TOP CHARTS

EMARKETER

2026 Marketing Trends Shaping Trust in the Era of AI

AI is changing how brands reach consumers and how consumers decide what to trust. Automation is accelerating media buying and content creation, while social media makes brand messages easier to question, remix, and amplify. At the same time, AI-generated content is blurring what's real, sponsored, and credible. EMARKETER's 2026 trends show how these shifts are redefining trust in marketing.

In this environment, trust isn't built by technology alone. It's earned through understanding: how consumers discover products and what signals credibility. The charts below highlight key 2026 trends shaping the digital landscape and what the shifts mean for trust, according to EMARKETER's Blake Droesch, senior analyst and director of client value.

TREND: AI-powered ad buying is driving efficiency but amplifying brand safety risks.

KEY STAT: Meta's US digital ad spending share is forecast to rise despite its share of time spent declining, according to EMARKETER's September 2025 forecast. The increase in ad spending aligns with the August 2022 launch of Advantage+, Meta's AI-powered campaign automation product, which handles targeting, optimization, and some creative execution for advertisers.

THE TRUST CONSIDERATION

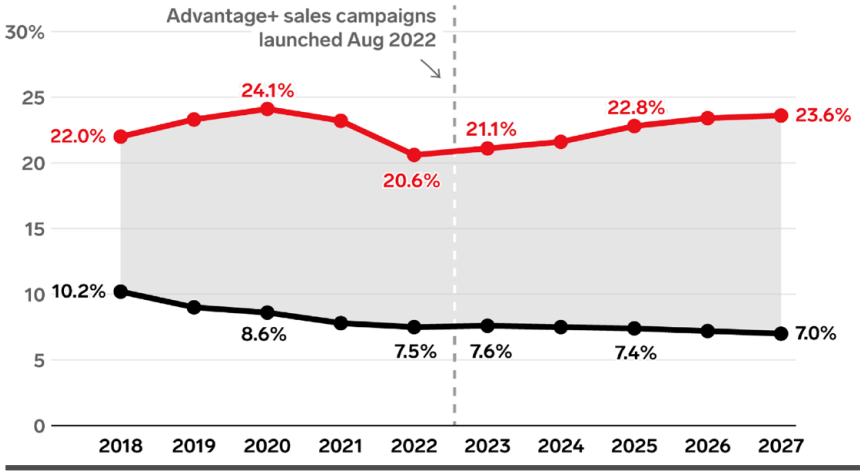
"This kind of AI-powered buying is clearly resonating with advertisers because it's making their spending more effective. But the more autonomy brands hand over to platforms, the more brand safety risks are amplified, especially around creative quality and where ads actually appear."



Blake Droesch
SENIOR ANALYST AND DIRECTOR, CLIENT VALUE, EMARKETER

Advantage+ Is Helping Reverse Meta's Downturn in Ad Revenue Share, Even as Time Spent Share Continues to Drop

Meta as a % of US digital ad spending and % of time spent with digital media by US adults, 2018-2027



Note: Meta time spent includes ages 18+, includes all time spent on both Facebook and Instagram, and includes usage via any device; Meta ad revenues are net ad revenues after companies pay traffic acquisition costs (TAC) to partner sites, include Facebook, Instagram, and Threads, and exclude WhatsApp; include paid advertising only, exclude payments to creators to produce sponsored content, and include creator content amplified as paid media; time spent forecast from June 2025
Source: EMARKETER Forecast, Sep 2025

TREND: The rise of AI-generated content is weakening trust in key discovery channels.

KEY STAT: AI-generated content jumped from 7.8% of newly published English-language web articles when ChatGPT launched in November 2022 to 51.7% by May 2025, according to Graphite.

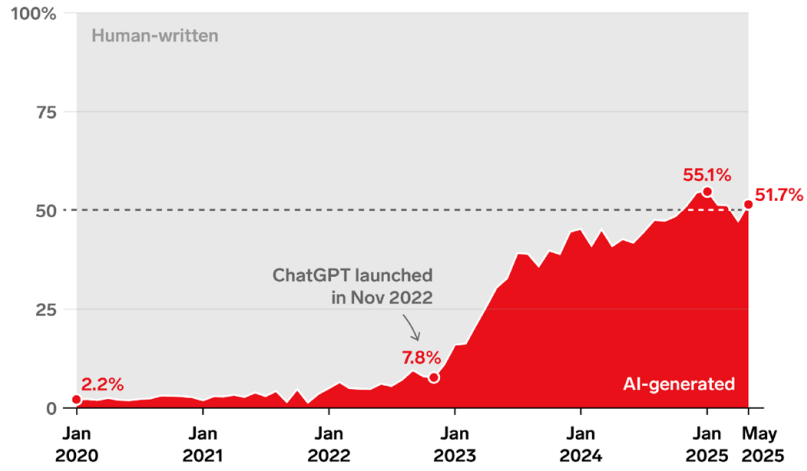
THE TRUST CONSIDERATION

"As more AI-generated content floods the internet, it creates more skepticism about what's real and what's not. If consumers stop trusting blogs, reviews, and other sources because they're unsure who—or what—wrote them, those marketing channels become less effective."

— Blake Droesch
SENIOR ANALYST AND DIRECTOR, CLIENT VALUE, EMARKETER

AI Accounts for Roughly Half of New English-Language Articles Published Online, Up From 8% at ChatGPT's Launch

AI-generated vs. human-written % of newly published English-language web articles worldwide, Jan 2020-May 2025



Note: based on an analysis of 65,000 randomly sampled articles published during the time frame; articles has at least 100 words and were sourced from Common Crawl; articles were classified as AI-generated if more than 50% of their content was detected as AI-generated
Source: Graphite, "More Articles Are Now Created by AI Than Humans," Oct 14, 2025

EMARKETER

TREND: Gen Alpha's heavier social media usage will raise expectations for authenticity.

KEY STAT: By age 16, 40.3% of Gen Alphas are projected to use social media, compared with 24.3% of Gen Zers, according to EMARKETER's May 2025 forecast. Gen Alpha will grow up more immersed in algorithmic feeds than the previous digitally native generation.

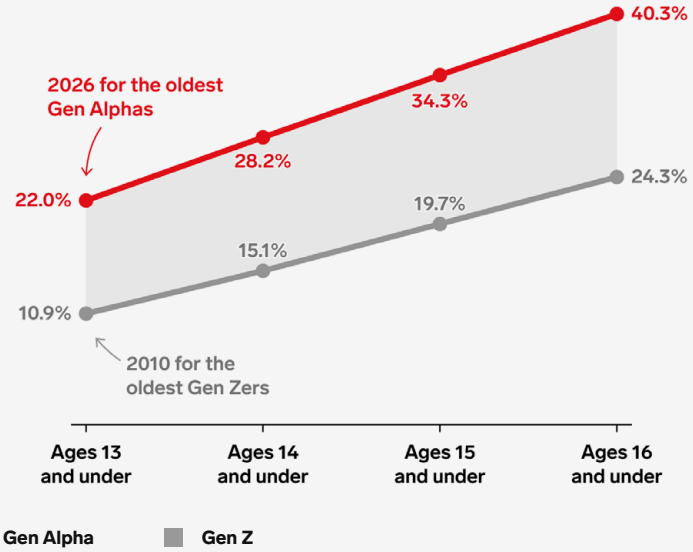
THE TRUST CONSIDERATION

"Building trust with younger generations has always been difficult, but Gen Alpha is coming of age in a much more advanced digital environment. They're going to be very good at spotting what's AI-generated and what isn't, which raises the bar for brands trying to come across as authentic."

— Blake Droesch
SENIOR ANALYST AND DIRECTOR, CLIENT VALUE, EMARKETER

Gen Alphas Will Use Social Media at About Twice the Rate Gen Zers Did at the Same Age

*social network users as a % of US population Gen Alpha vs. Gen Z, years 1-4 of adolescence**



*Note: Internet users who use a social network via any device at least once per month; Gen Alphas were born between 2013 and 2024; Gen Zers were born between 1997 and 2012; *for the oldest members of the cohort; Gen Alphas will be ages 2–13 in 2026; Gen Zers were ages 0–13 in 2010*
Source: EMARKETER Forecast, May 2025

EMARKETER

TREND: Most discovery moments still happen beyond AI agents' reach.

KEY STAT: Fewer than 4.0% of US shoppers found a recent purchase via an AI shopping assistant or genAI tool, compared with 48.2% in physical stores and 19.3% through friends and family, according to a July 2025 EMARKETER survey.

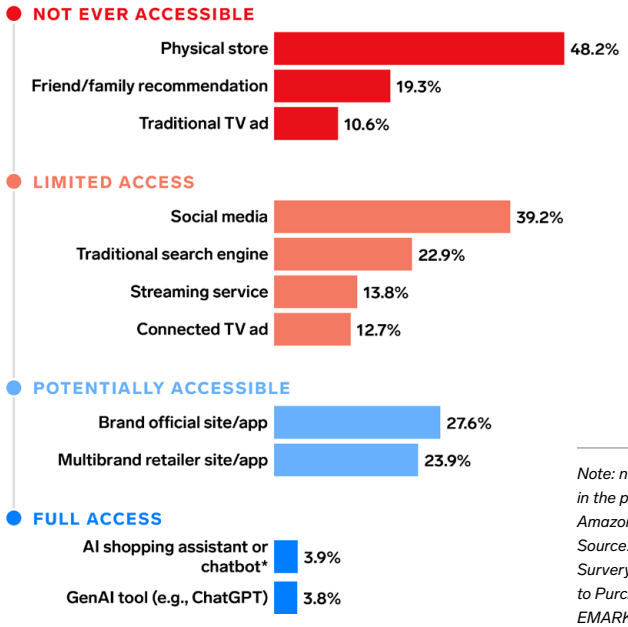
THE TRUST CONSIDERATION

"Even with all the attention on AI, many of the ways people discover products—and build trust—are still beyond its reach. Things like friends and family, in-store experiences, and real-world interactions aren't going away."

— Blake Droesch
SENIOR ANALYST AND DIRECTOR, CLIENT VALUE, EMARKETER

Most Product Discovery Happens Beyond the Reach of AI Agents

% of US shoppers, on where they discovered th enew brands or products they recently bought, June 2025



*Note: n=1,438 ages 15-79; in the past 6 months; *e.g., Amazon Rufus, Walmart Wally*
Source: EMARKETER Survery, "US Consumer Path to Purchase," July 2025; EMARKETER Analysis, Oct 2025

EMARKETER

TREND: Creator marketing is gaining value as a trust intermediary.

KEY STAT: Influencer marketing spending is expected to grow 12.9% by 2027, outpacing search, social network ads, and programmatic display, according to EMARKETER's July 2025 forecast. Even as other digital channels mature, influencer growth remains resilient.

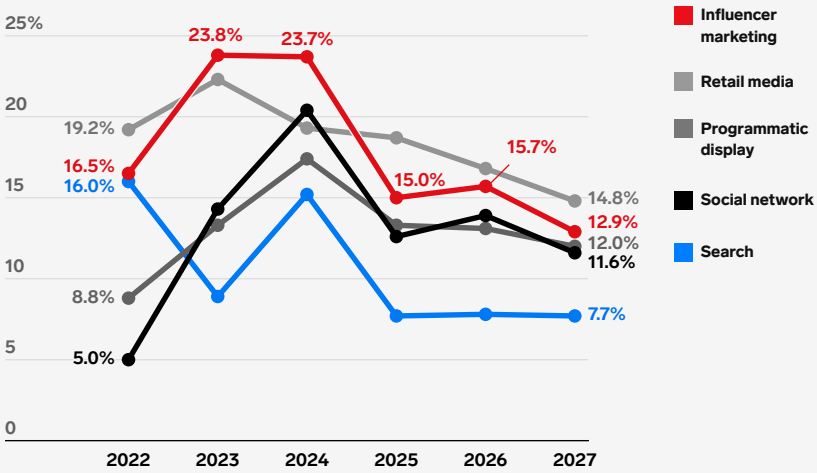
THE TRUST CONSIDERATION

"As skepticism grows, brands have a harder time making authentic connections on their own. When people start questioning written content, influencers they already trust naturally become more valuable."

— Blake Droesch
SENIOR ANALYST AND DIRECTOR, CLIENT VALUE, EMARKETER

Influencer Marketing Spending Growth Is Outpacing That of Most Digital Channels

% change in US digital ad spending, by channel, 2022-2027



Note: influence marketing includes payments made by brands to creators to promote products and services on social media, excludes noncash payments, and excludes creator content amplified as paid media; retail media includes digital advertising that appears on retail ecommerce websites or apps or is bought through a retailer's media network or demand-side platform (DSP); search includes contextual text links, paid inclusion, and paid listings; social networks include paid advertising only, exclude payments to creators to product sponsored content, .and include creator content amplified as paid media; programmatic display includes digital display ads transacted or fulfilled via automation
Source: EMARKETER Forecast, July 2025

EMARKETER

Power your next move with clear and credible insights.



Stay informed with daily newsletters

Never fall behind the biggest trends and executive-level decisions shaping your industry with our Industry Briefings— timely subscriber-only newsletters delivered straight to your email.

Learn more

Get the bigger picture

Your organization is affected by diverse industries, geographies, and ideas. Tap into these influencing factors to avoid information silos and see a more complete picture.

Learn if your company subscribes

Validate strategies with confidence

Get to decision-making faster with access to exclusive data sets, expert insights, interactive forecasts — and now AI Search: a faster, smarter way to navigate and contextualize EMARKETER research.

Talk to an expert

Contact our Team

For sales inquiries please contact sales@emarketer.com

For Advertising and Sponsorships, contact advertising@emarketer.com.

EMARKETER

Copyright © 2026, EMARKETER Inc. All rights reserved.