



# Marketing Trends to Watch in 2026



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# Introduction

As marketers begin laying their plans for 2026, the only guarantee we have about the coming year is that it will be anything but boring!

It may be clichéd to say that change is the only constant, but we really are living in a time of significant technological and cultural upheaval. And that means marketing and communications professionals have to work harder than ever to keep up with a changing media industry, shifting consumer behaviors and attitudes, and a business environment that feels completely different to just five years ago.

That might sound daunting, but the good news is that marketing technology is changing too, giving us powerful new capabilities to help marketers stay ahead. At the core is the continued evolution of AI, which is turning simple tools into collaborative teammates, helping us turn data-overload into meaningful insight, execute our campaigns more efficiently, and get accurate, real-time intelligence on how they perform.

This guide highlights the 15 trends every comms, PR, and social leader needs to know this year, from the rise of Answer Engine Optimization (also referred to as Generative Engine Optimization) to the professionalization of influencer commerce, the dominance of video, and the critical role of social customer care. Each trend includes practical actions and shows how Meltwater's suite of solutions can help you not just keep up but stay ahead.



# 1. AI Search Optimization Moves Center Stage

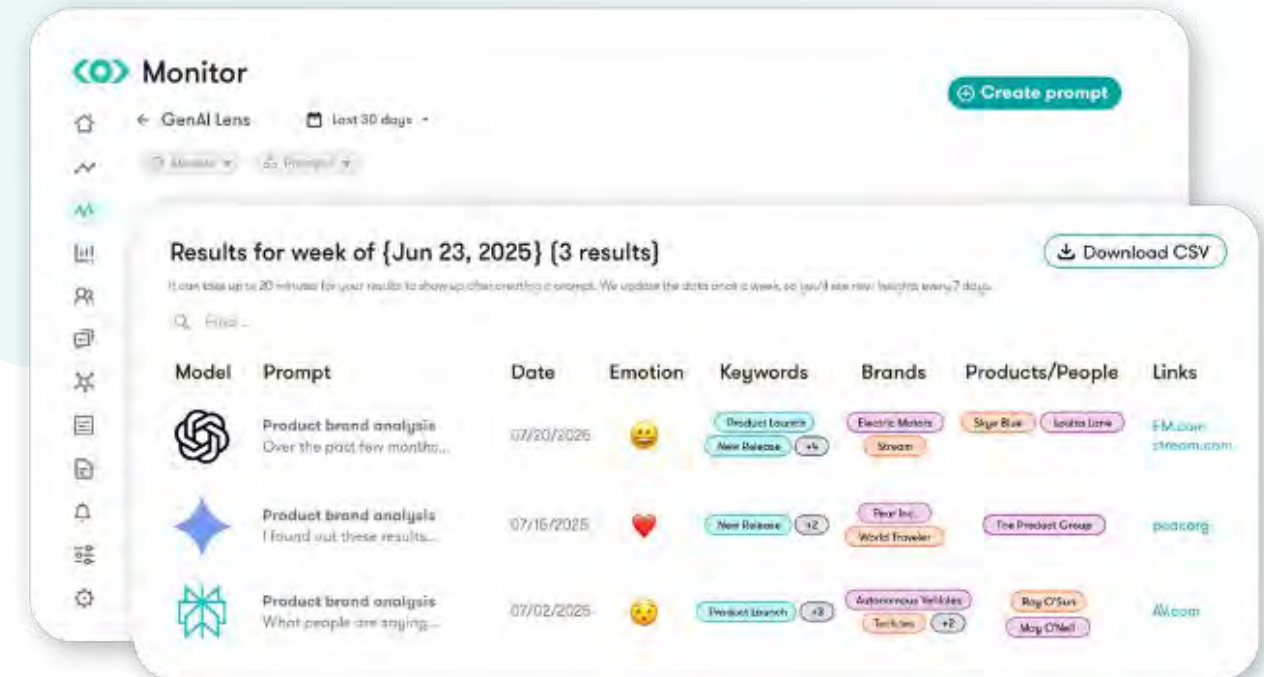
Search is no longer just about *search engines*. With Google's AI Overviews, ChatGPT, and other answer engines increasingly becoming the first place people look for information, the world of SEO has been turned on its head.

Even though it's well documented that Large Language Models (LLMs) can make factual errors and their outputs cannot be relied upon in situations where accuracy is critical, people are increasingly treating these Answer Engines as a primary source of truth. Marketers need to get ahead of this change, and quickly. According to Gartner, **by 2028 AI-powered search will displace conventional web search** as the primary discovery channel for consumers. Meltwater's **2025 Global Digital Overview** shows ChatGPT is now the world's eighth most visited website.

Answer Engine Optimization (AEO) is now just as important as SEO, and will likely become more so as people grow used to having their queries answered directly by the engine, rather than having to dig through a list of links to find what they're looking for. The challenge is that AEO/GEO is a fast-developing discipline, so best practices are still being established.

## Action Points

- Publish authoritative content, human-attributed explainers, FAQs, and a *brand source-of-truth hub* with consistent facts (bios, product specs, crisis statements) — so it's easy for LLMs to ingest.
- Track how LLMs depict your brand/competitors; file corrections when misrepresented.
- Use **GenAI Lens** to see how major LLMs portray your brand and competitors. It also highlights the original content references used by LLMs, so you can correct/update information at the source.



# 2. LLM Reputation Management Becomes a Discipline

It's not just SEO that's being upended by the growing popularity of AI as an information source — public relations is also facing disruption. Journalists and influencers are increasingly using LLMs as research aids, and according to the Reuters Institute, **newsrooms already rely on tools like ChatGPT** to inform their reporting.

That means your brand's reputation isn't just shaped by traditional media and social channels, it's also shaped by what journalists read about you in LLM outputs.

Inaccurate or outdated information embedded in AI responses can quickly influence decision-making at scale, from consumer purchases to investor confidence. LLM reputation management is emerging as a new discipline, requiring regular audits, correction mechanisms, and proactive content strategies that feed accurate data into these systems.

The biggest challenge here is identifying which original content sources were fed into the LLMs to give them their knowledge about your brand. Often that information will have come from your own website, but it can also come from a wide variety of third-party sources, so understanding which sources are used and ensuring they feature correct messaging is critical.

The issue needs to be taken seriously, to combat misinformation risks and maintain control over your brand's narrative. Over time, organizations that fail to adapt will lose ground to competitors whose information is better represented in AI-powered answer engines.

## Action Points

- Monitor how your brand is represented in popular AI tools, and correct inaccuracies by updating the source content which informed the LLM.
- Build Answer Engine Optimization skills, and ensure verified facts (leadership bios, DEI, ESG, crisis statements) are visible to LLMs.
- Use **GenAI Lens** to see how major LLMs portray your brand and competitors, and uncover the original content sources that created that viewpoint. Our partnerships and integrations with industry leading specialists give you the **tools to fight reputational risks**.

# 3. From Tools to Teammates: **Agentic Workflows**

AI is evolving from simple, task-level helpers into full-fledged teammates that can perform much more sophisticated actions and use a variety of software tools as required. For example, a modern agentic AI could help run much of a marketing campaign, which would involve research, planning, creative, execution, measurement and reporting, using appropriate software at each stage.

McKinsey **describes this shift as the rise of agentic AI**, systems that can autonomously complete multi-step workflows.

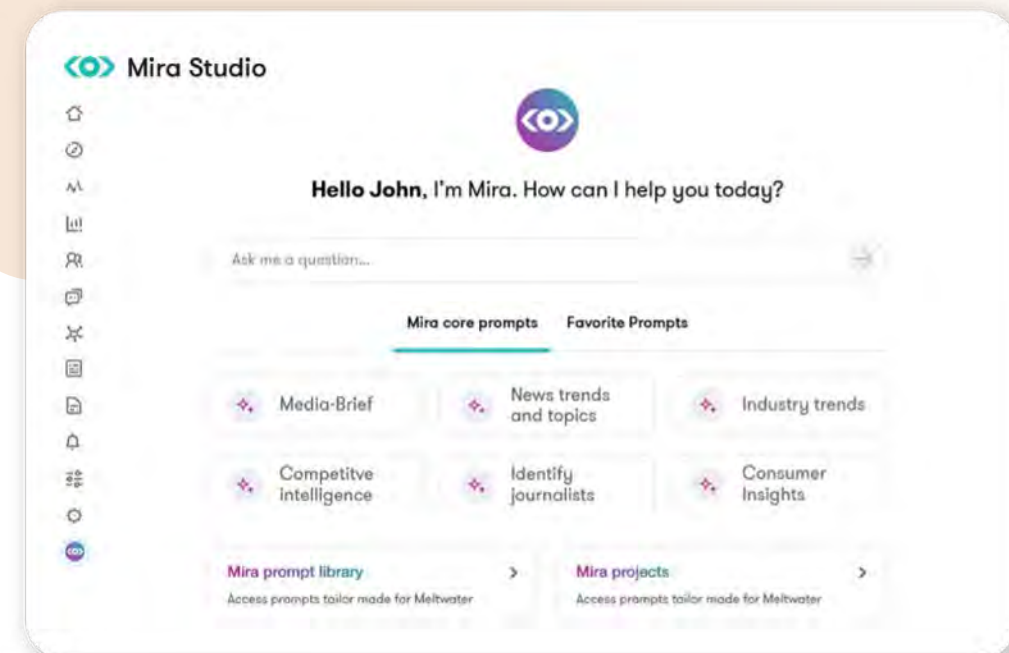
For marketers and communicators, this means moving beyond dashboards, Boolean strings, and endless reporting. Instead, teams can interact with conversational interfaces that condense hours of work into a few prompts, written in plain English.

Imagine briefing an AI to monitor competitive coverage, surface emerging risks, draft a campaign plan, and produce a measurement dashboard, all from a single prompt. The real promise of agentic workflows is

dramatically increased productivity, letting computers do more of the administrative heavy lifting of our jobs, leaving us free to focus on the creative and strategic work that we do best.

## Action Points

- Audit your martech stack to identify which tools work with agentic AI to offer seamless, automated workflows.
- Experiment and educate your team on agentic AI platforms — understand how they work and how they can help you.
- Meltwater's **Mira** is an agentic AI embedded throughout our entire suite of solutions. It utilizes all Meltwater tools and can assist with simple one-off tasks, or work with you to deliver entire end-to-end campaigns.



# 4. Mis/Disinformation Resilience is Table Stakes

Deepfakes, AI-generated hoaxes, and manipulated narratives are on the rise, and this problem is simply not going away. It's understandable that consumers trust the media less than ever, when they're bombarded with mis/disinformation from all angles.

The Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development warns that **misinformation is now a serious societal danger**, requiring robust resilience strategies from both public and private organizations. In 2022 pharmaceutical companies **Eli Lilly and Pfizer were both hit by narrative attacks**, which went viral on social media, causing significant reputational damage. In the case of Eli Lilly, the fake story caused its stock price to fall by over four percent, while the Pfizer disinformation is still **occasionally spread online, years later**.

For brands, this means that misinformation is an ongoing reputational risk. False narratives can spread fast, while corrections often come late and go largely unnoticed, damaging trust, brand equity, and even financial performance.

Crisis comms readiness can no longer be thought of as a *nice to have*, the threats are too pervasive and the risks too high. Comms teams must move from reactive to proactive, investing in early-warning systems, misinformation playbooks, and cross-functional crisis protocols.

Brands that can spot and neutralize false narratives quickly will avoid costly clean-ups, while those who remain unprepared risk lasting damage. In 2026, building misinformation resilience is as fundamental as cybersecurity or data privacy.

## Action Points

- Ensure your **media monitoring** and **social listening** programs are set up to cover potential misinformation risks.
- Update your crisis comms protocols and training to include guidelines for narrative attacks.
- **Explore+** and **Smart Alerts** help quickly identify and understand potential problems. Our partnerships and integrations with industry leading specialists make it easier to **pinpoint the sources of misinformation**.

# 5. Creator Commerce

## Shifts from Sponsorships to Performance

The influencer marketing industry is professionalizing. As the industry matures, **brands and creators alike are moving beyond flat-fee sponsorships** to performance-based partnerships. Marketers are looking for more clarity on the ROI of partnerships, while creators want recurring, sustainable revenue streams. So the shift to a model which rewards influencers based on the results they deliver makes sense for everybody.

This shift is accelerating as measurement tools improve and budgets tighten. For advertisers and comms teams, this means structuring contracts around metrics that matter, like attributed sales, traffic, or brand lift, rather than vanity impressions.

Creators now have more opportunity to prove their business value, while brands will benefit from partnerships that can scale well and deliver measurable results that can easily be justified to budget holders.

The industry as a whole should benefit from a clearing out of less scrupulous influencers who artificially inflate their metrics, while providing little value to their commercial partners. When compensation is linked directly to performance, there's no reward for being a fake-fluencer.

### Action Points

- Consider redesigning influencer contracts around performance. Move from flat fees to agreements that tie compensation to measurable outcomes.
- Build a diversified creator portfolio. Balance nano-, micro-, and macro-influencers, testing across formats and channels.
- **Klear** enables brands to discover, vet, contract, and track influencers, managing the full lifecycle of performance-driven creator partnerships. Klear's Monitor feature gives you insight into the creator strategies of your competitors, helping you to keep ahead.



# 6. Reddit Communities Drive Decisions

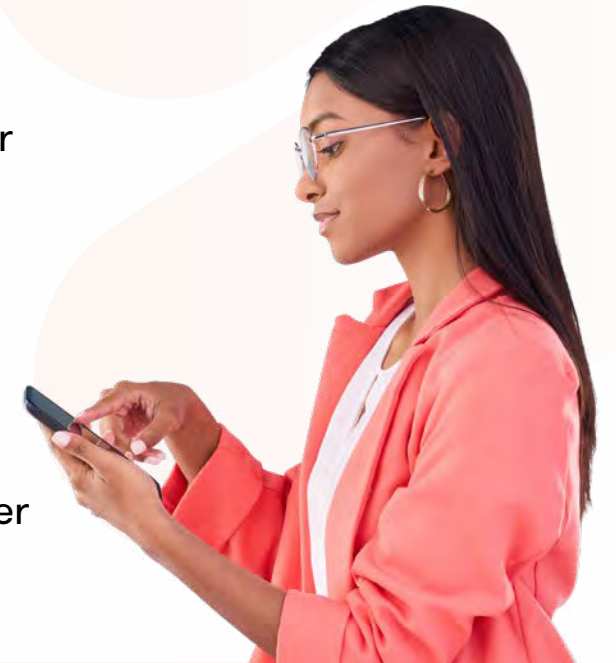
Reddit's galaxy of niche discussion forums has grown from fringe online communities into mainstream hubs for authentic consumer decision-making.

These communities consistently rank highly in search and increasingly shape buyer intent, particularly in B2B and technology spaces. Data from our [2025 Global Digital Overview](#) shows Reddit's reach continuing to grow significantly, with six billion monthly visits, making it the sixth-most visited site on the internet. Whether you're searching for advice on Google or ChatGPT, the chances are you'll find a Reddit thread in the answer you receive.

For brands, this presents a strong opportunity, but you must proceed with caution. These spaces are less forgiving of inauthentic engagement, requiring genuine participation, community fluency, and value-add contributions. Brands that respect community culture and work with trusted voices can build credibility and influence purchasing decisions long before consumers hit the consideration stage. Read this [blog post](#) to learn how brands like [Mint Mobile](#) and [Blizzard Entertainment](#) are successfully engaging with Reddit communities.

Conversely, if the community feels they are being exploited by a brand looking for an easy commercial win, it can quickly spiral into a PR disaster.

But ignoring these spaces risks you missing out on high-intent conversations with highly engaged audiences, so it's worth taking the time to get it right, rather than simply avoiding them entirely.



## Action Points

- Map the subreddits that influence your category; earn trust before you promote.
- Track peer to peer recommendation threads mentioning your brand and competitors.
- Use [Explore+](#) and [Consumer Intelligence](#) to identify communities and psychographics; and uncover subreddit-level drivers of sentiment and consideration.

# 7. Personalization at Scale is Finally Practical

The goal of achieving personalization that goes beyond demographics is a dream for many marketers, but the complexity and cost made it impractical. In this context, personalization means tailoring messages based on values, interests, and behaviors; for example, serving sustainability-focused content to eco-conscious buyers while offering product innovation stories to early adopters.

Advances in AI now make that kind of psychographic segmentation and micro-targeting feasible at scale. McKinsey reports that **65 percent of consumers see targeted promotions as a leading purchase driver**, and brands can see a two percent lift in incremental sales (i.e. those additional sales over the baseline, attributed to marketing campaigns) by using personalization.

In 2026 it's time to move beyond one-size-fits-all content and invest in personalized journeys that will build stronger customer relationships, and higher lifetime value. The key is balancing automation with authenticity, ensuring that AI-driven personalization enhances rather than erodes trust.



Marketers must also navigate privacy regulations and consumer expectations around data use. Those who get it right will move faster from insight to execution, delivering relevant content to the right audience, in the right context, at the right time.

## Action Points

- Build segments around digital tribes, not crude demographics; customize comms and messaging for each tribe.
- It's not just about advertising — micro-segments can be valuable for PR, social, and content marketing.
- **Consumer Intelligence** surfaces digital tribes and their motivations; export segments to **Social Media Management** for targeted distribution.

# 8. Social SEO is the New Top-of-Funnel

As well as turning to LLMs instead of search engines, growing numbers of consumers are using social media to find answers; TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit are now where people look for how-tos, reviews, and explanations.

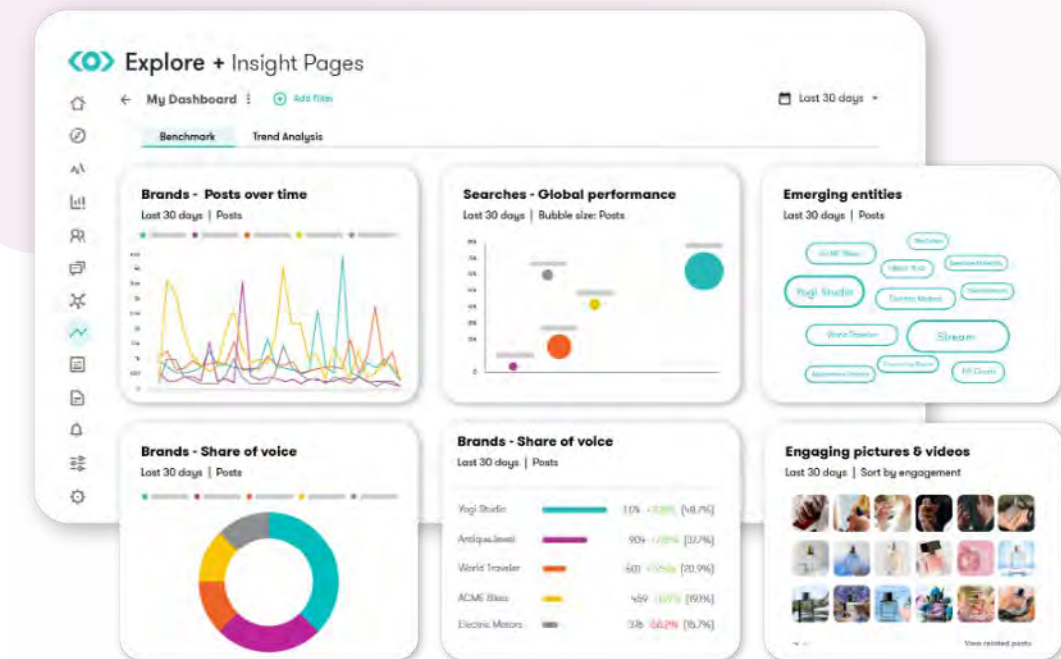
Research from Forbes shows that 24 percent of people already prefer to use social media platforms over Google for search queries, and that trend is growing among younger audiences.

For marketers, this requires optimizing content not just for Google but also for in-platform discovery. Keyword-rich captions, explainer formats, pinned Q&As, and short-form video series are essential tactics. Social SEO is the practice of engineering how your brand is discovered when people are actively searching for answers, and that requires a deep understanding of not just the mechanics of these platforms, but the nuances of their communities.

Brands should start thinking of TikTok, YouTube, and Reddit as essential top-of-funnel touchpoints, or risk invisibility in increasingly important channels.

## Action Points

- Optimize for in-platform discovery. Embed target keywords in captions, titles, and transcripts; use explainer formats and Q&A features to rank in social search results.
- Develop short-form video playlists and pinned content that directly answer common searches in your category, ensuring your brand is consistently visible at the start of the customer journey.
- **Explore+** maps demand-gen questions, while **Social Media Management** helps teams schedule and measure social content performance across multiple platforms.



# 9. Unified Cross-Channel Measurement

Vanity metrics just won't cut the mustard for PR and comms any more, because business leaders expect comms teams to connect their work directly to business outcomes. **Forrester's Total Economic Impact of Meltwater** report highlights how organizations that modernize measurement see stronger ROI and credibility.

The focus is shifting from impressions to attention, from raw reach to quality mentions, from volume to share-of-conversation. Unified PESO (Paid, Earned, Shared, Owned) dashboards are becoming the gold standard, enabling leaders to see how media, social, and owned content contribute to awareness, reputation, and demand.

AI-powered analytics now explain not just what happened, but why it happened, in plain language for executives, and make it easier to directly connect PR wins to business outcomes. The result: PR and comms finally earn their seat at the executive table by speaking the language of outcomes, not outputs.

## Action Points

- Consolidate Paid, Earned, Shared, and Owned metrics into a single reporting view that ties media and social activity to brand awareness, reputation, and demand generation.
- Replace vanity metrics with KPIs executives care about, share of conversation, attention quality, and attribution to business results.
- **Explore+**, **Engage**, and **Unified Dashboards** deliver a single view of performance, while **Mira** explains your measurement data in plain English.



# 10. Multi-platform Engagement as the Norm

The average consumer now uses nearly seven platforms per month, according to our [2026 Global Digital Overview](#). For brands the question has shifted from “Which platforms should we have a presence on?” to “How do we integrate all of these touchpoints into a cohesive campaign?”

Consumers don’t experience campaigns in silos, they move fluidly across TikTok, Threads, Instagram, YouTube, and more, so you need to give them a consistent, joined-up picture of your brand, wherever they encounter it.

To succeed in a multi-platform world, you need to master integrated storytelling that adapts to each platform’s unique culture while maintaining brand coherence. This demands both intelligent orchestration and agility. You should have well-planned content calendars that cover all the key channels, but with the flexibility to adapt your messaging in real time, depending on how each of your target communities receives and responds to the campaign.

A great example of a multi-channel campaign is [McDonald’s “Grimace’s Birthday”](#) which won two prizes in 2024’s Webby Awards. The campaign saw Grimace taking over all of McDonald’s social channels, delivering tailored content for each platform, supported by a landing page and digital audio content via Spotify.

Brands that can weave narratives seamlessly across multiple touchpoints will win attention and loyalty. Those who treat platforms in isolation will waste budget and dilute impact. The mandate is clear: multi-platform engagement isn’t optional, it’s the baseline expectation.

## Action Points

- Build content calendars that span TikTok, Threads, Instagram, YouTube, and more, ensuring consistent narratives while tailoring execution to each platform’s unique culture.
- Set up workflows that let teams pivot messaging in real time based on audience response or platform shifts, keeping brand stories aligned without being rigid.
- [Explore+](#) surfaces audience and topic insights, [Mira](#) AI helps brainstorm integrated storytelling, and [Engage](#) powers orchestration across platforms.

# 11. Video Everywhere: Short, Long, Live, Shoppable

It's no surprise that video continues to extend its grip on consumer attention, but that's an oversimplification, because there's a lot of diversity in the video formats that hooks people. Data from Meltwater's [2026 Global Digital Overview](#) shows YouTube as the world's most-used social platform, while TikTok remains the leader in engagement.

Attention spans are fragmenting: short-form video rules feeds, but long-form and podcasts are gaining ground too, so don't believe the myth that nobody watches anything longer than 30 seconds any more!

Live streaming and shoppable video are also rising, blurring the lines between commerce, entertainment, and community. The opportunity for marketers is to diversify video strategies; create episodic series that build loyalty, use shorts to drive discovery, and experiment with interactive formats that turn viewers into buyers. [State Farm's Gamerhood](#) is a great example of combining episodic and streaming long form video content, which earns the brand hundreds of thousands of views per video.

Video is more expensive than other content formats, and can be difficult to do well, but it simply cannot be ignored in today's competitive online media landscape. Brands that underinvest in video risk fading into obscurity as audiences flock to richer, more immersive formats.

## Action Points

- Balance short-form clips for discovery with episodic long-form series for loyalty, while testing live and shoppable video to convert attention into action.
- Treat video not as a one-off tactic, but as an essential element of every campaign. Start small, experiment, measure, prove results, and secure future budget.
- **Engage** supports planning, publishing, and analyzing video series, while **Explore+** identifies trending topics and best times to publish.



# 12. Create Relevance: From Trendjacking to Trend-shaping

In a world where thousands of brands are vying for visibility on social, jumping on trends for quick reach has diminishing returns. Audiences, especially Gen Z, increasingly reward originality and authenticity.

The **Meltwater-sponsored Webby Awards in 2025** showcased “brainrot culture” as proof that fast-moving, playful, and authentic trend creation drives deeper connections. In the coming years, brands that succeed won’t just hijack trends, they’ll shape them.

This means using insights to seed cultural hooks, design original formats, and create moments that others riff on. It requires agility, but also foresight: spotting emerging cultural signals before they peak. Brands that invest in trend-shaping will earn disproportionate attention and cultural influence.

Those stuck on reactive trendjacking risk looking derivative and out-of-touch. The playbook is shifting from opportunism to originality, and in 2025 there was no stronger example of a brand creating an original hook than Duolingo’s campaign announcing the **death of its famous Duo owl mascot**.

## Action Points

- Set up an “agile creative team” with fast approvals and clear risk guardrails, tasked with making your brand trend under its own merits, not off the back of somebody else’s viral success.
- Use audience insight to seed original hooks. Understand your community, identify the ideas and angles that will resonate with them.
- Use **Explore+** for real-time signal spotting and **Engage** for streamlined approvals and rapid publishing.



# 13. Alternative Social Platforms are Rising, and Splintering

Threads and Bluesky have emerged as leading Twitter alternatives, both designed to compete against the short-form content champion, with very similar functionality, but with distinctly different communities.

Threads is gaining mainstream traction (our [2025 Global Digital Overview](#) ranks it first in engagement and second in downloads amongst the fastest growing apps in Q4 2024), while Bluesky has attracted smaller but highly engaged groups and [frequently gets namechecked in the press](#).

For brands, these platforms represent both opportunity and risk. They offer fresh spaces to reach early adopters, test creative formats, and diversify beyond saturated channels, but they also require careful strategy, as norms are still forming and communities are sensitive to overt marketing.

Brands that experiment thoughtfully will gain first-mover advantage and could win over these nascent communities.



## Action Points

- Start tracking relevant discussions on these channels, add them to your social listening program and take the opportunity to build an understanding of how the communities work.
- When the time is right, build out a presence on whichever platforms make sense - but proceed carefully!
- Threads and Bluesky are fully integrated into [Explore+](#) and [Engage](#), enabling monitoring, engagement, and measurement across new platforms.

# 14. Social Customer Care is Critical for Brand Reputation

Social media is now a primary channel for customer service, not just marketing. More than 70 percent of worldwide internet users aged 16 and up use social platforms to find information about brands, according to our [2026 Global Digital Overview](#). That means unanswered mentions or delayed responses don't just waste opportunities, they erode trust and harm reputation.

Increasingly, customer experience and brand reputation are inseparable, and social customer care is the point of convergence. To address this, brands can integrate their support and comms workflows and systems, [equipping agents with social listening and engagement tools](#) to respond rapidly to customers voicing queries or complaints on social media.

A brand responding quickly and empathetically on social media can mean the difference between loyalty and churn.



## Action Points

- Break down silos between customer support and social teams by unifying listening, sentiment analysis, and response management in a single workflow.
- Establish SLAs for social responses, empower frontline agents with brand-approved messaging, and measure success by resolution time and customer sentiment, not just response volume.
- Through [various strategic partnerships](#), Meltwater enables social insights to flow directly into contact center operations, helping teams respond faster, improve resolution times, and protect brand reputation.

# 15. The Rise of AI-Generated Virtual Influencers

For better or worse, many influencers have always represented an idealised, picture perfect version of life. That's what makes aspirational lifestyle influencers so successful — they offer a glimpse into a life that, while often unrealistic, gives people a taste of glamor.

So it makes sense that **virtual influencers** are booming. Using the latest generative AI tools, it's possible to create an artificial influencer that's more perfect than perfect, giving audiences exactly what they want with none of the limitations suffered by mere human creators. In 2025 we saw a growing number of these virtual influencers inking **lucrative deals with major brands**, and it's reasonable to assume that this is only the beginning.

Gen AI tools are becoming more powerful and more widespread, so there's going to be a lot of competition to create the next virtual sensation. For brands seeking partnerships, AI influencers can be far more cost-effective than conventional creators, but that comes with the risk of being seen as inauthentic, so any such deals should be weighed up carefully.



## Action Points

- Identify virtual influencers who may be a fit for your brand. Analyze their followers to understand if they're the right audience for you, and compare costs with your existing partnerships.
- Research your target audience to build a clear idea of how they might react to your brand partnering with an AI created influencer. It might not be a problem, but it could create a backlash.
- **Klear's** discovery surfaces the best creators for your brand based on audience fit, engagement quality, and authenticity signals, and includes AI influencers alongside humans.

# Industry Expert Predictions

We asked five experts from diverse roles and organizations to share their predictions for the trends that will impact marketing in 2026.



## Detect Narratives AND Coordination to Win Trust

*Dan Brahmey, CEO & co-founder, Cyabra*

By 2026, monitoring narratives alone won't protect brands. AI has made it effortless to generate deepfakes, synthetic visuals, and convincing text at scale. Combined with bot networks, this means anyone can orchestrate sophisticated disinformation campaigns capable of undermining a brand's reputation within hours.

The real challenge for marketing teams isn't spotting one single narrative, but understanding the whole ecosystem: who is behind it, how it spreads, and where text, visuals, identities, and networks intersect. To safeguard their most valuable asset — trust — brands must adopt a holistic approach that combines narrative intelligence with detection of AI-driven deception and coordinated amplification. Those who expand their view will be resilient in the face of this new reality.



## Increasing Multi-Modal Social Content

*Danny Gardner, Social Intelligence Lead, Haleon*

Social listening continues to grow in importance, and that's evident in industry award submissions, conference stages, and the trade media. Multi-modal is the most complex challenge - social listening now analyzes so many different media formats, next year we can expect to see at least twice as much video based content over static images and text.

I believe we'll see this in both UGC, and organic owned social, from brands who intentionally lean into multi-modal content, for example, Instagram carousels or the TikTok equivalent. Maybe three times as many consumers and users are driven by social apps to express their creativity through multi-modal content creation.

So we're going to see more levers that offer brands and creators the opportunity to tell better stories using visuals, sonic branding, trending audio, and more.

# Industry Expert Predictions



## Data Quality Becomes the New AI Currency

*Rob Key, Founder & CEO, Converseon*

“Is your data AI and research ready?” is going to be a common refrain in 2026 as organizations recognize that the quality of their insights and their “safe” and responsible use of agentic AI is directly related to underlying data quality issues. This will require analysis and insight pros to level up their data quality measurement, governance and adoption.

The good news: there are new AI-powered technologies and approaches that are making great strides in this area, such as those that Meltwater and Converseon are bringing to market. These include new model governance systems that give you precise measurement of AI model accuracy on your own data.

The result: hallucination-free “enterprise-ready” genAI output as well as more effective use of this unstructured social media and voice of customer data into new areas like predictive reputation and brand intelligence. Efforts, such as those led by AMEC and the Global Data Quality Initiative, to drive adoption of key data quality principles and processes for media and social analysis will further accelerate this trend.



## PR Is the New Fuel for Generative AI

*Melanie Klausner, Executive Vice President, Consumer, Havas Red*

In 2026, brand reputation will be increasingly shaped not by what people search for, but by what AI answers. As generative engines like ChatGPT, Gemini, Perplexity, and SearchGPT become the default gateways to information, PR and earned media will evolve into strategic inputs for AI training data.

The shift from search engine optimization (SEO) to [generative engine optimization](#) (GEO) means that articles, interviews, blog posts, and expert commentary are no longer just content, they’re citations that determine whether a brand is surface or omitted when someone asks an AI for “the best,” “the most trusted,” or “the leading.”

For communicators, this demands a new mindset and fundamental shift: publishing with the intent to be machine-cited. Brands must prioritize authoritative storytelling, proprietary insights, and expert voices to ensure they’re surfaced in AI summaries. Traditional media must also adapt, becoming algorithmically recognized as credible sources or risk fading from relevance. In this new landscape, PR isn’t just about visibility — it’s about feeding the AI ecosystem that defines public perception.

# Industry Expert Predictions



## Monitor AI the Way You Monitor Media

*Will Swope, Associate Director,  
Issues Management & Monitoring, NCBA*

Comms teams will need to adjust to add more time and resources to AI monitoring. Billions of conversations are taking place each day with chatbots. Reports from OpenAI and Anthropic are starting to reveal AI is being used and the types of questions that are being asked.

Organizations will need to learn to spot and react to information from AI sources the same way they had to learn new ways of dealing with issues on social media platforms. The speed at which AI adaptation is taking place will force this to become a priority in 2026 and [Meltwater's GenAI lens](#) will be one of the tools necessary to monitor this new technology.



## Authentic Video Will Win Hearts and Algorithms

*Greg Barta, Public Information Officer,  
Orange County Fire Authority*

One of the top trends shaping communications and marketing in the next 12 months will be the rise of authenticity-driven, short-form video storytelling. Audiences are tuning out polished, overly produced content and responding instead to genuine, relatable moments, especially on platforms like TikTok, Instagram Reels, and YouTube Shorts.

For communicators, this means shifting from “broadcasting” to “connecting”: highlighting real people, behind-the-scenes content, and transparent messaging. Organizations that empower their teams and spokespeople to tell human-centered stories in a quick, authentic way will see stronger engagement and trust, especially as algorithms continue to favor organic, personality-driven video over traditional brand messaging.

# Metrics that Matter for 2026

As the marketing world evolves, it's important to find new ways to measure the performance of our activity. Based on the trends we've outlined in this report, here are a few suggestions for KPIs that you might not already be tracking, which will help keep your measurement and reporting relevant.

- **LLM Visibility & Accuracy:** % of key messages correctly presented across major LLMs.
- **Narrative Health:** Net sentiment vs. misinformation volume.
- **Creator Contribution:** Reach and conversions that can be clearly attributed to creator partnerships.
- **Community Share of Voice:** Mentions, engagement, and traffic from Reddit threads.
- **Video Effectiveness:** Completion rate, watch time, and click throughs.
- **Personalization Lift:** Engagement/Uplift vs generic control across segments.



# The Meltwater Difference

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The trends in this guide highlight both the risks and opportunities that lie ahead in 2026: from AI search and creator commerce to misinformation resilience and social customer care. Success depends on connecting signals across every channel, platform, and audience, and having the agility to act on the insights those connections offer.

Brands that want to stay ahead in a changing world need to turn complexity into clarity. That's where Meltwater makes the difference.

By combining the industry's most comprehensive media and social dataset with AI teammates like Mira, unlimited listening and analytics through Explore+, performance-driven creator partnerships in Klear, and reputation management powered by GenAI Lens, Meltwater gives brands the insight and agility they need to move faster, prove impact, and protect reputation.

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and consumer intelligence.**