

# ahead

XXXXX  
2024

branding  
beyond  
impact





It is in understanding the why behind our actions, motivations, and desires that we unearth the true essence of our existence—a quest for purpose, connection, and meaning.

In a world defined by constant change and evolving landscapes, navigating the path forward requires a deep understanding of our collective journey as both brands and individuals. As we stand at the intersection of innovation and responsibility, the significance of our choices has never been more pronounced.

This edition of ahead delves into the ethical dilemmas faced by advertisers today. From sustainability initiatives to responsible marketing practices, we shine a light on the pressing issues that demand our attention. Drawing upon the wisdom and insights of dentsu X leaders worldwide, we aim to navigate these challenges together.

In the midst of global upheaval, it is our shared humanity that serves as a guiding light. It is in understanding the why behind our actions, motivations, and desires that we unearth the true essence of our existence—a quest for purpose, connection, and meaning.

Together, let us move ahead.

**Shenda Loughnane**  
Global Brand President, dentsu X

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reimagining the 4 Ps of marketing for change:

# A NEW PARADIGM FOR A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

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In the dynamic world of marketing, the foundational 4 Ps—Product, Price, Place, and Promotion—have guided strategies since the 1950s. However, in our rapidly evolving society where environmental and social consciousness is paramount, these principles need to adapt to today's reality and evolve through the lens of more sustainable and responsible practices. The question is no longer about whether to adapt but, how new paradigms help us rethink these foundational principles.

What if we could evolve these marketing pillars to align with today's ethical and sustainable demands? How might this shift, redefine success for the modern marketer?

## PRODUCT:

### INNOVATING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

The redefined 'Product' in our marketing mix prioritizes sustainable innovation. Moving beyond mere market demand, this perspective fosters products that positively impact customer wellbeing and the environment. This paradigm shift towards sustainable consumption advocates for reduced overall consumption and eco-friendly alternatives. Take [IKEA's](#) "Buyback & Resell" initiative,<sup>1</sup> for instance. Amidst the frenzy of Black Friday, a day synonymous with mass consumption, IKEA urged customers to purchase second-hand items. This not only positioned the brand as a champion of durable goods but also embedded sustainability into its very DNA, proving that less can indeed be more.

## PRICE:

### FAIRNESS AND ACCESSIBILITY

The new vision for 'Price' in marketing is one of fairness and inclusivity. Sustainable practices must be accessible to everyone, not just a select few. This approach rejects strategies that foster exclusion or consumer debt. Brands like Patagonia are leading the way with new value-led pricing models, moving away from fast fashion, and embracing the power of durability and wearability. By doing so the brand is not focused on adopting the latest trends, but on making durable and sustainable products for a wide audience. [Patagonia's](#)<sup>2</sup> pricing reflects the true cost of ethical manufacturing and environmental stewardship, resonating with consumers who value corporate responsibility and sustainability.





## PLACE:

# SUSTAINABLE DISTRIBUTION AND ACCESSIBILITY

The concept of 'Place' in marketing, traditionally focused on distribution channels and retail locations, is undergoing a profound shift. Today, it's about strategically minimizing the environmental footprint of distribution and enhancing the accessibility of sustainable products. This evolution extends beyond just physical stores to encompass the digital marketplace, a pivotal arena for influencing consumer decisions.

In the U.S., it is reported that systemic inequality has resulted in a staggering racial wealth gap, with profound differences in income and assets between white and black households. This disparity, amounting to an £11 trillion gap, underscores the urgency for equitable access. SheaMoisture, a Unilever brand, is addressing this challenge head on. They have committed to reinvesting at least \$1 million annually in small, black-owned businesses, recognizing the importance of inclusivity in sustainable practices.<sup>3</sup> Through such initiatives, 'Place' in marketing is redefined not just as a physical or digital space, but as a commitment to bridging societal divides and fostering equality in sustainability.

## PROMOTION:

# ETHICAL MARKETING AND DIGITAL RESPONSIBILITY

The evolution in 'Promotion' reflects a broader trend: the growing expectation for brands to act as responsible stewards of not only their products, but also their influence. It's a shift that demands a recognition of the power of marketing in shaping consumer behavior and leveraging that power to foster a more sustainable and socially conscious world.

A key element in this transformation is recognizing the role of digital marketing. While digital campaigns are less resource intensive than traditional media, they still carry an environmental footprint that must be managed responsibly.

An impressive 83% of Generation Z consumers expect brands to take a stand on social issues,<sup>4</sup> indicating a significant shift in consumer expectations. Brands like Shiseido have risen to this challenge. In 2020, they launched the Sustainable Beauty Actions (SBAS) initiative,<sup>5</sup> a global commitment to sustainability unique to the beauty industry. SBAS focuses on integrating sustainability into all aspects of their business, from product development to promotional activities.





## EMBRACING A SUSTAINABLE MARKETING MIX FOR A BETTER TOMORROW

As we revisit the foundational question, "what if we could reinvent the 4 Ps to align with today's ethical and sustainable demands?" we find ourselves on the cusp of a marketing renaissance. This transformative shift, redefining success for the modern marketer, goes beyond profit margins and market dominance. It's about creating a balance between commercial success and societal wellbeing, embedding sustainability and ethical practices into the core of marketing strategies. At dentsu X, we call this "Driving Value for All", signifying that campaigns can be good for the client, consumer and society alike, demonstrating that aligning with sustainable and ethical values is not only possible, but profitable and impactful.

However, this journey is just beginning. As the world evolves, so must our marketing approaches, continuously adapting and innovating to meet the challenges of our time. This journey promises immense rewards for businesses and society alike, forging a path towards a more sustainable and equitable world. In doing so, we redefine what success truly entails for the modern marketer – it's not just about what we sell, but rather, how and why we sell it.

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the rise of conscious consumers:

# THE IMPERATIVE FOR AUTHENTIC BRAND PURPOSE

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Brand purpose has long anchored how brands connect with their consumers at an emotional level. From the sustainability-centered operating model of Patagonia to the Dove 'Real Beauty' platform, organizations have long understood the importance of brands needing to stand for something greater than the products or services they sell.

However, conscious consumers are increasingly influencing how marketers communicate brand purpose. Whereas a brand might once have solely marketed inclusivity or sustainability initiatives, it has now become a business imperative to match platitudes with action. With 57% of consumers claiming to be more loyal to brands committed to addressing social inequalities<sup>6</sup> and 45% considering alternative brands which are greener or more environmentally friendly than their current choices, brand purpose has never been as important as it is now.

And yet, marketers are not always doing enough to communicate externally their brand values. More than half (54%) of consumers are unable to form an opinion on a brand's commitment to diversity and inclusion. With DEI being a key driver of brand choice for Gen Z (+27%) and Millennials (+13%),<sup>7</sup> marketers are potentially missing a significant opportunity to differentiate themselves from the competition.

One of the challenges of purpose-driven initiatives is the potential for a negative perception rising from internal and external stakeholders. Unilever faced significant backlash from activist shareholders over its perceived prioritization of social impact credentials over business performance.





The Bud Light activation with Dylan Mulvaney<sup>8</sup> drew the ire of some groups who were indignant the brand was partnering with a trans influencer, leading bar owners to delist the beer and public figures denouncing it as a stunt. The beer brand further enraged audiences by distancing itself from the campaign, leaving both itself open to accusations of flip-flopping and Ms. Mulvaney with no defense from online trolls.

It is fair to question why this activation for Mulvaney ignited such a reaction, whereas her partnership with Nike<sup>9</sup> (running around the same time) did not. The answer can be found in its purpose to “break barriers and build community to change the game for all.” Nike has done much to support myriad underrepresented groups, therefore consumers expect it to be working with talent such as Ms. Mulvaney.

After its support for NFL player Colin Kaepernick and his decision to take the knee to raise awareness of racial injustices, Nike faced a backlash including public burnings of its shoes. However, in the following years, the organization saw its advocacy from its core groups, increased sales, and a record high share price.<sup>10</sup>

A recent dentsu study showed only 8% of consumers would not buy a product from a brand if it promoted its commitments to diversity, equity, and inclusion. However, this vocal minority has an oversized influence on a brand's decision to support DEI initiatives. Instead, marketers should look towards the 92% of consumers who are at worst, ambivalent, and at best, enthusiastic when hearing about inclusivity initiatives.

One organization who champions purpose is HEINEKEN, with 'Sustainability and Responsibility' identified as one of its four drivers of stakeholder value creation and top-line growth. This is translating into how its brands communicate to consumers. Inch's is a cider brand centered on sustainability, with all its apples grown within 40 miles of its mill and leftover apple pulp converted into biofuel.<sup>11</sup> This extends into its marketing activities, including carbon-neutral digital campaigns, recycling its outdoor banners into tote bags, and promoting the benefits of using locally sourced ingredients in recipes. Additionally, Heineken-owned Strongbow looked at the intersection of LGBTQ+ and disabled communities to create an accessible stage at Brighton Pride,<sup>12</sup> including having on-stage signers, wheelchair accessible areas, and working with influencer Gareth Howell (Hunsnet) to curate a stage of queer talent.

Many question why representation in advertising matters. From a business perspective, it simply makes sense. It is more likely high-growth organizations will have established equity metrics for brand messaging campaigns than those with no or negative growth.<sup>13</sup> Crucially, diverse and inclusive campaigns are 25% more likely to achieve greater brand advocacy and 35% more likely to result in increased purchase intent.<sup>14</sup>

'Go woke, go broke' has become a term which indicates brands should place social impact at the forefront or risk commercial underperformance. And yet, time and again the results prove this is simply untrue. Brands which are wide awake will win the loyalty of consumers and deliver better business returns.

When consumers are increasingly expecting brands to have a purpose, can you afford to be asleep at the wheel?





# THE IMPACT OF AI ON BRANDS AND PEOPLE

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**Can Artificial Intelligence cause a disconnect between the economic progress of companies, and the social and cultural advancement of individuals?**

A dentsu study, surveying hundreds of marketing professionals worldwide across more than 30 countries, sheds light on this intriguing question. It reveals a stark contrast in sentiments towards Generative AI at a professional level versus its societal implications. While more than 50% of marketing professionals feel excited about the potential of Generative AI within their companies, less than 30% share this enthusiasm when considering its societal impact. What's more striking is that over 40% of respondents admit to feeling concerned.<sup>15</sup>

In Spain where I operate, these contrasts are even more pronounced. While half of marketing professionals remain enthusiastic about the professional possibilities of Generative AI, more than 50% harbor concerns about its societal repercussions.

Why does this difference exist between the enthusiasm at a professional level and the concerns at a social level? Does it imply that the possibilities offered by this technology at a professional level are incompatible with its broader societal implications? One thing is certain: the potential of AI is almost limitless. Within the marketing industry, Generative AI promises several advantages, from enhanced consumer insights and sentiment analysis based on social listening, to behavioral prediction, customer experience transformation, personalization at scale, content creation, process automation, and agile decision-making, among others.





The reality is that the possibilities of AI are nearly infinite, limited only by human imagination and ethical boundaries. And therein lies the crux of the matter. If we use AI ethically and responsibly, professional progress can indeed coexist harmoniously with social and cultural advancement.

Yet, here's the dilemma. Ethics are not absolute, and many companies, countries, politicians, and other leaders prioritize their personal and professional interests over societal well-being. Take Elon Musk's recent denouncement of OpenAI. He accuses them of prioritizing economic profit for the company (after Microsoft's acquisition) over the "benefit to humanity", which was precisely the original vision and ambition with which OpenAI was created.<sup>16</sup> Beyond this case, many political and technological leaders have warned about the dangers of AI while simultaneously pushing for its development.

It falls on us to act responsibly to ensure ethical use of AI. Technology should serve humanity, not the other way around. Business and social progress can and must coexist. We must consider the well-being of future generations as we navigate this landscape.

As marketing professionals, we hold significant sway. Our industry is at the forefront of adopting use of emerging technologies. Our responsibility is to use them ethically and honestly, prioritizing the balance between business growth and safety and privacy of individuals. We must adopt marketing strategies rooted in respect for individuality, so that we can forge relationships built on trust, fostering sustainable long-term brand growth.

What do you think? Will we be able to achieve sustainable growth? Will we use AI responsibly in a way that balances business progress with social progress?

The future depends on us. Let's build it together.



# WHAT ROLE DOES BRAND INVESTMENT PLAY IN ACCELERATING GROWTH OF WOMEN'S SPORTS?

**Pranav Pandit**

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**Spring is in the air, the birds are singing, and millions of sports fans ask each other “is your bracket busted?” College basketball dominates the US sporting calendar in what’s dubbed March Madness and up until very recently it was the men’s game that dominated the conversation.**

Step aside, fellas.

2024 marked a watershed moment in sports as women’s college basketball eclipsed the men in drama, buzz and most important to marketers, viewership. It was a hopeful moment in time when the disparity between men’s and women’s sports was turned on its head and signaled a wave of change. Or did it? Only time will tell if the spike in interest can be sustained and spread to other sports. Many will tout compelling facts such as the NCAA Women’s Championship game between Iowa and South Carolina getting 18.9MM viewers, more than double from the previous year, shattering records and beating out the Men’s Championship which only had 14.9MM viewers.<sup>17</sup> The game, which featured the now household name Caitlin Clark, was also the most viewed basketball game over the past five years outpacing NBA games during that same period.<sup>18</sup> With stats like that some will say that female athletes’ time has finally come and we’re in a new age of equality.

They’d be wrong.





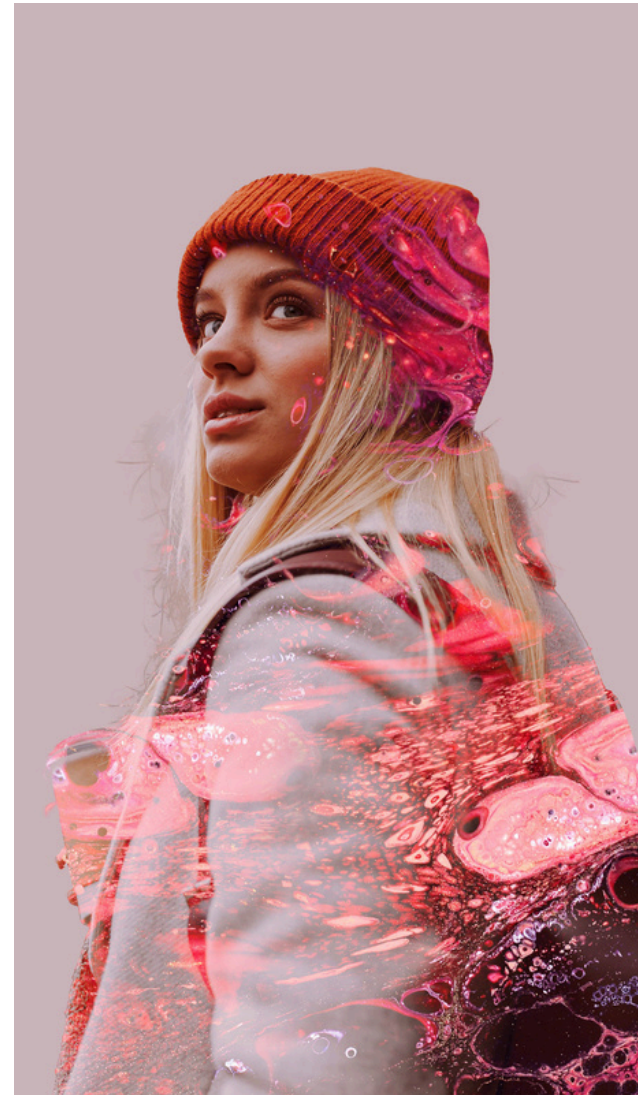
While all indications are that brand investment in women's sports is on the rise, the question remains how much should marketers invest in the space? Women's sports account for 15% of all sports social, linear, streaming and digital sports coverage, an more than 3x increase from the previously accepted stat which stated that number at only 4%. This number is expected to reach a 20% total share by 2025<sup>19</sup> Deloitte predicts that in 2024, revenue generated by women's elite sports will surpass \$1 billion for the first time, with \$1.28 billion in total forecast revenues. Women's sports saw a 20% YoY increase in sponsorship in 2022 alone.<sup>20</sup> These and other indicators are all positive signs of growth but in some regards are simply beating their own benchmarks and still pale in comparison to the avalanche of money invested in men's sports. Some brands are putting their money where their mouth is with a change in strategy.

Financial services company Ally continues to work towards their 2022 50/50 pledge to evenly split marketing dollars between men's and women's sports. In 2024 they've reached approximately 44% in spend towards the women's side.<sup>21</sup> dentsu X client Vital Farms is making their first foray into national advertising, focused 100% on women's sports. They'll be pioneering a "Early Birds" brand initiative in 2024, investing in both the NWSL(National Women's Soccer League) and LPGA (The Ladies Professional Golf Association) as part of their commitment to progress. Another dentsu X client, Carmax, is a corporate sponsor of both the WNBA (since 2020) and the NWSL (since 2022) The brand is one of just 13 corporate partners of the NWSL committing to a multi-year partnership in 2022. The brand is also making a push to feature female athletes in their creative.

That's not enough. There is an unequivocal accelerant to the virtuous cycle of growth for women's sports: disproportionate investment. Investing in women's sports transcends mere sponsorship—it embodies a deeper purpose, one rooted in the fundamental principles of equality and empowerment. By championing female athletes and providing them with the resources and visibility they deserve, brands are not only driving sales, but also forging meaningful connections with their audiences. In a world where consumers increasingly seek authenticity and purpose-driven brands, supporting women's sports becomes a powerful statement of values.

It signifies a commitment to inclusivity, diversity, and the pursuit of a more equitable society. Increased brand investment means media platforms will be forced to feature more games in higher-rated timeslots, leading to more attention, greater league and team revenue, and ultimately, better career opportunities, higher participation rates, and talent development. More stars will drive more excitement and viewership which leads to more brand investment...and now the cycle feeds itself. Through their investment in women's sports, brands have the opportunity to foster a sense of connection with consumers who share these values, creating a ripple effect of positive change that extends far beyond the realm of athletics. In this way, the quest for purpose, connection, and meaning becomes not just a marketing strategy but a guiding principle that shapes the future of advertising and society as a whole.

Swish.



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beyond the screen:

# ADDRESSING ALGORITHMIC BIAS IN ADVERTISING

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Algorithmic bias in advertising is a global concern, and Thailand is no exception. This article explores the potential pitfalls of AI-powered ad targeting, shedding light on how it could perpetuate social inequalities. Moreover, it presents innovative solutions, specifically focusing on the challenges and opportunities presented by the phasing out of third-party cookies, all while championing a key dentsu X ethos of "Responsibility Beyond Reach".

Algorithmic bias stem from two main sources: the data used to train AI models, and the design choices guiding those models. When biased data influences algorithms, it can inadvertently favor or disadvantage specific groups.

Algorithms also often rely on proxies, like zip code or browsing history, to target individuals. This can lead to discriminatory outcomes, even if unintended. advancement.

Biased algorithms might restrict individuals' exposure to job listings, educational opportunities, or housing options based on factors like race, gender, or socioeconomic status. This can widen existing inequalities and obstruct social progress. Biased advertising can reinforce negative stereotypes by disproportionately targeting certain groups with specific types of ads. Not only can this perpetuate harmful beliefs, but it can also limit individual potential. Algorithmic features can create "echo chambers" wherein individuals would only be exposed to information that aligns with their existing views that would deepen biases and impede societal advancement.

Imagine being denied a loan due to an algorithmic oversight. This scenario is becoming all too common as AI enters the realm of loan advertising, potentially discriminating against deserving borrowers.



### **REDLINING'S DIGITAL COUSIN**

Imagine a young couple with a stable income constantly seeing loan ads for high-interest payday loans because their zip code is flagged as "risky" by the algorithm. This digital redlining mirrors historical discriminatory lending practices, unfairly restricting access to prime loans for certain neighborhoods.

### **THE STEREOTYPE SHUFFLE**

A young entrepreneur from a minority community is inundated with ads for small business grants, while their white counterpart receives offers for business expansion loans. These algorithmic assumptions restrict access to the most suitable financial products based on stereotypes, not creditworthiness.

### **DATA ECHOES OF THE PAST**

Advertising algorithms trained on historical loan data might perpetuate biases against certain demographics or neighborhoods, creating a cycle where past discrimination shapes future lending opportunities.

### **THE FILTERING FALLACY**

Highly targeted loan ads could overlook potential borrowers altogether. A blue-collar worker with a strong credit history might not see any loan ads because their online activity doesn't align with traditional borrower profiles. This creates blind spots in the digital advertising landscape.

### **FIGHTING BIAS**

Let's say a bank uses AI to target loan ads. Here's how they can operate responsibly:

#### **CLEAN UP THE DATA**

Merely removing biased data points isn't enough. Banks should work with data providers who collect information fairly, ensuring their AI system starts on the right footing.

#### **TRANSPARENCY MATTERS**

Banks should advocate for clear explanations of how ad platforms target people. This allows for better decision-making and collaboration to reduce bias across the industry.

#### **THE HUMAN TOUCH**

Diversity experts who understand different demographics should review ad campaigns. This ensures a critical eye is cast on the process, considering not just technical aspects, but also the potential social impact.

## THE COOKIE-LESS CHALLENGE AND OPPORTUNITY

With the phasing out of third-party cookies, traditional targeting methods are becoming less effective. This presents an opportunity to embrace contextual targeting, embodying our "Responsibility Beyond Reach" ethos by reducing reliance on biased data by voiding individual user data. Contextual targeting minimizes the risk of perpetuating existing biases present in historical data.

In addition, by focusing on relevant content, ads can reach a wider audience regardless of their socioeconomic background or location. This can help promote financial inclusion by ensuring advertisements reach individuals in all areas, not just those historically shown in specific geographical data, promoting inclusivity in advertising practices.

Contextual targeting might not be as precise as individual user targeting however, potentially leading to a broader reach with a lower conversion rate. Analyzing website and ad content for ad placement also requires more manual effort and expertise compared to automated user data targeting.

## THE DAWN OF RESPONSIBLE DIGITAL MARKETING

The deprecation of cookies presents a crossroads for digital marketing. Despite its challenges, it offers a golden opportunity for brands to reimagine advertising strategies. By embracing contextual targeting and prioritizing "Responsibility Beyond Reach," we can usher in a new era of ethical and inclusive marketing. This approach mitigates algorithmic biases by ensuring messages reach a broader, more relevant audience. Ultimately, this responsible use of AI and digital marketing paves the way for a fairer and more equitable advertising landscape, benefiting the client, consumer and society.





# EXPLORING THE DYNAMIC RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TECHNOLOGY AND SOCIETY

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AI technologies can positively transform the way brands communicate, interact, and engage with their consumers. However, AI also poses significant challenges and risks for brands and people. How can brands leverage the benefits of AI while avoiding the pitfalls? How can they ensure that their AI strategies are aligned with their values and the expectations of their consumers and society?

## THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF AI FOR BRANDS AND PEOPLE

AI holds the promise of revolutionizing brand performance and consumer engagement. It can help brands improve their performance, efficiency, and innovation, as well as enhance their consumer satisfaction, loyalty, and advocacy. For example, AI can help brands analyze large amounts of data, generate insights, and optimize their marketing campaigns, products, and services. AI can also enable more natural, convenient, and seamless interactions between brands and consumers, through voice like Amazon's Alexa, text and image recognition like Google, and even chatbots. These benefits can lead to higher consumer satisfaction, trust, and loyalty, as well as increased brand awareness, reputation, and differentiation.

Even though we are just at the beginning of AI-driven interfaces, we've already learned AI helps to create fun and edgy, never seen before creative artwork, and adds an innovative sparkle as our client CosmosDirekt demonstrated at the 2023 OMR Festival with the freestyle RAP Battle between a real artist and ChatGPT.<sup>22</sup>





Amidst the excitement surrounding AI, we must acknowledge the significant challenges and risks it poses for both brands and individuals. These include privacy breaches, algorithmic bias, ethical dilemmas, and social impacts. For example, AI can compromise the privacy and security of consumers' personal data by collecting, processing, and sharing it without their consent or knowledge. Consequently, ethical concerns are being raised regarding accountability for AI actions and decisions, particularly when errors occur.

The production of biased or inaccurate outcomes due to flawed data or algorithms is another pressing issue, as evidenced by a recent incident involving Google's Gemini. In February 2023, Google took parts of its Gemini offline after it addressed the very sensitive topic of WW2 and AI-created images of racially diverse soldiers.<sup>23</sup> This extreme example underscores the potential dangers and ethical complexities associated with AI technologies.

Moreover, some applications of AI can have social implications, such as displacing human workers and influencing human behaviors and values. These challenges have the potential to undermine consumer trust and damage brand reputation and credibility.

## AI STRATEGIES FOR BRANDS

To address these challenges and risks, and to harness the benefits of AI, brands must adopt clear strategies that prioritize transparency, fairness, accountability, and empowerment. Transparency is essential to build trust, while fairness ensures that AI systems remain unbiased and accurate. Accountability involves taking responsibility for AI actions and implementing clear ethical guidelines. Empowering consumers by giving them more control over their data and AI interactions is also crucial for fostering trust and ensuring ethical AI practices.

As with any technological advancement, AI represents both a blessing and a curse. This article, for example, was inspired by AI but then adjusted for purpose by a human being. Ultimately, as with every disruptive development, guidelines and ethical rules need to be developed and formalized. Just as in chemistry, where the dose determines the poison, AI's impact hinges on the framework within which it operates. With clear guidelines and ethical boundaries, AI can indeed be a powerful ally for brands, enriching consumer experiences and fostering diversity in the digital age.



# SUSTAINABILITY AND BOUGHT MEDIA TRANSFORMATION:

paving the green path in a digital landscape

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Planning and Strategy Director, dentsu X Global



Amidst the digital revolution redefining landscape of bought media, a new player has emerged on the stage – sustainability. Beyond the realms of technological advancements, sustainability is becoming a key driving force in transforming how media is planned, created, and consumed. Take Kia's Niro Super Bowl ad,<sup>24</sup> for instance. In this article, we delve into the evolving role of sustainability in the bought media sector and explore its profound impact on various aspects such as planning, content creation, and distribution.

## SUSTAINABLE MEDIA PLANNING

Traditionally, media planning has focused on reaching the widest audience through various channels without much regard for the environmental impact. Now, in the era of sustainability, media planning is undergoing a profound shift. The emphasis is now on optimizing digital, social, TV, out-of-home (OOH), and video channels in ways that minimizes carbon footprints. This involves prioritizing eco-friendly options for campaigns, like McDonald's Better M campaign,<sup>25</sup> choosing platforms powered by renewable energy, and strategically selecting channels that align with sustainable values. By incorporating sustainability into the planning process, businesses can not only reduce their environmental impact, but also resonate with an increasingly eco-conscious audience.

## ECO-FRIENDLY CONTENT CREATION

The heart of any media campaign lies in its content. Sustainability is leaving an indelible mark on how content is conceptualized, produced, and disseminated. Brands are recognizing the importance of aligning their messaging with eco-friendly values. This shift goes beyond mere greenwashing and involves a genuine commitment to sustainable content creation. This may include using recycled or biodegradable materials in visual content, promoting environmentally conscious themes in video campaigns, and ensuring that the overall production process adheres to sustainable practices. Recently, Hellman's revamped their Cook Clever, Waste Less campaign<sup>26</sup> (initially a TV show crafted for Channel 4 in the UK to educate households on minimizing food waste) into a star-studded Super Bowl ad. By integrating sustainability into content creation, brands can appeal to socially responsible consumers while contributing to a greener media industry.





## GREENING THE DIGITAL LANDSCAPE

The digital sphere, despite its intangible nature, has a tangible environmental impact. From energy consumption to electronic waste, the digital landscape plays a crucial role in the overall sustainability of bought media. Businesses are now exploring ways to make their digital presence more eco-friendly, for example, IKEA's sustainable social campaigns, highlighting the witty origin stories of their BLÅVINGAD soft toy collection.<sup>27</sup> This can also involve optimizing websites for energy efficiency, utilizing sustainable hosting solutions, and adopting responsible data practices to minimize the environmental footprint of digital campaigns. The transformation of digital media towards sustainability not only aligns with ethical considerations but also positions brands as leaders in responsible corporate practices.

## SUSTAINABLE DISTRIBUTION CHANNELS

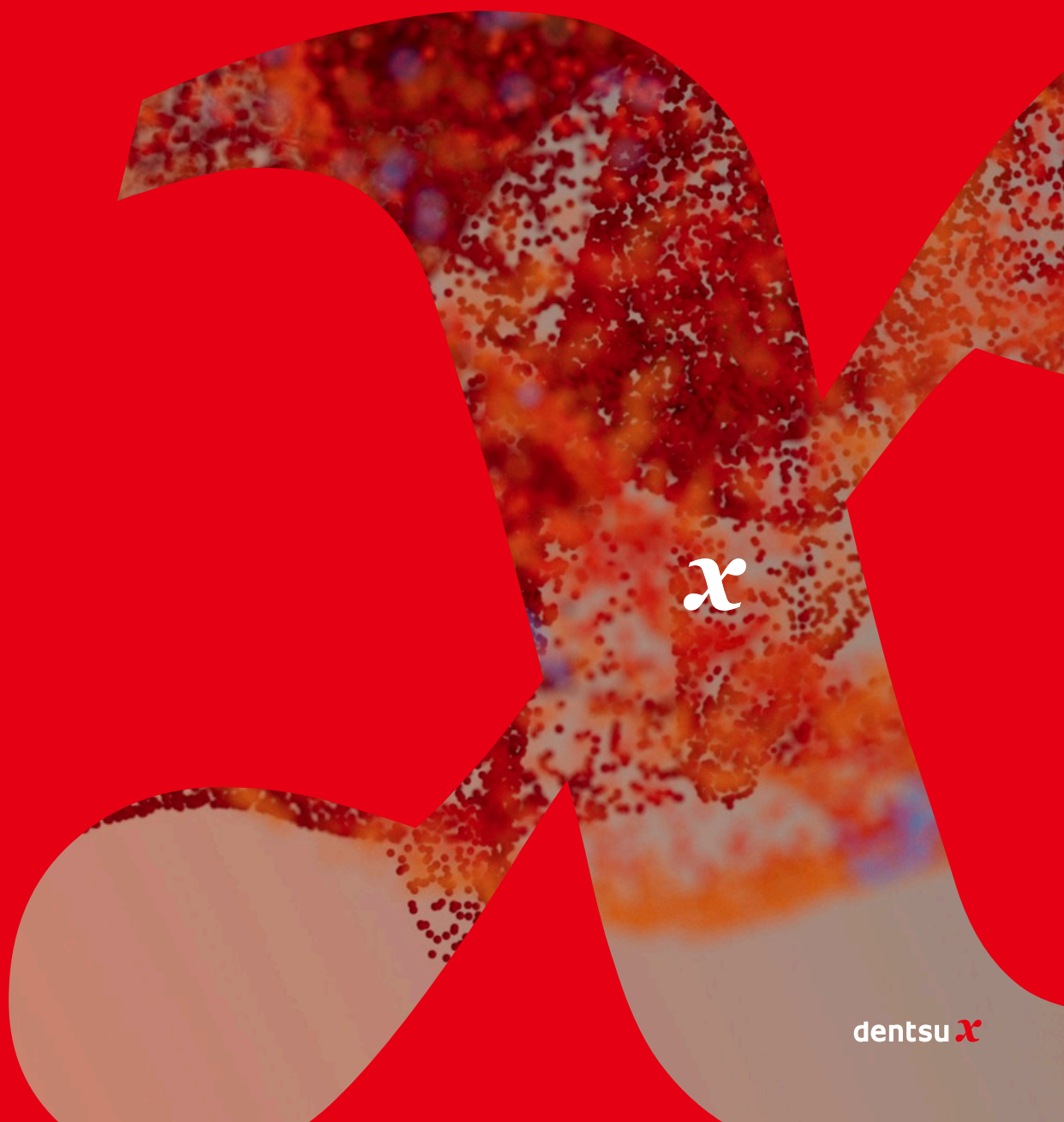
The distribution of media content, whether through social media, TV, video platforms, or OOH channels – such as Nando's, who removed the emissions equivalent of 11,265 cars with a single billboard – is a significant aspect of bought media.<sup>28</sup> Companies are reevaluating their distribution strategies to prioritize sustainability. Their efforts may involve partnering with eco-friendly courier services for physical materials, utilizing energy-efficient servers for online distribution, and even exploring innovative ways to leverage blockchain technology for transparent and sustainable content distribution. By embracing sustainable distribution channels, businesses can contribute to reducing the carbon impact of media dissemination and reinforce their commitment to a green future.

The transformation of bought media through sustainability is not just a trend, it is a necessity in the face of pressing environmental challenges. Beyond the technological advancements that have shaped the digital landscape, businesses are recognizing the importance of integrating sustainability into every facet of media planning and execution. As businesses embark on this transformative journey, they are not only embracing a more sustainable approach, but are also becoming agents of positive change in the media industry.

# CONNECTION IN AN AGE OF DIGITAL DISTRACTION

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**The influx of digital platforms has given us a buffet of ways to connect, yet despite this abundance, the irony is that we grapple with a loneliness epidemic. Deep down, we all seek meaningful connections, not just fleeting online interactions. To create a lasting impact, brands need to understand this and seek ways to foster genuine community.**

Let's be honest. Today we have more opportunities for interaction and relationships than we probably need, and certainly more than we can adequately manage. The abundance of offers sparks an onslaught of consumption, yet our human limitations cause us to struggle to keep pace with the speed of digital opportunities. Numerous consumer studies highlight the increasing fatigue we now experience in managing so many profiles, connections, groups and discussions.<sup>29</sup> Young people, in particular, are at the forefront of paring down their social media presence by opting for private profiles, disregarding vanity metrics like the number of friends (though not necessarily the number of likes) and gravitating back towards offline communities.<sup>30</sup>

Culture and tribes are two of the most common buzz words in the marketing and communication sphere and for very good reason. In a landscape where it's all too easy to be ensnared by yet another random piece of diverting content, tribes are the groups wherein we make stable connections and culture infuses these connections with vitality and significance. In theory it is an easy strategy for brands to move from addressing broad audiences with impactful content to addressing tribes with tailored messaging. However, the reality is far more complex. In realms where people have intense and lasting relationships, they protect themselves from strangers by raising barriers to keep out those who are not part of the group. Only a handful of lovebrands are spontaneously embraced by tribes, allowed to seamlessly become part of the fold. So, what hope do most brands have of forging new relationships in this landscape?



Brand strategists need to distinguish the different communities wherein people gather. Often, we tend to prioritize close-knit, strong groups while overlooking spontaneous communities that come to life for calendar, entertainment or even media moments. In those cases, people are more receptive to invite brands as guests, if not even as protagonists, when the rules are less rigid, habits are less consolidated and where there is room to create new rituals. This paves the way for partnerships with the creators that ignite these communities and can introduce and motivate the brand presence giving it more credibility. It requires rethinking the experiential marketing less in term of sponsoring and more in terms of enabling human connections for new shared moments when people need them most. Ultimately, it prompts brands to invest in new and bespoke content that speaks the same language of these tribes who are graciously opening their doors to new additions.

Connecting in the age of distraction isn't about achieving instant success. It's about laying the groundwork, one step at a time, one wave after another, engaging communities at the moments when they can create a sense of belonging, and becoming woven into the cultural fabric that binds people together.



# HOW DESIGN FICTION WILL SHAPE THE FUTURE OF THE ADVERTISING INDUSTRY

**Quentin Delamotte**

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In the dynamic world of branding and advertising, design fiction is emerging as a revolutionary tool. This innovative and still nascent approach, blending elements of fiction and design, invites brands to envision and discuss potential futures through speculative narratives and prototypes. Unlike traditional advertising methods, design fiction does not predict the future instead, it harnesses our imagination to explore and understand the possible social, commercial, and cultural impacts ahead. This methodology is particularly interesting when brands apply this approach to sustainability and social impact to go beyond conventional advertising limits and devise strategies aligned with their broader brand aspirations.

## THE CONCEPT AND POWER OF DESIGN FICTION

At the heart of design fiction lies its capacity to conjure thought-provoking what if scenarios. These narratives are crucial to our understanding of the implications of today's actions on tomorrow's landscape, especially in a world as intricate, fast-paced and brimming with information as ours. We can use design fiction to contemplate and better equip ourselves for what lies ahead.

By imagining a world where every consumer choice promotes environmental well-being, design fiction allows brands to craft stories that are both engaging and serve as blueprints for a greener tomorrow. This alignment of brand identity with sustainable narratives fosters a community of like-minded consumers and creates a strong brand loyalty rooted in environmental consciousness.

The power of design fiction in sustainability was vividly showcased in Greenpeace's campaign within the virtual world of Grand Theft Auto (GTA).<sup>31</sup> By portraying potential climate catastrophes within the game's universe, the campaign highlighted how design fiction could effectively communicate critical sustainability messages in an engaging and profound manner. This approach emphasized the urgency of environmental issues and demonstrated design fiction's potential to revolutionize traditional advertising methods.

## FOSTERING STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT AND DIALOGUE

Beyond its usefulness in crafting narratives, design fiction enables us to tailor prototypes to our clients' objectives. Organizations charged with preparing for the future are likely to fall victim to cognitive biases, i.e., entrenched thought patterns and ingrained methodologies that inadvertently shape our perspectives. To help overcome such limitations, brands can inject fictional external elements into their planning to reshuffle the deck, deconstruct their thought patterns, and enrich their thinking.

When we engage stakeholders in speculative scenarios, we extend the conversation beyond traditional advertising boundaries to nurture deeper community connections and foster a unified vision for a sustainable future among consumers, investors, and social communities. This collaborative approach positions brands as visionary leaders.

Design fiction offers the flexibility to challenge established norms and biases, particularly in tackling complex scenarios. By customizing narratives to resonate with various demographics, brands can convey the importance and relevance of their products or services in compelling ways. Whether through scenarios, videos or fictional drawings, this method enables us to understand all the forces and issues at play in the imagined future world. For advertisers, producing this type of scenario is a fantastic opportunity that enables them to discuss the relevance of an imagined device or service, identify the obstacles and benefits, and pinpoint areas for improvement.

This iterative process enables brands to engage diverse audiences, gather immediate feedback, and align brand initiatives with market preferences and expectations. By anticipating the future in this way, brands can ensure that these strategies, when materialized in the real world, are primed for success.





## VIRTUAL EXPERIMENTATION AND STRATEGY REFINEMENT

Companies who apply a design fiction approach can imagine their business in the years ahead to plan, prepare, and adapt better than their competitors. By imagining a future, 10, 15 or 30 years from now, companies can let go of the constraints of today and ask, "If a social phenomenon, a technology, or an idea could revolutionize the market over the next decade, what would it be? What would a world where this transformation actually took place look like? What new needs might this transformation generate? How could we adapt or renew our products or services to meet these emerging needs? How should we communicate to promote this new product or service to reach this new target audience?"

The Greenpeace campaign in Grand Theft Auto exemplifies how imaginative narratives can make complex issues like climate change more urgent and relatable. This advertising approach transcends product promotion; it ignites change and propels movements toward a sustainable world.

## THE TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF DESIGN FICTION IN ADVERTISING

By embracing this innovative approach, brands not only redefine their role in the market but also significantly contribute shaping the future through innovation, growth, and a more engaged society.

That is our vision at dentsu X: going beyond the conventions of today to create experiences that pave the way for a better tomorrow.



nostalgia in today's culture:

# EMBRACING THE PAST WITH PURPOSE

**Eve Leshaw**

EVP, Managing Director, dentsu X USA





Nostalgia isn't just about fondly remembering the past; it's a cultural currency shaping today's world. Each generation shows renewed interest in what has come before. The adage, 'everything old is new again' is an insight that is continually proven as demonstrated with the Tapeheads community who have a fervor for massive collections of long-forgotten VHS tapes. As one who had a vast collection of VHS tapes, I was happy to ditch them for the sleeker DVD.

Brands adeptly tap into this longing for bygone eras. In 2011, Nike dropped limited-edition Nike MAGs straight out of *Back to the Future Part II*. These were not just shoes; they were coveted time machines for sneaker-heads and movie buffs (some fetching up to \$25K on eBay). Igloo's retro cooler line blends Gen Z neon with '80s kitsch, complete with modern tech like Bluetooth speakers. Meanwhile, both Chili's 1990's throwback Baby Back Ribs jingle and Burger King's 1974 Have it Your Way campaign were reimaged with a modern twist across TV, video, and social media, appealing to multiple generations. Likewise, the success of the Barbie movie last year led to numerous Barbie collabs including everything from nail polish to toothbrushes. But not all uses of nostalgia hit home. As attitudes and beliefs evolve, brands must ensure their take on nostalgia aligns with contemporary values.

The proliferation of technology and media have reshaped how we perceive the world and brands around us. Streaming services, social media, and even genealogy websites offer unprecedented access to both past and present. Millennials and Gen X parents connect over TikTok, sharing videos of their Gen Z kids baffled by cassette tape players, pagers or rotary phones. These diverse historical perspectives have shifted generational attitudes and behaviors around product and media consumption. Gen Z and Millennials are 27% more likely than older generations to buy from brands they believe care about their impact on people and the planet. Thrifting, as a means to limit fast fashion consumption, has grown in popularity and is expected to gross \$77B by 2025. Contemporary views on systemic racism have prompted media companies like Turner Classic Movies and Disney to add warnings or discussions to old films, offering a modern take on their content.



In a world where yesterday's hits are today's trends, brands must do more than capitalize on nostalgia; they must do it right. And not only is the time narrowing between the past, the now and the resurgence, but it is happening intragenerationally.

## TAKEAWAYS FOR BRANDS

- Defy the convention of now: transcend the confines of showcasing only what's new and next by harnessing nostalgia to build deeper bonds between your brand and audience.
- Know your roots: Be transparent about your past and your trajectory. Your audience isn't just buying a product; they're witnessing your evolution within society.
- Make it more than a gimmick: Ensure nostalgic elements are aligned with your business purpose.
- Know your audience: Identify aspects of your past that resonate with consumers and bring them to life with a modern twist.
- Understand trend cycles: Conventional wisdom says to expect a resurgence every 20 years. Now that can happen in half the time with the same consumers.
- Collaborate: For emerging brands, collaborate with nostalgic brands that share similar values and audiences.

So, here's to yesterday's nostalgia, through the lens of today's truth.



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