Transformation Consultants and Doers

Yet Another One Talking About 2026 Trends | On Macro-Trends

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By Allegro 234 | Business & Branding | Transformation & Growth

This macro-trend analysis offers a grounded, forward-looking view of how people, sectors and brands are evolving as we move towards 2026.

It distils the major behavioural, technological, and strategic shifts shaping FMCG, consumer durables and consumer services, while highlighting what modern, urban audiences now expect from the organisations they interact with.

The goal is simple, "to give brand and business leaders a sharp, actionable understanding of the forces reshaping their markets and the opportunities worth seizing next."

allegro234.net
hello@allegro234.net
+34 911 576 450

Gran Vía de Hortaleza, 62
ES 28043 Madrid

Allegro 234 SL
Registro Mercantil de Madrid
Tomo 19051 - Libro 0 Folio 81 Sección 8
Hoja M 333099 - CIF ES B83710525

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Executive Summary

People Macro-Trends | How Behaviour Is Changing

Adaptive personalisation becomes the default

People expect brands, platforms, and services to adapt continuously to their behaviours and contexts. Static personalisation is no longer sufficient; real-time relevance now drives trust, engagement, and loyalty.

Values drive decisions

Ethical alignment and authenticity strongly influence purchase choices. People reward brands that practise transparent sustainability, fair labour, and responsible sourcing -and penalise those who fail to meet these expectations.

Participation replaces passive consumption

Individuals increasingly want to shape products, services, and brand narratives. Co-creation, feedback loops, and user-generated content define engagement in a world where creativity, community, and personal agency matter.

Sector Macro-Trends | How FMCG, Durables & Services Are Shifting

Digital-first becomes structural infrastructure

E-commerce, social commerce, and digital experiences now define discovery, purchase, and service across all categories. Physical and digital boundaries are dissolving, with digital journeys becoming the backbone of sector operations.

Sustainability becomes a growth driver

Environmental and social responsibility are no longer regulatory checkboxes -they are strategic imperatives. FMCG is redesigning packaging; durables are embracing circularity; services are embedding low-impact operations. Sustainability is increasingly linked to resilience, cost savings, and competitive advantage.

Technology deeply integrates across value chains

AI, IoT and automation are fundamental to forecasting, product development, customer experience, and operations. Technology is reshaping the economics and capabilities of every sector, raising both opportunities and expectations.

Brand Macro-Trends | How Brands Are Responding

Transparency as a foundation for trust

Brands are being held accountable across every aspect of their operations. Open communication about sourcing, sustainability, labour, and data practices now differentiates market leaders from laggards.

Experience-first innovation

Consumers judge brands by the quality of their end-to-end experience. Immersive digital tools, intuitive services, hybrid engagements, and seamless content-commerce ecosystems are becoming standard.

Collaborative ecosystems redefine brand building

Partnerships with tech players, creators, retailers, and sustainability pioneers extend capabilities and amplify value. Ecosystem thinking is increasingly essential for relevance and reach.

Macro-Trends for People in These Sectors | Behaviour Within Categories

Demand for frictionless journeys

People expect simplicity and fluidity whether buying groceries, appliances, or services. Any friction -unclear information, slow support, fragmented experiences -creates immediate dissatisfaction.

Increasing desire for influence

People want their opinions to shape product updates, service quality, sustainability initiatives, and innovation pipelines. Participation is now a requirement.

Value alignment embedded in everyday choices

From food to electronics to services, people increasingly choose brands based on ethical alignment. Switching is common and often immediate when misalignment is detected.

Interaction Macro-Trends | How People Engage with Brands

Two-way, real-time dialogue as a norm

Customers expect immediate, empathetic responses and open communication. Silence or delays are viewed as disrespectful and risk public backlash.

Loyalty built on meaning, not mechanics

Rewards programmes matter less than shared purpose, ethical behaviour, and long-term commitment. Emotional loyalty outperforms transactional loyalty.

Immersive and hybrid brand worlds

AR, personalised media, interactive content and blended physical-digital journeys elevate expectations for continuous engagement beyond transactions.

Strategic Macro-Trends | Shaping the Sector and Its Brands

Sustainability and profitability converge

Environmental and social performance increasingly drive operational efficiency, innovation, and long-term financial resilience. Sustainability is both a business model and a brand strategy.

Omnichannel ecosystems dominate competition

Brands must operate within complex, platform-driven marketplaces where discovery, purchase and usage occur across interconnected channels. Success requires system-level thinking, consistent brand experience, and data-driven coordination.

AI and data unify the entire landscape

AI now shapes forecasting, personalisation, support, content creation, and decision-making. Data flows link sectors, brands, and people into a shared ecosystem -bringing both opportunities for relevance and obligations around fairness, transparency, and trust.

Macro-Trends in People

1 | The Rise of Adaptive Personalisation and Contextual Relevance

Across global markets, both consumers and professionals are now demonstrating an intensified expectation for contextually relevant and dynamically adaptive experiences.

The increased sophistication of digital ecosystems, coupled with widespread integration of AI-driven analytics, is transforming the way individuals expect brands, organisations, and service providers to interact with them.

> Personalisation has progressed far beyond simple segmentation; it is evolving into continuous behavioural adaptation.

In urban settings, where people negotiate dense digital ecosystems, this shift is especially pronounced. Modern individuals expect real-time adjustments in service, communication, and value delivery.

This manifests in hyper-curated feeds, personalised commerce journeys, and services that evolve as behaviour changes.

> Brands that fail to demonstrate relevance risk being disregarded instantly.

Moreover, the boundary between B2C and B2B expectations has collapsed; business buyers increasingly anticipate the same frictionless, personalised experiences they enjoy as consumers.

AI-driven recommendation systems -e.g., those used by Netflix or Spotify- familiarised people with algorithmic adaptation. Urban, modern audiences, regardless of age or gender, now assume that such personalised calibration should apply across all touchpoints, including FMCG, consumer durables, and services.

The implications extend to trust and connection: adaptive personalisation is interpreted as care, whereas generic communication signals indifference.

Netflix

Netflix exemplifies adaptive personalisation through continuous real-time recalibration of each user’s content feed. Its algorithmic system analyses viewing behaviour, search patterns, time-of-day usage, and micro-preferences to deliver a tailored experience.

This reinforces platform stickiness and sets user expectations for similar adaptiveness in other sectors, pushing brands to elevate their personalisation strategies.

2 | Value-Driven Consumption and Ethical Alignment

A recurring theme is the growing cultural demand for organisations to adopt ethical, responsible, and transparent behaviour.

Modern consumers, especially urban, globally connected populations, are making decisions based not just on product quality, but on the values a company embodies. This applies equally to FMCG purchases, durable goods acquisition, and service relationships.

> Younger consumers once drove this trend, but data indicates that value alignment has now spread across demographics.

People prioritise authenticity, sustainability, and societal contribution, regardless of whether they purchase a bottle of shampoo, a home appliance, a meal delivery service, or engage with a B2B platform. Companies that behave unethically, contradict their stated values, or greenwash risk immediate and public backlash.

Urban consumers, who often experience the direct effects of pollution, social inequality, and overconsumption, are especially sensitive to brand integrity. This creates a requirement for operational transparency, ethical sourcing, reduced plastic usage, clean supply chains, and coherent social purpose.

> Brands with strong value propositions gain loyalty not through marketing alone, but by demonstrating responsible behaviour through products, services, communications, and partnerships.

Patagonia

Patagonia continues to set the benchmark in value-driven brand behaviour. Its environmental commitments, supply chain transparency, and public advocacy create deep resonance with ethically conscious audiences.

The brand's actions reinforce trust and inspire loyalty rooted in shared values rather than transactional benefits.

3 | Active Participation and Co-Creation in Consumer Culture

People no longer accept the role of passive recipients of brand communication or product design. Insights indicate that consumers increasingly expect to participate, shape, influence, customise, or contribute to the brands they engage with.

> This trend is fuelled by digital platforms that encourage content generation, dialogue, review culture, and collaborative creation.

Urban, modern audiences are culturally predisposed to express themselves publicly and to expect brands to facilitate that expression. They want to contribute ideas, create content, influence product evolution, and help shape brand narratives.

Social media platforms, creator communities, and user-centred digital ecosystems enable this shift, transforming individuals into micro-influencers and co-creators.

In FMCG, this appears through flavour votes, packaging design participation, and personalised product offerings. In durables, co-creation shows up in modular design, customisable aesthetics, and user feedback loops built directly into R&D.

> In consumer services, customers expect real-time dialogue, transparent responsiveness, and the ability to visibly shape service evolution.

GoPro

GoPro's brand ecosystem thrives on user-generated content, showcasing consumer experiences as a central component of the brand's identity.

By elevating real users as creators, GoPro turns participation into the core engine of its communication strategy, cultivating loyalty, engagement, and community.

Macro-Trends in the Economic Sectors

4 | Digital-First Ecosystems and the Acceleration of E-Commerce

Across FMCG, consumer durables, and consumer services, digital-first ecosystems continue to redefine how businesses operate. Insights highlight that digital commerce has evolved from a channel into a core organisational infrastructure.

> This is especially prominent in urban environments where hyper-connectivity, dense logistics networks, and digitally fluent populations accelerate digital adoption.

E-commerce is no longer supplementary: it is now a default expectation. In B2C categories, specifically FMCG and durables, online purchasing has surged, with subscription models, auto-replenishment, and rapid delivery becoming normalised.

Consumer services are integrating digital booking, virtual consultations, remote onboarding, and real-time support. In the B2B and B2B2C layers, e-procurement platforms, industry marketplaces, and automated purchasing systems now represent a significant portion of total sector activity.

The shift is enabled by digital payments, AI-based inventory management, dynamic pricing, and predictive logistics. Advanced infrastructure, often pioneered by Amazon, Alibaba, and leading retailers, is pushing the entire sector toward automation and seamless customer journeys.

> Consumers and business buyers alike now expect intuitive interfaces, frictionless transactions, and cross-device fluidity. Companies unable to offer "digital ease" are rapidly losing relevance.

Amazon

Amazon remains the benchmark for digital-first retail. Powerful data analytics, personalised shopping, seamless checkout, and sophisticated fulfilment operations shape global expectations.

Its marketplace and logistics innovations have influenced FMCG shopping habits, durable goods purchases, and service expectations worldwide.

5 | Sustainability Embedded into Sectoral Transformation

Sustainability is becoming a non-negotiable requirement across all consumer-related industries. The sector analysis and business case resources show a decisive shift from sustainability as CSR to sustainability as a strategic operational pillar.

> This is especially evident in FMCG packaging, supply chains for durables, and environmental commitments within consumer services.

In FMCG, sustainability pressures include eliminating single-use plastics, reducing carbon footprints, investing in regenerative agriculture, and ensuring full supply-chain transparency.

Brands are shifting to refill systems, concentrated formulations, compostable packaging, and reduced-waste manufacturing. Consumer demand, particularly among urban, modern audiences, has accelerated this transformation, as customers increasingly punish brands perceived as careless or misleading.

Durable goods manufacturers are redesigning products to increase longevity, modularity, and recyclability. Repair services, extended warranties, and "right to repair" trends are gaining traction.

Consumer services, from hospitality to entertainment, are implementing sustainable operations, energy-efficient infrastructures, and circular business models.

> Sustainability is now linked to competitive advantage: companies with measurable environmental actions attract trust, investment, and customer preference, particularly in urban markets where environmental awareness is high.

Interface Flooring

Interface Flooring demonstrates sector-leading sustainability by integrating circular practices and setting aggressive climate targets.

Its "Mission Zero" and "Climate Take Back" initiatives exemplify large-scale transformation and influence expectations across manufacturing and consumer goods.

6 | Technological Integration Across Operations, Products, and Services

AI, machine learning, automation, IoT, and extended reality -XR- are becoming foundational technologies across FMCG, durables, and services. Industry insights indicate that organisations are using these technologies to optimise production, reduce costs, improve safety, personalise offerings, and redesign customer experiences.

In FMCG, AI-enhanced analytics are driving demand forecasting, inventory optimization, and formulation innovation. IoT sensors track freshness, logistics, and manufacturing stability. In consumer durables, smart devices are now the norm: appliances, electronics, and home systems are connected, responsive, and data-generating.

> Predictive maintenance, remote diagnostics, and software-driven performance upgrades are reshaping how consumers interact with durable goods.

The consumer services sector is equally affected: digital assistants, automated customer service, virtual experiences, AI-based scheduling, and dynamic resource allocation are becoming standard. Urban populations, in particular, expect high-speed, technologically fluid interactions.

> Technology within the sector is no longer an enhancement, it’s the core enabler of efficiency, competitiveness, and customer satisfaction.

Siemens

Siemens leads sectoral digitisation through advanced industrial automation and IoT-enabled systems.

Its technologies allow businesses to optimise operations, enhance product performance, and integrate predictive insights, influencing expectations across manufacturing and consumer ecosystems.

Macro-Trends in Brands

7 | Radical Transparency and Authentic Brand Behaviour

Across all categories, brands are experiencing strong pressure to become radically transparent. Insights show that modern, urban audiences expect brands to show, not tell. Trust must be earned through demonstrable actions, not marketing claims.

This requires brands to disclose more: origins of ingredients, supply-chain structures, data usage, operational processes, sustainability performance, labour conditions, and pricing logic.

In FMCG, transparency is especially linked to packaging labelling, sourcing integrity, and ecosystem responsibility. In consumer durables, transparency centres around product lifespan, reparability, recycling pathways, and environmental impact.

> In consumer services, brands are expected to clarify data privacy, content integrity, ethical standards, and service reliability.

Urban, modern audiences respond strongly to authenticity. They reject greenwashing, performative activism, or polished corporate narratives that feel disconnected from reality.

Digitally fluent consumers can easily identify inconsistencies and expose them through social platforms. Perception gaps are amplified when users publicly scrutinise brand actions.

> Transparency is not optional; it is a competitive differentiator. Brands that embrace visible honesty earn loyalty, especially as consumers align purchases with identity and values.

Ben & Jerry’s

Ben & Jerry’s openly shares its social and political positions while maintaining full transparency about its supply chain, mission, and internal governance.

This uncompromising authenticity strengthens loyalty among audiences who expect coherence between brand values and behaviour.

8 | Experience-Oriented Innovation and Brand Immersion

Brands are increasingly moving from product-first to experience-first strategies. Insights show a growing emphasis on multisensory engagement, emotional resonance, and immersive environments. Digital and physical worlds are blending to create seamless hybrid brand experiences.

In FMCG, packaging becomes an interface: scannable content, AR-enhanced experiences, refill stations, smart labels, and personalised recommendations.

Consumer durables increasingly integrate software updates, connected ecosystems, and user dashboards that prolong the product relationship.

Consumer services rely heavily on experience design, personalised journeys, frictionless onboarding, community-building environments, and omnichannel engagement.

Technology amplifies this shift. AR and VR create immersive product exploration; AI guides personalised journeys; connected devices reinforce brand presence beyond the point of sale.

> This "experience-centric branding" transforms how consumers understand value. A brand is no longer what it sells; it is the holistic experience it enables.

Urban audiences are particularly responsive to experience-led innovation. They seek not only utility but stimulation, convenience, and emotional connection.

IKEA -AR Visualisation App-

IKEA's AR app allows customers to place furniture digitally in their home. This merges product utility with immersive digital interaction, providing a frictionless experience that builds confidence and enhances engagement.

9 | Strategic Collaborations and Ecosystem Branding

Brand-building increasingly depends on collaborative ecosystems, not isolated efforts. Insights reveal that co-creation, cross-industry partnerships, and influencer alliances drive significant value.

For FMCG brands, partnerships with local producers, delivery platforms, or sustainability startups open new routes to innovation. For consumer durables, alliances with technology companies -AI, IoT, hardware platforms- accelerate product development and expand functionality.

For consumer services, collaborations with content creators, cultural institutions, or digital platforms broaden reach and relevance.

Ecosystem branding allows companies to extend their capabilities, diversify their value propositions, and connect with new demographics. Urban consumers, who often operate across multiple digital platforms, naturally engage with interconnected brand ecosystems.

> Partnerships are also used to navigate societal expectations. Collabs with NGOs, environmental organisations, or ethical technology providers enhance social legitimacy and build trust.

Nike × Apple

Nike and Apple created a synergistic ecosystem that blends sport, digital tracking, and lifestyle technology.

Nike’s fitness products integrate seamlessly with Apple’s software and hardware, creating a continuous user experience that reinforces both brands’ leadership in their respective domains.

Macro-Trends for People and Their Relationship with Economic Sectors

10 | Expectation of Frictionless Digital Journeys Across All Categories

As digital adoption accelerates across sectors, people now expect seamless online and offline integration from every brand they encounter -whether buying fast-moving consumer goods, investing in durable goods, or engaging with service providers.

This expectation is consistent across age groups -even when age is irrelevant-, genders, and urban profiles. It is a behavioural shift deeply embedded in how modern individuals interact with the world.

Sector-specific data indicates that consumers no longer tolerate friction in discovery, purchase, service interactions, or after-sales care. They want predictive experiences, automated reordering, instant bookings, self-service portals, and transparent tracking.

> These expectations, once limited to tech companies, are now applied universally across FMCG, durables, and services.

In FMCG, frictionless journeys are visible through subscription models, rapid delivery, digital wallets, scan-and-go systems, and smart replenishment.

For consumer durables, integrated customer portals, remote diagnostics, online configuration, and instant support define desirable experiences.

Consumer services -fitness, dining, entertainment, repair, mobility- are now judged on the fluidity of their digital tools more than any other factor.

> Urban consumers, accustomed to digital speed, heavily penalise brands that introduce inefficiencies.

Sephora -Virtual Try-On Services-

Sephora’s virtual try-on tool demonstrates digital ease by letting users test products instantly through their mobile camera.

This expectation now extends even to FMCG beauty verticals, home appliances configurations, and service experiences requiring personalisation.

11 | Heightened Demand for Personal Agency and Collaborative Influence

People increasingly expect to shape brand outcomes, influence product development, and participate in decision-making. This shift reflects a culture where individuals see themselves as empowered contributors, not passive recipients.

Within FMCG, people expect choice architectures that reflect their preferences: product personalisation, sustainable options, and the ability to amplify concerns on social platforms.

In consumer durables, participation manifests through crowdsourced design features, repair communities, user-interface co-development, and modular product choices.

Consumer services are directly influenced by review cultures, community ratings, and customer-driven improvements.

Urban, modern audiences feel entitled to this influence. They actively co-create through posting, reviewing, giving feedback, or participating in open innovation platforms.

> Brands that fail to engage with this expectation are perceived as outdated or unresponsive.

GoPro -User-Generated Content Ecosystem-

GoPro's amplification of user-generated content empowers individuals to shape the brand's identity.

Urban consumers expect this kind of collaborative influence across products and services, whether showcasing ways they use consumer durables, rating FMCG innovations, or co-creating service culture.

12 | The Priority of Value Alignment in Purchase Decisions

People increasingly make purchasing decisions across FMCG, durables, and services based on whether a brand reflects their values. This behavioural trend transcends demographics and resonates strongly among urban populations with access to global narratives.

Across all categories, environmental sustainability, ethical sourcing, social impact, labour practices, and diversity commitments influence consumer behaviour. Consumers scrutinise packaging, manufacturing conditions, and corporate statements.

In durable goods, the emphasis is on longevity, repairability, material responsibility, and company ethics. In consumer services, transparency, digital safety, community responsibility, and equitable access shape choices.

> People now reward brands that demonstrate shared values and punish those that misalign, quickly and publicly.

TOMS -Value-Based Loyalty Model-

TOMS' one-for-one model exemplifies value-aligned purchasing. Consumers gravitate toward brands with coherent ethical frameworks, whether buying shoes, household appliances, grocery items, or service subscriptions.

Macro-Trends for People in their Relationship with Brands

13 | Expectation of Two-Way Communication and Real-Time Dialogue

Insights consistently show that people now expect brands to listen and respond in real time. The shift from unidirectional communication to dynamic conversational ecosystems is one of the most significant behavioural changes affecting brand–audience relationships today.

Urban consumers, in particular, operate in a fast-moving digital environment where immediate answers are the norm. They expect brands to maintain active, responsive, and empathetic communication across social media, customer service platforms, and community forums. Silence or delayed responses signals indifference and erodes loyalty.

In FMCG, consumers expect instant clarity on ingredients, supply chains, allergen information, sustainability claims, and product availability.

In consumer durables, they expect immediate troubleshooting, transparent support, and continuous dialogue around updates or improvements.

In consumer services, brands are judged on the fluidity and warmth of their digital interactions -chatbots, live chat, social media responses, and proactive notifications-.

> Strong two-way communication humanises brands, builds emotional connection, and allows companies to identify issues before they escalate.

Starbucks -Social Engagement and Feedback Loops-

Starbucks demonstrates exemplary two-way communication by actively responding to customer comments, gathering feedback, and incorporating this input into service improvements.

This behaviour reinforces consumer trust and shows how ongoing dialogue strengthens brand affinity.

14 | Loyalty Rooted in Shared Values and Meaningful Contribution

People increasingly connect with brands that reflect their personal values, beliefs, and aspirations. This trend is reshaping loyalty across FMCG, durables, and services.

Urban consumers, who often engage deeply with social justice, environmental responsibility, cultural identity, and digital ethics, gravitate toward brands that demonstrate values through actions, not words.

Traditional loyalty programmes based on discounts or points have limited power in this new landscape.

> Emotional loyalty, rooted in shared values, drives stronger retention and deeper advocacy.

Consumers favour brands that take a stance, contribute to societal improvement, and demonstrate integrity in their operations.

In FMCG, value-based loyalty appears in commitments to sustainable packaging, ethical sourcing, and transparent ingredient lists.

In durables, brands that prioritise repairability, long-term responsibility, and ethical manufacturing gain trust.

For services, loyalty is connected to equitable treatment, accessibility, inclusivity, and community benefit.

> Brands must articulate and demonstrate their core values consistently across all touchpoints.

TOMS -Social Impact as a Loyalty Engine-

TOMS’ long-standing one-for-one model exemplifies how social contribution creates deeper loyalty.

By linking each purchase to a meaningful social outcome, the brand inspires emotional connection and long-term commitment from value-driven consumers.

15 | Desire for Immersive Digital and Hybrid Experiences

People increasingly seek immersive experiences that extend beyond simple transactions. Insights indicate that digital–physical hybrid experiences are becoming the cultural norm in brand interactions.

In FMCG, digital elements -QR codes, AR packaging, virtual tastings, personalised shopping apps- enhance discovery and engagement.

For consumer durables, immersive digital tools such as 3D configuration, virtual showrooms, AR placement, and smart device ecosystems extend the brand experience beyond purchase.

Consumer services are integrating immersive digital tools for training, entertainment, dining, fitness, and wellness.

> Urban, modern consumers expect frictionless, sensory-rich environments that animate brand worlds, deepen emotional resonance, and enable exploration.

Spotify -AI-Enhanced Experience Personalisation-

Spotify uses AI to create personalised playlists and listening journeys, offering users a dynamic and engaging experience that evolves with their behaviour.

This level of immersive relevance sets expectations across all categories for personalised digital ecosystems.

Macro-Trends at the Intersection of Sectors and Brands

This final chapter synthesises how sector-level transformations -digital, sustainability, technology, collaboration- are reshaping what brands in FMCG, consumer durables and consumer services must do.

Three intersecting trends stand out:

- The convergence of sustainability and profitability as a joint strategic driver.
- The rise of omnichannel ecosystems and platform-based competition.
- The embedding of AI and data as the connective tissue between sectors, brands, and people.

16 | Convergence of Sustainability and Profitability in Brand Strategy

Sector research in consumer goods, retail, and packaging shows that sustainability and profitability are increasingly interdependent.

> Brands can no longer treat sustainability as an optional or purely reputational activity.

Instead, they are redesigning products, packaging, operations, and business models to create economic value through environmental and social improvements.

In FMCG, this convergence is visible in a shift toward concentrated products that reduce logistics emissions, refill and reuse systems that lower long-term costs, and regenerative sourcing practices that stabilise supply and reduce risk.

Large consumer-goods players are exploring ways to decouple growth from resource consumption, recognising that climate impacts and resource scarcity pose direct threats to margins and continuity of supply.

In consumer durables, circular models such as repair, refurbishment and resale are emerging as credible revenue streams as well as reputation enhancers. Brands are experimenting with leasing, subscription and trade-in programmes that keep products and materials in circulation for longer, extracting more value from each unit produced.

In fashion and electronics, in particular, early movers are using circularity to differentiate their offers and pre-empt regulatory pressure around waste and extended producer responsibility.

In consumer services, energy-efficient operations, sustainable infrastructure investments, and responsible workforce practices can both save costs and mitigate regulatory and reputational risks.

Hospitality, retail, and mobility providers, for example, are investing in lower-emission buildings, more efficient logistics and better employee conditions. These changes not only reduce exposure to carbon pricing and labour disputes but also enhance brand preference among value-driven consumers.

For brands, the implication is clear:

> Sustainability can no longer sit in a separate CSR silo. It must be embedded into positioning, innovation roadmaps, capital allocation, and everyday decision-making.

Winning brands will be those that can show concretely how responsible choices make the business more resilient, more efficient, and more attractive to customers, employees, and investors.

Unilever: Value Chain Sustainability as Brand and Business Strategy

Unilever has set explicit targets to reduce the environmental impact of water, waste, and greenhouse gases per consumer use of product and works across its value chain to support sustainable agriculture, responsible sourcing, and renewable energy.

These commitments shape both its brand narratives -e.g. around purpose-led brands in its portfolio- and its innovation efforts -e.g. concentrated formulas, more sustainable packaging-.

Unilever demonstrates to the market that sustainability, when treated as a core strategic pillar, can drive innovation, reduce risk, and support long-term growth.

17 | Omnichannel Ecosystems and Platform-Based Competition

Sector-level analysis points to a future in which omnichannel ecosystems dominate competition. Instead of isolated brands and channels, we see interconnected platforms where retailers, manufacturers, tech providers, and service brands collectively shape consumer journeys.

E-commerce, physical retail, social commerce, and direct-to-consumer models are blending into fluid systems where consumers can start, pause and resume interactions anywhere.

For FMCG brands, this means thinking well beyond the traditional shelf. They must manage how they appear in retailer search algorithms, curated digital aisles, subscription services, social commerce feeds, and quick-commerce apps.

Content, availability, price, and promotion need to be coherent across these environments, even when different intermediaries control them. The same product may simultaneously be part of a supermarket promotion, a D2C bundle, an influencer-linked social post, and a dark-store quick-delivery assortment.

For consumer durables, omnichannel expectations now cover the entire path from inspiration to long-term usage. Consumers might discover a product on social media, research it on a marketplace, compare reviews on a specialist site, see it in a physical showroom, then complete the purchase via an app with home delivery and installation.

> Brands have to orchestrate consistent information, pricing, support, and branding across this journey, often collaborating closely with retailers and platforms that control key touchpoints.

For consumer services, platform-based competition is particularly intense. Super-apps, aggregators, and marketplaces -for mobility, food delivery, travel, entertainment, etc.-act as gatekeepers to large audiences-.

Service brands must optimise their presence within these ecosystems while still maintaining some direct channels that allow for deeper relationships and data gathering.

The sector-level rise of omnichannel ecosystems demands that brands:

- Design for the system, not just for their own website or store.
- Understand the economics and data flows of platform partnerships.
- Ensure a recognisable, coherent brand experience wherever the customer encounters them.

Alibaba's "New Retail": Integrated Commerce Ecosystem

Alibaba's "New Retail" concept merges online and offline commerce into a unified data-rich ecosystem, exemplified by formats such as Freshippo supermarkets. In these environments, mobile apps, in-store technologies, logistics, payments, and data analytics work together seamlessly.

Consumers can browse in-store, scan for detailed information and reviews, order online for home delivery, or have products cooked on-site.

For brands operating within this ecosystem, success depends on understanding how their products are surfaced, recommended, priced, and delivered across multiple modes.

Alibaba's model illustrates the broader shift that consumer brands must navigate worldwide: competing not only as individual brands, but as part of complex, platform-driven systems.

18 | AI and Data as the Connective Tissue Between Sectors, Brands and People

The spread of AI and data-driven tools across sectors is fundamentally changing how brands interact with their markets.

Digital consumer trend research shows that generative AI, in particular, is rapidly moving into mainstream use, with a growing share of people using it regularly in their daily lives for both personal and professional tasks.

For FMCG, consumer durables and services brands, AI now underpins a broad range of activities:

- Insight and forecasting: Analysing vast datasets to understand demand patterns, segment audiences, forecast sales and identify emerging niches.
- Personalisation and experience design: Tailoring product recommendations, content, pricing and messaging to individuals and micro-segments in real time.
- Operations and supply chain: Optimising planning, routing, inventory levels, and production schedules to reduce waste and improve reliability.
- Customer support: Powering chatbots, virtual assistants and decision-support tools that enable faster, more consistent responses across channels.
- Content creation and optimisation: Generating and adapting creative assets, copy and experiences at scale, while testing multiple variants to improve performance.

These tools allow brands to increase both efficiency and relevance, but they also bring new responsibilities. Misuse of AI, through opaque algorithms, biased outputs, hallucinated content or intrusive data practices, can quickly erode trust. Regulations and public expectations are moving toward greater transparency and ethical standards around automated decision-making and data use.

At the sector level, AI enables more precise planning, scenario modelling, and innovation. At the brand level, it allows highly tailored experiences and smarter resource allocation.

> For people, when deployed responsibly, it offers convenience, better matches between needs and offers, and more accessible support. When mismanaged, it can create confusion, frustration, and a sense of being manipulated.

Winning brands will be those that can:

- Integrate AI deeply into their processes and be transparent about how it is used.
- Combine machine intelligence with human judgment and empathy.
- Treat data as a shared asset that must be protected and used in ways that respect individual rights and expectations.

Salesforce Einstein: AI as Sales and Experience Enabler

Salesforce Einstein uses AI to analyse customer data, predict opportunities, automate tasks, and personalise outreach within the Salesforce ecosystem.

While this is primarily a B2B tool, its impact is felt by end consumers in the form of more timely, relevant, and coherent communications from the brands that use it.

Einstein illustrates how AI platforms can link sector-level capabilities -cloud infrastructure, data integration, analytics- with brand-level outcomes -better targeting, higher service quality- and, ultimately, with people's expectations of responsiveness and personalisation.

Similar AI layers are being embedded across retail, FMCG, durables and services, making data and algorithms the invisible connective tissue between sectors, brands, and users.

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About Allegro 234

We catalyse conscious business growth through people, brands, and experiences.

We make your company worth admiring, creating value, improving results, and generating a positive social and environmental impact.

We create, drive, and transform your brand so that it is ahead socially and digitally.

We develop strategies that provide creative solutions, designs that can be integrated into your business and interim hands-on implementations.

Our solutions are focused on delivering:

- Living Brands: The brand as a strategic platform synthesizes its institutional purpose, business legacy, and aspirations.
- Innovative Culture: The path for meaningful and transforming experiences is based on business consciousness and co-creativeness.
- Impactful Marketing: To catalyse growth, information and technology must be subsidiary to an engaging experience that is fresh, positive, meaningful, and valuable.
- Connected Experiences: In our digitalised world, our purpose-driven and experience-based approach gives context and a human touch and drives growth.

Since its foundation in 2003, we have been working with companies such as AEBrand, Bodegas Montecillo, Bodegas Torres, Casa del Libro, Codorníu, Cosentino, Global Alliance for Banking on Values, Green Building Council, Grupo Lar, Impact Hub, Komoneed, Macri Group, Medinge Group, Osborne, Post-Industrial Institute, Repsol, Trasbordo, Uralita, Uriach and zenziya among others.

Also, Allegro 234 is part of The Flow Collective, a diverse group of highly experienced, blue-chip brand and strategy thinkers and doers, passionate believers in brands with purpose and conscience. Coming from three continents, its members have worked all over the world addressing some of the biggest strategy and branding challenges, in fields as diverse as FinTech, Telecom, Automotive, Healthcare and the Performing Arts.