attention, motivations, and personality are spread across various digital platforms. Marketers understood a consumer to be a single and uniform entity when, in fact, they are a mix of smaller, context-driven identities.

A person who uses various digital platforms reveal different aspects of their personality through them. This fragmentation does not necessarily mean confusion; instead, it demonstrates the adaptability of consumers in today's digital age.

Different studies show that consumers no longer act as a collective group; instead, they comprise sets of specific tastes and interests. Digital platforms and algorithms multiply this effect by showcasing highly personalised content, reiterating people's unique preferences. This leads us to believe that people not only have fragmented attention, but also fragmented desires and preferences.



This is why brands can no longer follow broad trends; there is a need for personalisation. It has becomeimperative for brands to target micro-communities and identity-driven niches, which will help form the emotional bridge between the consumer and the brand.

Fragmentation is no longer a trend; it is a cultural shift. It reflects a world where people shift between selves, moods, and motivations, and where relevance depends on understanding which self a brand is speaking to at any given moment.

Community-led trust: How Groups Shape Influence

Another mindset shift driving marketing 3.0 is the rise in community-driven trust, where influence does not flow from the brand to consumers but from consumer to one another. Social standing and acceptance, creator recommendations, and micro- communities are the factors that influence consumer behaviour. People no longer pay attention to what brands are saying; instead, they focus on shared experiences and authenticity provided by these communities. Quora and Reddit threads have become 'trust' centres for consumers, where the 'filters of marketing' are no longer at play.

The self-discrepancy theory can also explain the reliance on communities. When individuals are given choices, they tend to select those that align with their ideal or ought self. These communities help individuals temporarily close/reduce this gap, enabling them to feel more like who they want to be. Marketers cannot influence consumers through broad campaigns; it must be earned by delivering genuine value to the communities where consumers trust one another.

Conscious-Contradictory Behaviour: Navigating the Say-Pay Gap

In today's world, we have seen a rise in consumers' concern for sustainability, ethical sourcing, and social responsibility. However, when we examine their actual choices, we see that most of the time, they are driven by convenience, price, or habit. Explaining this through the lens of the Self-Discrepancy theory, an individual's ideal self would be someone environmentally responsible, whereas their actual self is a consumer of fast fashion. This contradiction in behaviour reflects the nuances of human behaviour. The inconsistencies in consumer behaviour show how challenging it is to bridge the gap between the authentic self and the ideal self, given the environment in which consumers live. In the Marketing 3.0 era, credibility increasingly lies in a brand's ability to support consumers' self-alignment, not just their transactions.

Implications for brands

The shift in consumer mindsets and behaviours shows us that brands can no longer stick to 'traditional marketing'. Brands must look beyond broad segmentation andadopt a personalised approach. Different platforms activate different self-states, which means a single message cannot resonate uniformly. Secondly, influence must be built within communities. This means that brands should collaborate with micro- influencers and be present where conversations really happen, not where brands wish they were.

Finally, brands must recognise the conscious–contradictory consumer and design experiences that close the gap between intention and action. This means making the ethical, sustainable, or health-oriented option more accessible, less expensive, and easier to use. The core task of marketers in this new age is to create alignment between who the consumers are and who they aspire to be.

The evolution of consumer behaviour is not a shift in strategy, but a change in how consumers behave and react to brands themselves. Consumers today operate with multiple selves, rely on communities rather than corporations for trust, and carry aspirations that do not always align with their behaviours. For brands, success in this era lies in recognising the human complexity behind each interaction. Those who understand fragmented attention, honour community influence, and help close the gap between real and ideal selves will build not only loyal customers but genuine advocates.

Ultimately, Marketing 3.0 is about seeing people not as segments or data points, but as evolving individuals—and creating value that speaks to every version of who they are.

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Impact-Driven Decision Making: The New Metric of Success

National Finalist

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2025-2027

When Busyness Masks Emptiness

When was the last moment of introspection, where you became convinced that every single deed was actually your own?
Often, we end up living our lives by a certain script, just responding to circumstances, and then asserting it was a choice. Our actions are usually dictated not by a clear vision, but by necessity—picking from whatever life throws us instead of widening our own range of options. In this never-ending hustle, we fail to see that living with purpose is a skill, which needs both clear sight and the courage to perform. It is less difficult to flow with the stream than to question its destination.
It is the beginning of a soft, unsettling realization, that feeling of Sunday evening when you mentally go through a week of non-stop activities but do not find any substantial progress. This is not mere tiredness; it is what brain scientists call "cognitive drift," the brain's default mode network activation that makes one question if one's deeds are in accordance with one's real values.

The prefrontal cortex, your brain's decision-makingorgan can hardly develop coherent narratives out of unrelated activities; meanwhile, the amygdala responds to this separation with a background of anxiety. Surely you have done a lot, but still, you might feel even more distant from your goals than you did at the beginning.

Modern Traps and Ancient Solutions: The Path to Conscious Choice The ancient Greeks had a clear understanding of the cognitive trap. They created the narrative of Sisyphus, eternally condemned to roll a stone to the top of a mountain—this perfectly illustrates the situation when our basal ganglia (the brain's habit center) takes over and we are made to go through the motions without being aware of it. Every done email, every eliminated task produces a dopamine release, thus reinforcing the cycle.
However, unlike Sisyphus, we have a choice: we can stack the rock up and down forever, or we can take the good side of the Mahabharata like Arjuna,

who controlled his prefrontal with high power when he could only see "the bird" amidst a multitude of distractions. The battle in the mind between the two roads —habit-driven strife versus purpose-driven action- takes place in three major brain systems. The prefrontal cortex plays the role of the executive: it is responsible for planning, decision-making, and aligning actions with the long-term goal. The limbic system, and particularly the amygdala, is the center for emotional reactions and incoming threats. It often pushes us towards quicker and safer-looking tasks. Meanwhile, the basal ganglia turn the repeated actions into habits, which helps save cognitive energy but can also result in being stuck in counterproductive behavioral patterns. When these systems are out of balance, we choose the easy over the significant.

This internal conflict of the gods vexed mankind the most at the Mahabharata battle of Kurukshetra. Arjuna, rather inadvertently put in the situation to slay his kin, became the victim of emotional overload in his prefrontal cortex—what modern humans would call "the analysis paralysis". His amygdala was more than active in fear noticing, his hippocampus was going under with the recollections of the good times together, and his usually very focused attention was dispersed. The advice Krishna gave was actually cognitive restructuring—helping Arjuna to get his prefrontal skills disguised by connecting the present action to a higher purpose (dharma). This transformation from limbic system reactivity to cortical clarity enabled what neuroscientists call "value- based decision making," where the decision dialectic is won by long-term principles rather than short-term emotions.

Becoming the Architect: From Cognitive Drift to Purposeful Action

The modern-day professionals are, in a way, like the warriors of Kurukshetra—they too face daily battles. The "visibility trap" occurs when, due to our need for instantaneous gratification, we tend to choose the tasks that are most visible and could be wrongly regarded as productive. The "dopamine trap" has us forever after the quick rewards that come with finishing small tasks because it gives a fast neuro reward. The "herd mentality trap" works in our favor by making use of mirror neurons and social brain networks, hence unconsciously imitating others' priorities. Each of these traps has a unique neural pathway that is overpowering the decision-making process.

To liberate ourselves from the traps, we have to go through what cognitive scientists call "metacognition"—a higher level of thinking. The "Bird's Eye Test" forces the prefrontal lobe to get involved and not the regular automatic processing taking over. The "So What Chain" brings in "cognitive elaboration," which is the process of devising more complex mental images of the tasks. The "Regret Minimization Framework" activates the brain's power to think in the future, thereby linking present actions with future selves.

These techniques not only assist in sorting tasks—they indeed rewire the decision-making pathways through neuroplasticity.

<u>What proof really supports this method?</u>
It is in modifying our measures of success. The classical incentives like promotions or dividends primarily stimulate the mesolimbic pathway of the brain and the associated dopamine rush. On the other hand, quality-driven decisions utilize the prefrontal cortex's capacity for meaning-making along with the brain's default mode network— this is the part that gets activated during pondering and purpose-driven thinking. Thus, what is generated is that which psychologist's term "eudaimonic well-being"—the kind of well-being that stems from making noteworthy contributions rather than merely avoiding pain or seeking pleasure.
Transforming from a thoughtless wanderer to an intentional architect needs just a tiny morning ritual. Ask yourself, before diving into email—which quickly activates the reactive brain circuits—the prefrontal-brain-strengthening question: "What one thing would make everything else easier or unnecessary?" This results in what neuroscientists try to convey with the term "implementation intention," setting up your brain to be aware of, to identify, and to take on the essential task.
Emails will be there, and meetings will be organized; but you would have gone through the unlikely route of the basal ganglia's normal course into taking the lead with the prefrontal.

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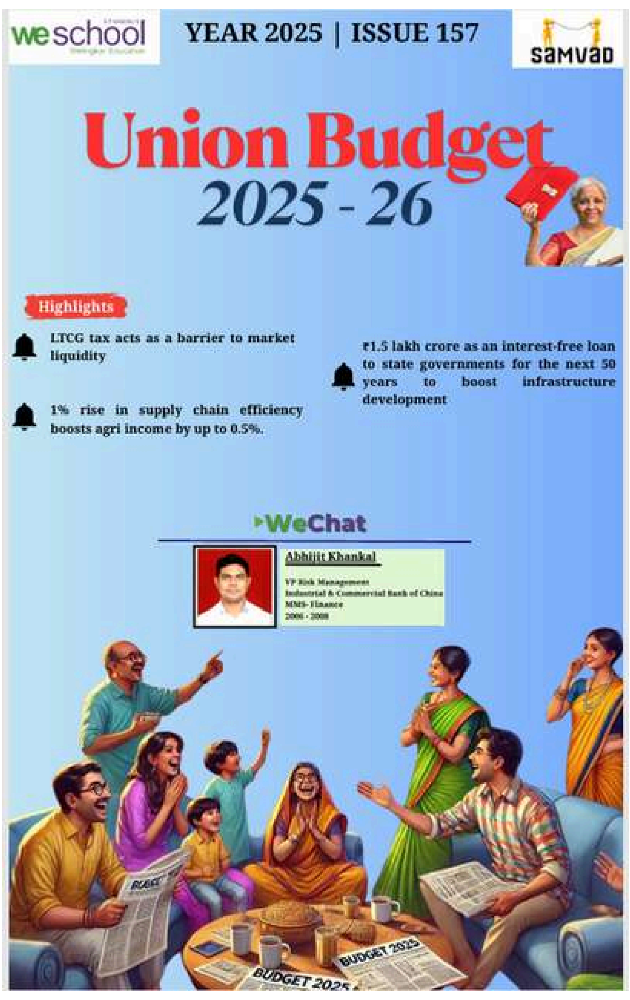

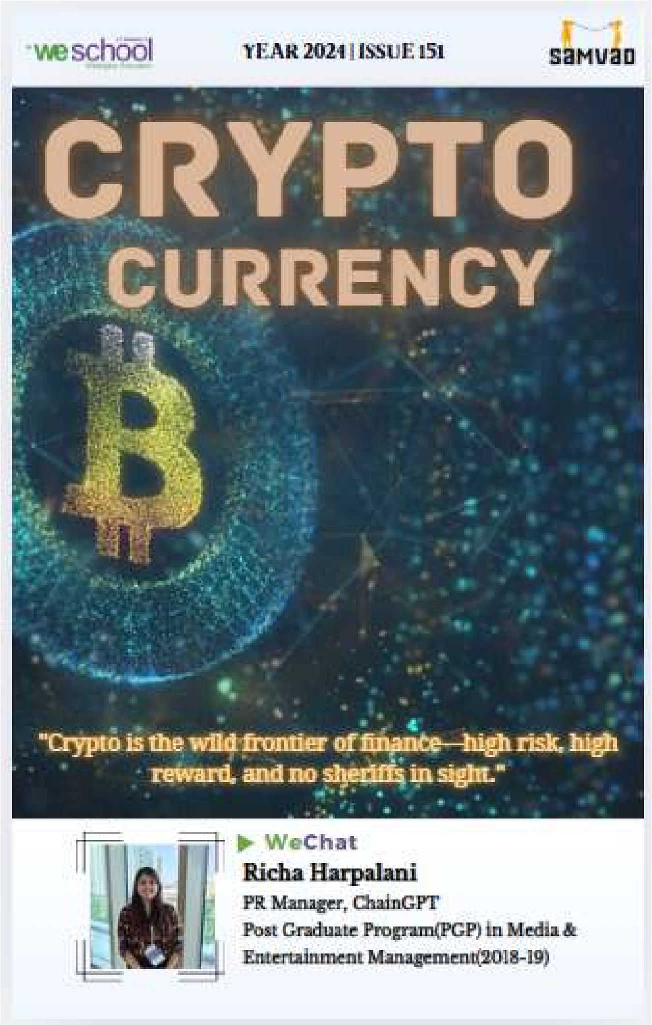

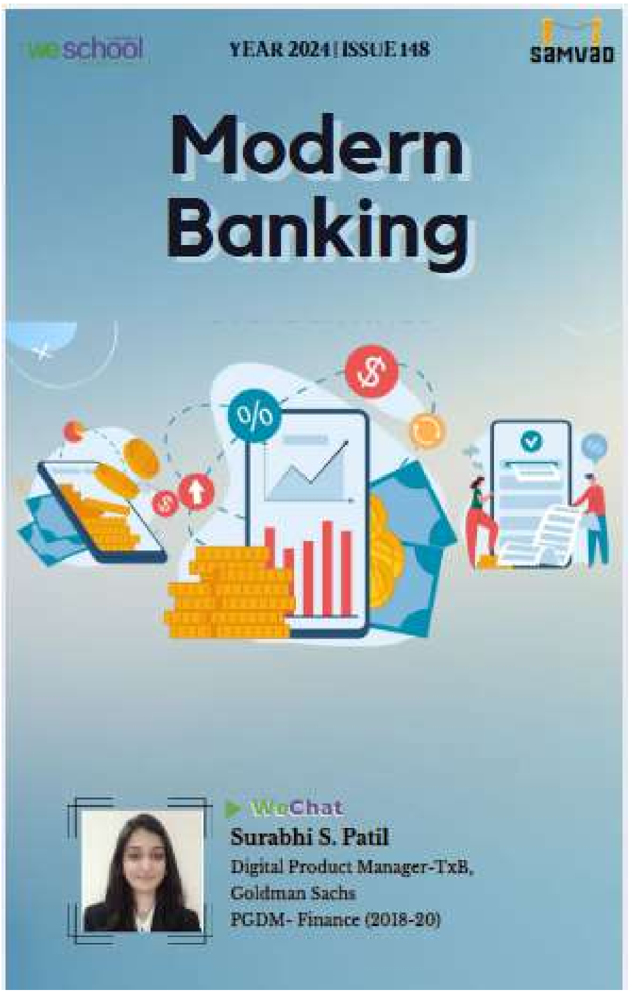

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