

Omnicom at SXSW

Relevance *Amplified*

On the ground at SXSW 2025, our people explored the trends and technology brands must jump on to up their cultural clout.

Here are our impressions.



A Letter From the Editors

SXSW 2025 keynote speaker Issa Rae

At Omnicom, we thrive at the intersection of creativity, culture, and technology. So it's no surprise that SXSW is one of our favorite playgrounds. Unlike traditional conferences with a singular focus, SXSW is a dynamic convergence of film, art, music, tech, and innovation. It's where the lines between industries blur, creating a frenetic yet cohesive experience that explores future trends, ideas, and possibilities.

This year, SXSW once again stood out as the premier stage for best-in-class activations and immersive experiences. From groundbreaking technologies to cultural movements, the festival offered an abundance of opportunities to explore what's next, providing inspiration for both brands and individuals to think bigger and push boundaries.

In today's marketing world though, trends seem to come and go faster than ever before—but not before hands are wrung, money is spent, and Transformation with a capital T is preached.

So, what's real and what's just noise? Is AI really coming for my job, or is it the next metaverse?

At this year's SXSW, brilliant minds from across Omnicom sounded off on the buzziest trends in our industry and discussed which are worth taking seriously, and which we can probably write off. In the following pages, we'll help you make sense of it all, and share what we learned about making brands become more relevant than ever in 2025 and beyond.

— The Omnicom SXSW Team



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Our SXSW Impressions

Unlocking Authenticity, Personalization, and Innovation



By **Charlie Doyle**
Strategist, Critical Mass

The most salient trend I observed at SXSW 2025 is the widespread focus on creating authentic, personalized, and meaningful connections with audiences through storytelling, data-driven insights, and innovative technologies. This shift is reshaping industries including podcasting, streaming, advertising, sports, and music, as brands strive to meet the evolving expectations of their consumers.

Authenticity has become a key driver of engagement, with brands and creators leveraging raw, relatable storytelling to foster emotional connections. In podcasting, for example, the emphasis on vulnerability and personal experiences allows audiences to feel heard and understood, building trust and loyalty. Similarly, streaming platforms like Tubi are tailoring content to specific audience segments, using data to identify niche interests and deliver curated experiences.

Personalization is being propelled by data and AI, enabling brands to better understand consumer preferences and behaviors. Companies such as Samsung and Lyft are integrating real-time insights to offer hyper-personalized products and services, creating more seamless and relevant interactions. This approach goes beyond traditional marketing, empowering consumers with information and tools that enhance their decision-making and engagement.

Meanwhile, innovative technologies are transforming how brands connect with audiences. From AI-powered automation and decentralized platforms to advanced tech enhancing fan experiences, these tools are enabling deeper, more meaningful interactions at scale.

“ *Authenticity* has become a key driver of engagement, with brands and creators leveraging raw, relatable storytelling to foster emotional connections. ”

Across industries, the focus on authenticity, personalization, and innovation is reshaping the way brands engage with their audiences. Those that embrace this trend are not only fostering stronger connections but also positioning themselves for long-term success in an increasingly consumer-centric world.

What This Means for Consumers

Consumers are now experiencing more personalized interactions that cater to their unique preferences, behaviors, and values, whether through curated content, targeted advertising, or tailored advice. This means they receive experiences that feel relevant and meaningful to their lives. The growing focus on authenticity and vulnerability helps consumers feel seen, heard, and understood, fostering trust and deeper emotional connections. Additionally, consumers are gaining access to tools, data, and educational resources that empower them to make more informed decisions. This shift puts consumers in control, creating more impactful and personalized experiences.

Samsung phones now feature Galaxy AI, an AI assistant that delivers personalized features such as daily briefings.



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Brands must prioritize authenticity by using *genuine storytelling and transparency* to build trust and differentiate themselves.

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What This Means for Brands

Brands must prioritize authenticity by using genuine storytelling and transparency to build trust and differentiate themselves. Data and AI are essential for delivering personalized experiences at scale, while building ecosystems and communities is key to fostering loyalty, with successful brands moving beyond transactions to create meaningful connections.

Charlie's Controversial SXSW Hot Take

AI is an incredibly powerful tool, but its true impact lies in how we choose to use it. Rather than viewing AI as a replacement for human creativity, intuition, and critical thinking, it should be embraced as a catalyst to enhance our work. With more brands adopting AI, determining its viable uses is important, as it has the potential to streamline processes, improve efficiency, and connect us more effectively—but it should always complement, not replace, the human touch. The key is to use AI thoughtfully, allowing it to handle repetitive or data-heavy tasks while freeing us to focus on creativity, strategy, and building meaningful connections. When used responsibly, AI can amplify our abilities, enabling us to work smarter and more effectively without losing the personal, human element that drives innovation and connection. Ultimately, the way we integrate AI into our work will determine its success, making it a tool for collaboration and enhancement rather than a substitute for human ingenuity.

In February 2025, Lyft announced a partnership with Anthropic AI to create a customer care AI assistant for drivers and riders, featuring an integration with Anthropic's Claude chatbot.



A Word with AI about SXSW

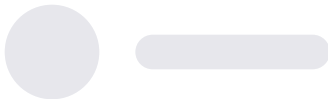
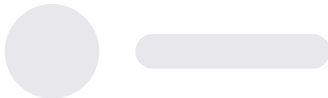
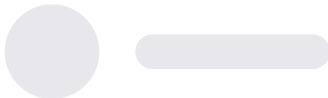
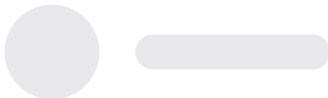


By Martin Pagh Ludvigsen
Director of AI & Creative Tech,
Goodby Silverstein & Partners



and Martin’s SXSW 2025
TrendScout, a custom GPT

For this recap article, I’ve collected transcripts from the sessions I attended and uploaded them to a new custom GPT I created called “Martin’s SXSW 2025 TrendScout.” What follows is two answers to each question: one from the TrendScout, and one from the real me. I’m going to react to what the TrendScout says, because with AI we always want a human in the loop.



What were some key trends at SXSW 2025?



TrendScout

The biggest trend this year is **Living Intelligence & AI Autonomy**—the fusion of AI, biotechnology, and advanced sensors, creating self-evolving, decision-making systems.

- 🚀 AI is no longer just a tool—it’s an autonomous agent. Systems like OpenAI’s Sora and Claude 3.5 Sonnet aren’t just generating content; they’re making complex decisions and executing strategies independently.
- 🧬 Biotech + AI = Human Enhancement. AI is revolutionizing drug discovery, synthetic biology, and neuro-symbolic AI, leading to AI-driven healthcare and longevity research.
- 🤖 Robots are breaking free. No longer confined to factories, AI-powered robots are adapting to unstructured environments, from construction to health care.
- 💰 AI is getting cheaper, smarter, and more powerful. Companies like DeepSeek and OpenAI are making AI more efficient, reshaping industries from media to finance.
- 🎬 The AI content revolution is here. From AI-generated films and music to hyper-personalized experiences, creativity is being redefined.

SXSW 2025 isn’t just about AI assisting humans—it’s about AI acting independently, shaping the future in real time. This is the moment AI stops being futuristic and becomes reality.



Martin

So, my TrendScout has been very well trained, and even broke into emoji bullet formatting, the hottest LinkedIn trend of 2024. Sure, I can appreciate that it responded to the trends that were discussed in large volume and on the big stages.

But I think it’s ignoring what I see as the most interesting trend, and that is 2025 being the breakthrough year for **the open social web** and the [Fediverse](#), of claiming digital sovereignty from big tech, and starting the existential fight for our digital lives. This trend was represented by three incredibly impressive women: Jay Graber, the CEO of Bluesky; Meredith Whitaker, President of Signal; and Molly White, digital activist, Wikipedia editor, engineer and writer.

Even with the many smart people at SXSW I still found myself having to explain what the Fediverse is, just as [I’ve been doing for years](#)—and maybe, just maybe—the Fediverse needs a better name? “The open social web” could be that name, and that seems now to be the more popular term.

A few years ago, it was just me and a handful of other first movers in the open social web, because there was no incentive to go there. But in 2025 things have changed and there are great reasons for consumers and brands to consider moving their identities out of the walled gardens of big tech.

What does this mean for consumers?

TrendScout

For consumers, AI will feel more personal, proactive, and embedded in daily life. Personal AI agents will handle tasks like scheduling, shopping, and finances autonomously. Healthcare will see AI-driven diagnostics, personalized treatments, and longevity breakthroughs. Entertainment will be hyper-personalized, with AI-generated movies, music, and interactive experiences tailored to individual preferences. AI-powered robots and assistants will enhance homes, workplaces, and services. The downside? Privacy concerns and potential job disruptions as AI takes on more decision-making roles. Consumers must navigate trust, transparency, and AI's growing influence on choices and behaviors.

Martin

Well, the TrendScout is starting to get into something interesting at the end. Consumers should consider moving their digital identities to the open social web, because it's a safer and more inclusive place to exist online, and one where the ideals of free speech still exist. We used to advocate for making the move by saying: "What if a billionaire you disagree with ruined your favorite social platform?" A couple of years ago that seemed crazy. In 2025, that's very real for Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Facebook, and a lot of people are starting to feel very homeless on those platforms.

What does this mean for brands?

TrendScout

For brands, AI means hyper-personalization, automation, and new engagement models. AI-powered systems will predict consumer needs, automate customer service, and create tailored content at scale. Brands must integrate AI-driven marketing, AI-generated media, and autonomous customer interactions to stay competitive. Supply chains will become smarter and more efficient, reducing costs while improving responsiveness. However, AI transparency and ethical use will be crucial—consumers will expect authenticity and trust in AI-driven experiences. The key challenge? Adapting fast enough to leverage AI without losing human connection and brand identity.



Bluesky CEO Jay Graber made headlines at her SXSW 2025 keynote, where she wore a shirt that read *Mundus sine Caesaribus* ("A world without Caesars" in Latin).

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In 2025 things have changed and there are great reasons for consumers and brands to consider moving their identities out of the walled gardens of big tech.

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Martin

It's been hard to convince brands to start considering the open social web because there are very few consumers there. But that's really starting to change; Bluesky has reached 32 million active users, and this makes the platform relevant. However, as brands start to consider how to enter the open social web, they need to consider that they might not be welcomed with open arms by everyone in the space. There's a grassroots vibe, an anti-capitalist vibe by many of the first movers, and that needs to be handled with respect.

What are some key quotes from SXSW 2025?



TrendScout

- 🗣️ Ian Beacraft, Futurist & CEO of Signal & Cipher: "The half-life of skills is collapsing. We used to get 30 years out of a degree. Now? Maybe three. AI is forcing us into a new era where learning never stops."
- 🗣️ Amy Webb, Futurist & CEO of FTSG: "AI isn't just changing how we work—it's changing what it means to be human. The decisions we make in the next five years will define the next century."
- 🗣️ Arvind Krishna, CEO of IBM: "The real risk isn't AI taking your job. It's AI doing your job without your oversight—and making decisions you can't explain."



Martin

- 🗣️ Molly White, Digital Sovereignty Advocate: "The internet was meant to be open and free. What we have now is a series of walled gardens where billionaires decide what we see and hear. We have to take our digital lives back."
- 🗣️ Jay Graber, CEO of Bluesky: "Your social network should belong to you, not to a billionaire with a mood swing."
- 🗣️ Meredith Whittaker, President of Signal: "Privacy isn't a luxury. It's the foundation of a free society. And if we don't fight for it now, we may never get it back."

Do you have any controversial hot takes?



TrendScout

One of the most controversial takes from SXSW 2025? Big tech's AI obsession is a distraction from the real revolution: the open social web.

While AI dominated the headlines—faster models, agentic systems, quantum breakthroughs—the biggest long-term shift is happening outside of corporate AI labs. The open web movement (Bluesky, ActivityPub, Fediverse, and Web3) is quietly dismantling the centralized, ad-driven internet we've been trapped in for the past decade. Why does this matter more than AI? Because it's about who owns the future. AI will shape industries, but digital sovereignty determines who gets to use AI—and on whose terms. If we let a handful of trillion-dollar companies own our online identities, our feeds, and even our creative outputs, then all AI does is reinforce that monopoly. The real SXSW takeaway? Decentralization is the existential fight of our digital age—and big tech hopes you're too distracted by AI hype to notice.



Martin

This is a *holy shit* moment! When I saw my TrendScout present this hot take I jumped out of my chair with excitement. I am now FULLY aligned with the TrendScout. And it even used the R-word: REVOLUTION! Honestly, that was a word that was whispered all the time in quiet conversations at the happy hours and meet-ups every day at SXSW after the official conference programming ended and the real conversations started.

Sizzle or Fizzle: What's real and what's just noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: The Open Social Web



TrendScout

The open web movement (Bluesky, ActivityPub, Fediverse, and Web3) is quietly dismantling the centralized, ad-driven internet we've been trapped in for the past decade.



Martin

The open social web, a safer and more inclusive place to exist online.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: The Metaverse



TrendScout

The once-hyped virtual worlds revolution—centered on Meta's VR dreams and corporate-backed metaverse projects—is quietly fading. While spatial computing, AR, and mixed reality are thriving, the idea of fully immersive digital worlds replacing social media has lost steam. Why? Clunky hardware, low daily engagement, and the rise of AI-powered interfaces that prioritize personalized, fluid interactions over static virtual spaces.



Martin

Pour one out for the Metaverse. Not sure what to do with the six VR headsets I own, but they do make for excellent office decor.

The Shift from Audience to Community: What It Really Takes



By Diana Snyder
SVP of Experience Strategy,
Propeller

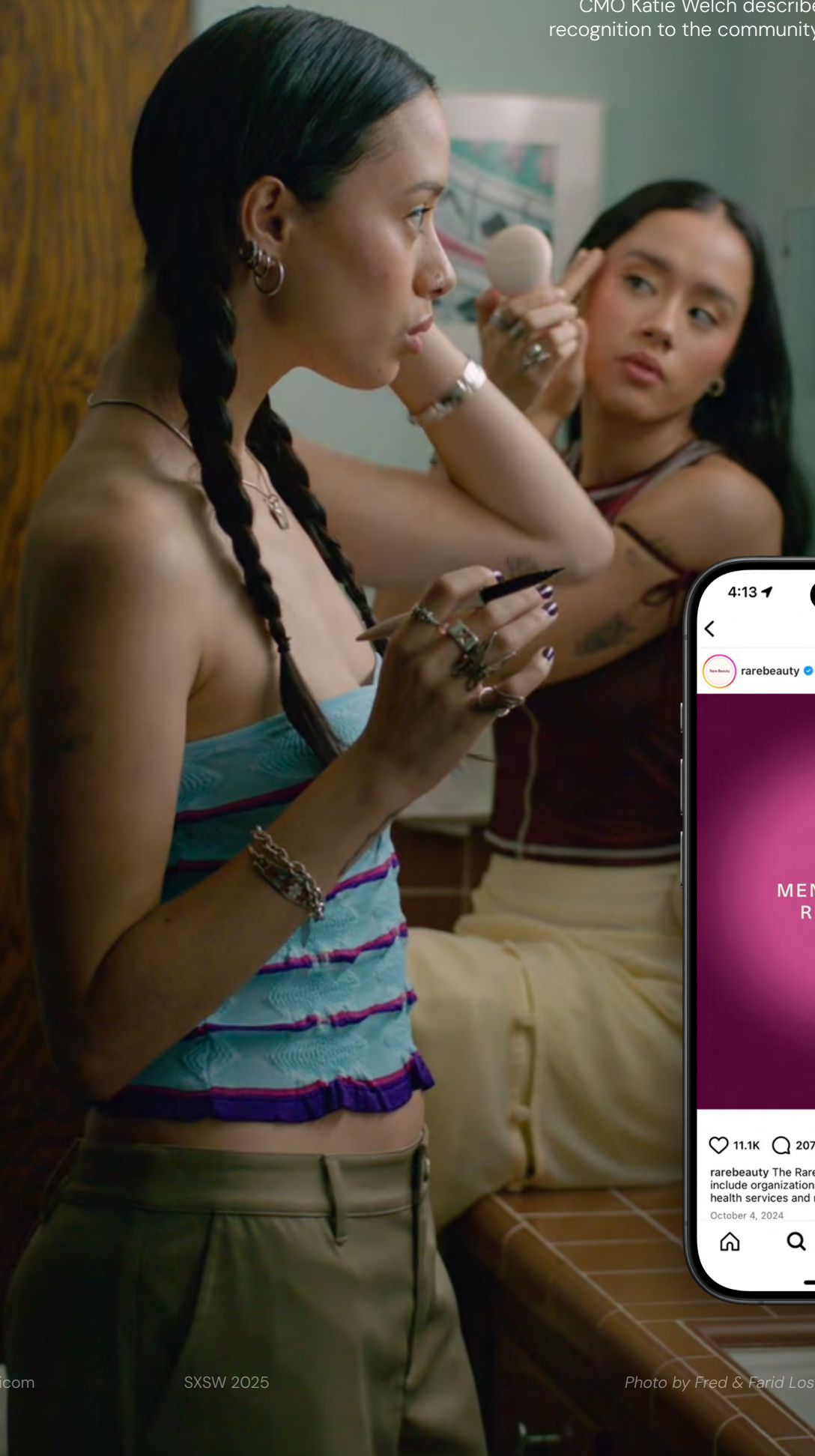
At SXSW this year, it became quite clear that community building is taking center stage in branding. During the session, “A Conversation on Brand and Community Building,” Katie Welch, CMO of Rare Beauty, posed an intriguing question: How can brands transcend audience-building and foster true community? The answer, in Rare Beauty’s case, lies in mental health advocacy. The brand’s “hook” wasn’t just beauty—it was loneliness.

This shift aligns with the loss of “third spaces”—places outside of home and work where people connect. Brands that thrive are no longer just selling products; they offer a space where consumers feel seen and supported. Even brands with significant resources—like a blockbuster brand budget or a famous founder—must ask: What can people achieve through a relationship with us? What an amazing place to start a strategic dialogue!

True community building goes beyond marketing campaigns and social media engagement. It requires brands to show up in ways that offer tangible support, emotional connection, and genuine value.

Making an emotional connection with your audience isn’t groundbreaking. What is groundbreaking is the ability to build structures that actively support your audience. Brands need to know their audience beyond behaviors and preferences—they must understand their struggles, aspirations, and unmet needs deeply enough to provide real answers.

Rare Beauty’s first global brand campaign, “Every Side of You,” features a 60-second spot called “Love Your Rare.” CMO Katie Welch describes the spot as “a letter of recognition to the community” built around the brand.



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Even brands with significant resources must ask: *What can people achieve through a relationship with us?*

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MTN DEW partnered with the HBCU Esports League and Twitch to produce a Call of Duty tournament, building and engaging with their community in person and online.

The brands that succeed in this new era will be the ones that don't just speak to their audience, but actively create spaces where they feel valued and empowered.

What This Means for Consumers

Consumers are entering an era where AI curates, predicts, and even shapes their choices, from the content they see to the products they buy. While this promises hyper-personalization, it also raises concerns: Are consumers truly in control, or are AI-driven systems nudging them toward predetermined behaviors?

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The brands that succeed in this new era will be the ones that don't just speak to their audience, but *actively create spaces* where they feel valued and empowered.

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As Propeller is focused on the healthcare space, I'll also take a moment to address the implications there. For HCPs, the stakes are even higher, and they won't be easily fooled by AI-generated insights or synthetic personas. Doctors don't have the luxury of blind trust when clinical decisions carry real-world consequences. Unlike consumers engaging with AI-powered recommendations for shopping or entertainment, HCPs will demand transparency, evidence-backed data, and peer-reviewed validation. AI may assist in streamlining information, but HCPs will remain skeptical of algorithm-driven medicine unless it stands up to rigorous clinical scrutiny. In a field where lives are at risk, critical thinking will always win over convenience.

What This Means for Brands

Brands must rethink engagement strategies. Traditional social media marketing is losing effectiveness as younger audiences shift to more interactive platforms. Gaming is the next brand battleground, where immersive storytelling and integration—not just ads—will be key.

Additionally, AI isn't just a productivity tool; it's an intelligence amplifier. Companies can leverage AI agents to help marketers ingest and act on years of interviews and detailed market research, unlocking insights at a scale that was previously impossible. Rather than replacing human expertise, AI enhances it, enabling smarter, faster decisions.

Brands that build authentic, purpose-driven communities will thrive in this new era of engagement.

SIZZLE OR FIZZLE

What's Real and What's Just Noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: Community Building

Brands that thrive are no longer just selling products; they are offering a space where consumers feel seen and supported.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: Feed-Based Engagement

The era of static, feed-based engagement is ending. Engagement rates are declining and audiences aren't motivated to act from passive scrolling—they want resources and participation. Engagement has shifted to interactive platforms like gaming and AI-powered experiences. While platforms like Instagram still hold value, the days of brands relying on traditional social media marketing for major impact are numbered.



Novartis' first Super Bowl ad, "Your Attention Please," features actor and singer Hailee Steinfeld and comedian Wanda Sykes. The spot encourages viewers to visit YourAttentionPlease.com to learn more about breast cancer and breast health.

Diana's Controversial SXSW Hot Take

The fear of AI is real, but the marketing world's response has been to prove we're not afraid, to call it just another brush in the creative toolbox. But success won't come from blind adoption in the name of survival. Truly great AI-powered marketers won't just use models and agents—they'll understand how they work to truly avoid pitfalls, like over-reliance on AI's summarized, optimized view of the past instead of generating new ideas. What happens when every brand uses AI the same way, hyper-personalizing based on historical data? Our industry thrives on people, so we must continue to model the magic of creative friction—for clients and the next generation—while navigating an AI-driven workflow.

A Futurist's Firehose and a Clarion Call for Authenticity



By David Cherry
EVP, Director of Customer Experience, Biolumina

Attending SXSW is like drinking from a futurist's firehose. With up to 20 simultaneous sessions in each timeslot, every day each participant gets a completely different set of predictions and experiences, and the overall gestalt you take away is obviously shaped by your individual participation choices. In 2013, my first attendance, the breakout star was Grumpy Cat.

Here's my take on SXSW 2025. To me, it feels like we—ourselves as individuals, our industry, our society—are at a significant inflection point. The enthusiasm of the last few years around autonomous or agentic Gen AI was almost universally tempered by a growing sense that we're unlikely to escape needing a human in the loop for tasks of any significant seriousness. And there was wide acknowledgment that the current wave of Gen AI is delivering a rising tide of generic sludge that shows signs of drowning us in mediocrity, and which in no way justifies the sky-high valuations of the companies building these tools. A significant correction is imminent.

But all is not lost. A countervailing theme across many sessions at SXSW 2025 was a clarion call for authenticity, for bringing together disparate disciplines and points of view to create something not just new, but genuinely different, engaging, or even "weird," which seemed to be a bit of a

In the documentary *Strange Journey: The Story of Rocky Horror*, *The Rocky Horror Show* creator Richard O'Brien reflects on the musical's enduring success, underscoring the power of authenticity.



buzz word this year. During the premiere of the documentary *Strange Journey, The Story of Rocky Horror*, the joy in creator Richard O’Brien’s voice as he talked about the film taking on a life of its own and continuing to find an audience 50 years later underscored the power of authenticity. There is a rising interest in “getting real.” Hand crafted, bespoke, unique—it commands a premium.

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The science of quantum computing may actually dig us, as a species, out of the environmental and sociological mess we’ve created for ourselves.

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Speaking of reality, the most exciting part of the 2025 event for me was that it was the first year with a specific Quantum Computing track. Quantum is no longer “20 years in the future.” The underlying physics recently turned 100 years old. And it neatly fits into the “weird” bucket. Hearing the passion as people in the space talked about their exponential progress in turning the theoretical physics into reality—new hardware and software, sensors and substrates—gave me genuine shivers-down-the-spine moments. We’re 12 months from the activation of multiple million-qubit devices, and offshoots from these advances are already powering advances in cancer imaging, mineral discovery with muon tomography, and the solving of “impossible” constrained problems in logistics.

The combination of conventional computers with quantum devices and—yes, Gen AI—may in the next few years move us from creating viral videos with recombined human artifacts, to creating genuinely and authentically “new” (and probably weird) material sciences that unlock a new depth of understanding about the universe. We’re talking,

if the claims can be believed, about the same order-of-magnitude changes that we’ve seen from electricity over the last 150 years, and a much better future for humanity. And that is the sort of “real” I would love to see. Sure, there’s work to do and engineering problems to be solved, but the potential is insanely great. The science of quantum computing may actually dig our species out of the environmental and sociological mess we’ve created for ourselves.

SIZZLE OR FIZZLE

What’s Real and What’s Just Noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: The Authentic, The Weird, and Quantum Computing

Hand crafted, bespoke, unique—it commands a premium as people hunger for genuinely authentic and engaging experiences. The advances in quantum computing are also impressive and may yield groundbreaking solutions to some of humanity’s most intractable problems.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: Gen AI on Its Lonesome

The enthusiasm around autonomous or agentic Gen AI was almost universally tempered by a growing sense that we’re unlikely to escape needing a human in the loop for tasks of any significant seriousness. And there was wide acknowledgment that the current wave of Gen AI is delivering a rising tide of generic sludge that is drowning us in mediocrity.

In December 2024, Google announced their latest quantum computing chip, Willow.

The Convergence: AI and Human- Centric Experiences Come Together for Maximum Impact



By the FleishmanHillard
SXSW Team

AI is no longer just a buzzword but a deeply integrated tool across industries, from content creation to healthcare and sports. However, this integration must be balanced with a strong emphasis on authenticity, community building, and human connection in order to be truly successful.

We're seeing AI enhance rather than replace human experiences. For instance, in dating apps, AI is promoting authenticity in user representation. In sports, AI is complementing athlete-driven content, not replacing it. And in healthcare, AI is accelerating research while still prioritizing patient-driven advocacy.

Simultaneously, there's a noticeable shift towards community-focused events and brand activations that prioritize genuine connections. Brands are moving away from overly complex activations to more straightforward, authentic experiences that resonate with attendees on a personal level.

This trend is further exemplified by the rise of podcasts and long-form video content, which foster deeper, more genuine connections with audiences. Even in gaming, the

Intuit Dome, the new home of the Los Angeles Clippers, is investing heavily in AI-powered experiences, such as personalised promotions and real-time game insights.

focus is shifting towards creating immersive storytelling experiences and cultural crossover moments.

The sizzle is in this delicate balance: leveraging cutting-edge AI technology to enhance and streamline experiences, while simultaneously doubling down on human connection, authenticity, and community building. It's about using tech to bring people together, not to replace human interaction.

“Brands are moving away from overly complex activations to more *straightforward, authentic experiences* that resonate with attendees on a personal level.”

What This Means for Consumers

Consumers can expect more personalized, efficient, and genuine experiences across various sectors, with AI integration streamlining processes while maintaining human touch. The focus on community and real connections will manifest in interactive brand experiences and community-centered events. Platforms and brands will emphasize user autonomy and data transparency, creating a world where technology enhances human interaction and community building rather than replacing it.

What This Means for Brands

Brands must strike a balance between leveraging AI for efficiency and maintaining authentic human connections. They need to embrace AI for personalization and data analysis while ensuring their messaging and activations remain genuine and community-focused. There's an opportunity to create more immersive, cross-cultural experi-

Bumble has introduced new AI features to further enable human connection, such as AI-generated ice breakers on the Bumble for Friends app.

“It's about using tech to bring people together, not to replace human interaction.”

ences that resonate with diverse audiences. Brands must also be prepared to cede some control over their narrative to consumers, as the internet increasingly shapes brand perception. In fact, consumers are demanding it as they seek to take back control. Lastly, sustainability and social responsibility should be integrated into brand strategies to meet growing consumer expectations.



SIZZLE OR FIZZLE

What's Real and What's Just Noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: Community Building

Cutting-edge AI technology that enhances and streamlines experiences, while simultaneously doubling down on human connection, authenticity, and community building. It's about using tech to bring people together, not to replace human interaction.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: Audience Segmentation

The trend of hyper-niche audience segmentation is giving way to more universal, community-focused marketing strategies. While targeted marketing still has its place, brands are increasingly recognizing the value of broader awareness campaigns to unlock untapped audience groups and create cultural crossover moments. This shift is evident in sports and entertainment, where there's a growing emphasis on creating shared experiences that bring diverse audiences together. Brands are finding success with monoculture moments that extend reach beyond their traditional target markets. This approach not only expands the potential customer base but also fosters a sense of inclusivity and community, resonating with consumers' desire for connection and shared experiences.

AI: From New Artistic Genres to Fears and Tears



By Leonie Moreton
Global Managing Director,
Coffee & TV

Unsurprisingly, high on the agenda at this year’s SXSW was AI’s expanding role within culture, marketing, politics, and advancing tech. Discussions ranged from its creative applications in art, with Holly Herndon the poster girl for this emerging genre in the featured session “AI, Music & Creativity in the Imagination Age,” to concerns about job displacement and ethical implications, with Esther Perel nearly moved to tears in a live recording of her podcast *Where Should We Begin?*

The festival also delved into the potential convergence of AI and quantum computing, exploring future innovations at their intersection. A lot of that discussion was noise that we’ve heard before. Some discussions were unsubtle fear-mongering, whilst some were quietly disquieting.

Coming from a creative company driven by tech, it’s crucial Coffee & TV stays at the bleeding edge of AI’s rapidly evolving landscape. As futurist Amy Webb reminded us at the launch of her *2025 Tech Trends Report*, not only can AI be used for efficiency, speed, and effective data management, but it’s clear that AI tools can enhance our creative output, allowing artists to explore new creative possibilities. With AI, collaboration between teams becomes smoother, especially when it comes to real-time adjustments and revisions, which ultimately enhances the client’s experience.

In her *2025 Tech Trends Report*, futurist Amy Webb emphasized the rapid societal change caused by artificial intelligence, biotechnology, and advanced sensors.



What This Means for Consumers

AI is already impacting consumers across all aspects of daily life, in ways that they may not even be aware of. Webb also spoke of AI increasingly playing a significant role in influencing consumer choices. From personalized recommendations to predictive analytics, AI will deeply understand consumer behaviour, preferences, and purchasing patterns. This enables brands, advertisers, and content creators like Coffee & TV to tailor their content to each individual, creating more targeted marketing experiences.

What This Means for Brands

At a live recording of Scott Galloway’s podcast *Prof G Markets*, the infamously straight-talking professor was critical of Apple’s slow adoption of AI technologies compared to competitors like Google, Amazon, and Microsoft, which have been more aggressive in integrating AI across their products and services. That said, Galloway sees the company’s strong brand loyalty and consumer trust as an advantage in areas where it can innovate without compromising its core values. So, how does AI impact brands? Brands need to adapt or die, but in order to retain consumer loyalty, they should take care not to stray from their core values which provide solid foundations on which to build.

“Brands need to adapt or die, but in order to retain consumer loyalty, they should take care not to stray from their core values, which provide solid foundations on which to build.”

SIZZLE OR FIZZLE

What’s Real and What’s Just Noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: AI

AI may have been the sizzle of the year, but unlike the Metaverse, it’s likely to remain the sizzle for many years to come.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: AI Fear

Concerns about job displacement and ethical implications nearly moved Esther Perel to tears in a live recording of her podcast *Where Should We Begin?* Some discussions this year engaged in un-subtle fearmongering, whilst some were quietly disquieting—but despite whatever reservations we may have, AI is clearly here to stay.

In December 2023, Google launched Gemini, its most advanced AI model. Their heartfelt 2025 Super Bowl spot, “Dream Job,” shows a father using Gemini to prepare for a job interview.

The Year We All Become Futurists

 **By Greg Brown**
VP of Digital Innovation,
DAS Group

SXSW 2025 made clear the dire need—and huge opportunity—to use our human agency in everything we do at home, at work, and in our communities, as well as the need to make our relationship with technology a more mutually beneficial one. Those sound like truisms, right? Who could argue against either?

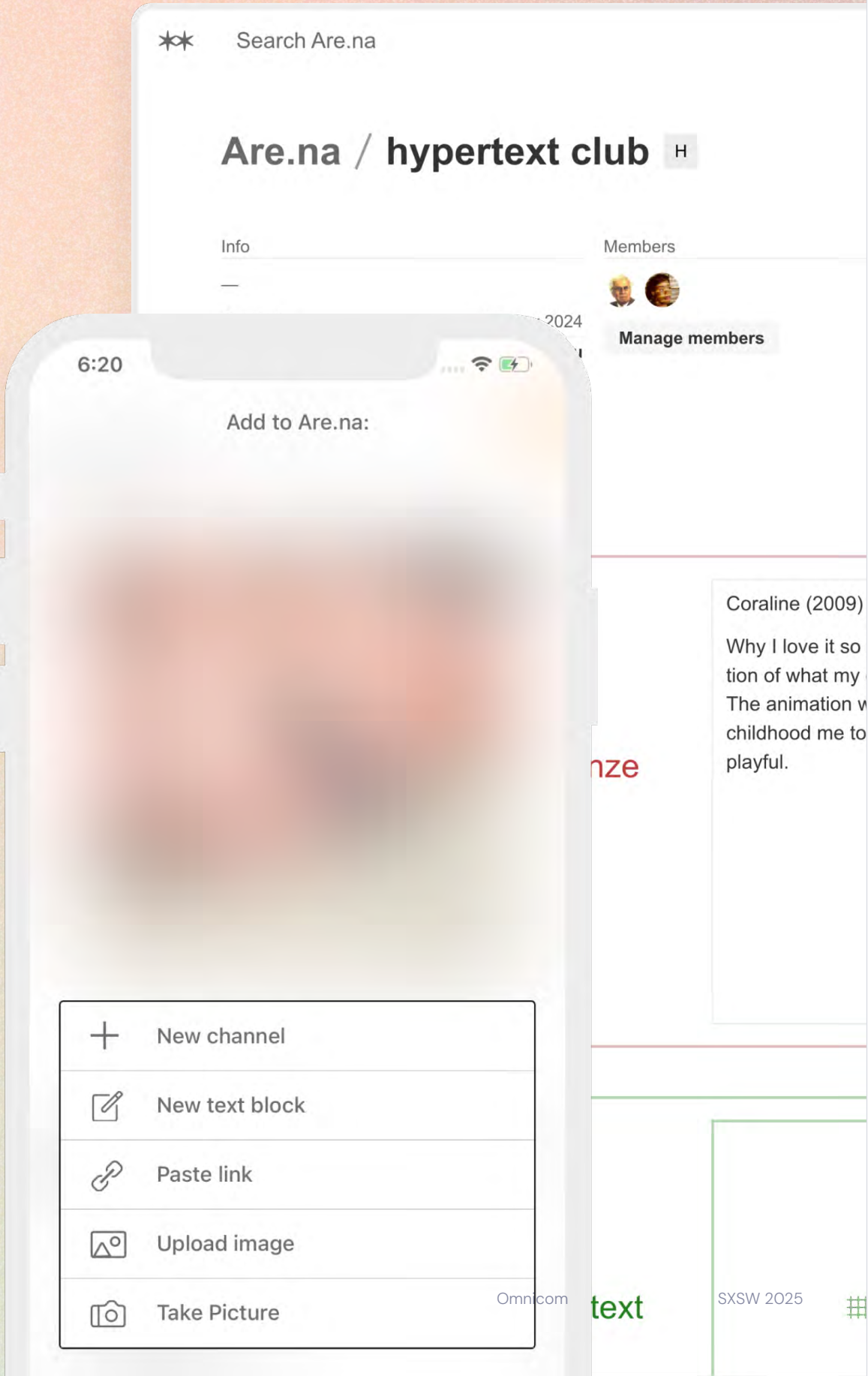
The fact is that many feel paralyzed by the rate of AI-driven technological change and the seismic geopolitical paradigm shifts happening at the same time. It can seem out of our control, and can wreak havoc on our somatic intelligence—the intuitive, fight-or-flight reactions we have to external stimuli.

Therefore, not playfully engaging with the transformative technologies at our fingertips becomes the easier path. Throwing our individual or institutional hands up and saying, “I don’t get AI,” or worse, “tech is changing too fast for me to have any impact” becomes the default.

But here’s the thing: that’s not true. At SXSW this year, futurism—the practice of strategic foresight –and conscious technology building—showed us the path forward.

A team from IDEO gave us a thought experiment about “mutualism” and provided tangible examples of how mutualistic interactions between technology and humanity could manifest in the real world, including contemporary platforms like Are.na.

Platforms such as Are.na integrate technology with human intelligence to connect ideas and build knowledge.



Bluesky CEO Jay Graber doubled down on open social media and user ownership of their own network. Signal President Meredith Whittaker made the case for privacy as a fundamental component to the good (free) life. The Fediverse House offered up an antidote to extractive, algorithmic social media. Futurists, from Amy Webb to Ian Beacraft, hit the keynotes to remind us: we can shape the future and technology.

“ Rethink how your brand and products intersect with technology and consumers. What’s at the center that makes the *whole ecosystem* better, stronger, and more beneficial to all parties? That’s where you should live. ”

These leaders and futurists practicing strategic foresight are in the business of using new language, dialogue, and envisioning potential futures—then asking “which ones do we need to fight for?” That pushes the dual call for (1) using our human agency and (2) making the human/technology relationship more symbiotic—and to make these fundamental societal imperatives.

This is the year we all become futurists.

What This Means for Consumers

Nostalgia is the default comfort in the face of external chaos. They need something different; an alternative vision of the future. Something tangible, exciting, and *new*.

What This Means for Brands

Brands have three essential roles to play.

One: Start at the business level. A new geopolitical paradigm and AI arms race are incentivizing short-term decision-making. Even if your foresight tells you that the medium-to-long term paradigm is fundamentally chaotic, short-termism is still a losing strategy. Either scenario requires a strategy and decisioning that extends far beyond the end-of-fiscal.

Easy? No. Required? Yes.

Two: Rethink how your brand and products intersect with technology and consumers. What’s at the center that makes the whole ecosystem better, stronger, and more beneficial to all parties? That’s where you should live.

Three: Use new language, new ways of framing our moment and future, and co-create the possible future. This isn’t content co-creation. Or campaign co-creation. Or product co-creation. It’s even scarier and wildly more impactful than that: future co-creation.

Greg’s Controversial SXSW Hot Take

Marketers, brands, and technologists should ditch the main SXSW event—the interactive, film, and music festivals—and the largesse and hobnobbing that come with it. Instead, we should prioritize the smaller event that takes place a few days prior. SXSW EDU is where experts come to discuss teaching, policy, and other key topics across education.

If we take seriously trends from this year, like AI and transformation, it certainly warrants going where educators and practitioners are charting out the future of learning. And if we are all going to be futurists, then we should probably listen to those directly responsible for the growth and success of generations to come.



SXSW EDU, which takes place a few days before SXSW, tackles key topics in the education sector.

SIZZLE OR FIZZLE

What’s Real and What’s Just Noise?

The Sizzle @ SXSW: Human Agency

It’s time for us to reassert our agency and use it in everything we do at home, at work, and in our communities, while making our relationship with technology healthier, and mutually beneficial. This stuff isn’t beyond our grasp—we all need to become futurists in order to use technology to our advantage.

The Fizzle @ SXSW: Technology Paralysis

Many feel helpless at the rate of change, and simply want to throw up their hands. But that would be to miss out on the opportunity we have in front of us to establish “mutualism,” in which we establish a mutually beneficial relationship with technology.

SXSW 2025: The Most *Amplified* Sessions



Charlie Doyle



The Future of Social

With Jay Graber, CEO of Bluesky

This session was truly groundbreaking, showcasing Bluesky’s innovative approach to decentralization, user control, and open-source development. The conversation highlighted how Bluesky is redefining social media by prioritizing user choice, transparency, and community building. From customizable feeds to its “billionaire-proof” structure, the platform demonstrates a commitment to empowering users and developers alike. This session left a lasting impression, offering a hopeful vision for the future of social media that fosters creativity, inclusivity, and independence from centralized control.

Capital T Trends: How Social Media is Shaping the Future of Business

With Billy Jones, VP of Brand Experience & Design, Hootsuite

This session was an eye-opening exploration of social intelligence and its transformative impact on businesses. The speaker’s engaging insights highlighted how brands can go beyond chasing fleeting trends to harness deeper, data-driven social intelligence for long-term growth. From leveraging subcultures and consumer behavior shifts to addressing paradigm shifts, the session provided actionable frameworks and real-world examples that were both thought-provoking and practical. It was an impressive call to action for brands to adapt, innovate, and connect with their audiences in more meaningful ways.



Leonie Moreton

Social Studies: Gen Z, Social Media’s Dark Side, and Brands

With Lauren Greenfield, Founder of Institute and Margaret Johnson, Chief Creative Officer & Partner, Goodby Silverstein & Partners

Without question the most impactful discussion was about the raw human experience of teenagers whose lives have been so brutally impacted by social media. There was not a dry eye in the house during this timely reminder that whilst social media can foster connection, creativity, and awareness, it also poses significant challenges related to mental health, addiction, and exposure to harmful content. Johnson and Greenfield spoke about brands’ unique opportunity to use social media as a platform to deliver responsible and supportive messages, as demonstrated in their award-winning Super Bowl spot of Nike, ‘Like a Girl’. By sharing positive, supportive messages and creating educational content, brands can help normalize conversations around mental well-being and body acceptance. The key is to foster an environment that celebrates inclusivity, self-worth, and mental resilience while using the platform to combat unrealistic standards and harmful content.




Martin Pagh Ludvigsen

How Not to Screw Up an AI Transformation While Shaping the Future of Your Company

With Ian Beacraft, CEO of Signal & Cipher

Futurist Ian Beacraft’s session was one of my favorites. It’s available to stream on SXSW’s YouTube channel and really worth watching. As he said, “The half-life of skills is collapsing. We used to get 30 years out of a degree. Now? Maybe three. AI is forcing us into a new era where learning never stops.”






Diana Snyder

IBM and Twitter: The Future of Digital Engagement

- Panelists:
- Brian Fanzo, Chief Digital Strategist & Partner, Broadsuite
 - Bryan Kramer, Social Business Strategist & CEO, PureMatter
 - Maria Winans, VP of Social Business & Industry Cloud Solutions Marketing, IBM
 - Will Mayo, Senior Manager, Data Partnerships, Twitter

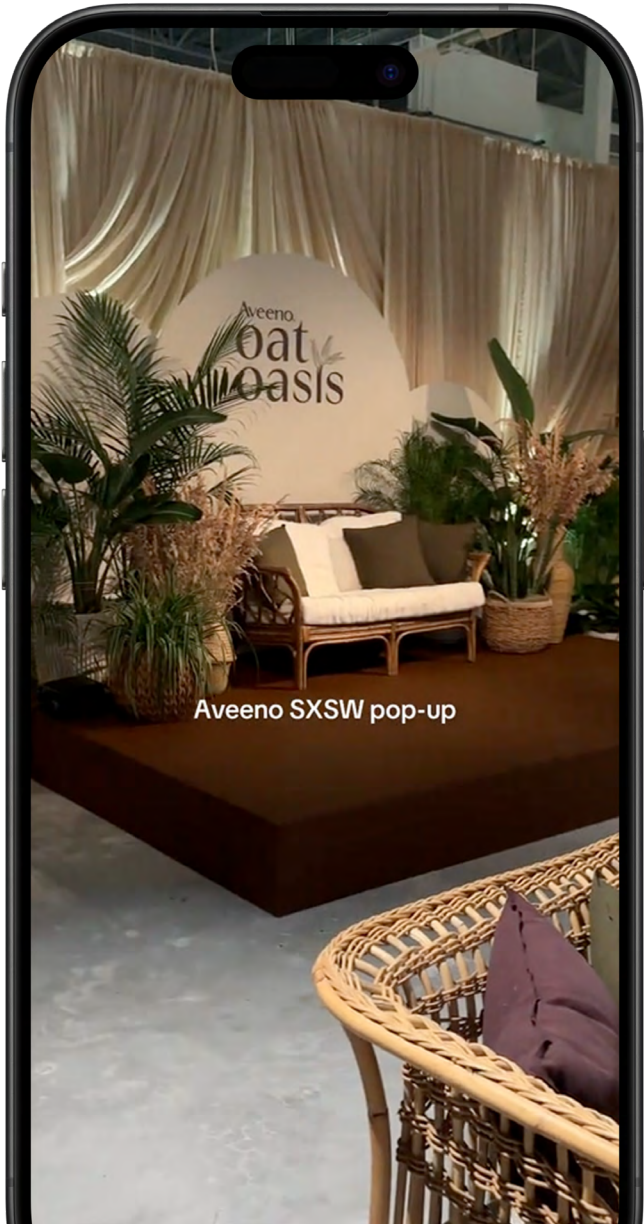
A panel on the future of digital engagement confirmed what we already suspected: social media isn’t social anymore. Engagement has shifted from passive feed-scrolling to interactive platforms like gaming and AI-powered experiences. The conversation wasn’t just about what’s next—it was a wake-up call for brands still clinging to outdated social strategies.




FleishmanHillard Team

Aveeno’s Oat Oasis

Aveeno’s Oat Oasis created a calm, authentic space amidst digital and physical overwhelm. By offering customized oat milk lattes, full-sized products and unique experiences like poetry readings and palm readings, Aveeno created a multi-sensory, community-focused space. This approach aligns with the growing demand for brands to provide more than just products, but meaningful experiences that foster connection and well-being. The Oat Oasis demonstrated how brands can successfully balance technological integration with authentic, human-centric experiences, catering to consumers’ desire for meaningful interactions and personalized care.





Ro Kalonaros

SHEBA® Brand’s *Reef Builders* Documentary

At the heart of great brands lies a compelling story—one that not only connects with audiences emotionally, but also drives meaningful action. At SXSW 2025, the SHEBA® brand, part of the Mars Inc. family, exemplified this principle with the debut of *Reef Builders*, a documentary that seamlessly blends brand purpose with entertainment, innovation, and global impact. *Reef Builders* shines a spotlight on the brand’s groundbreaking Hope Grows™ program, part of one of the world’s largest coral reef restoration initiatives led by Mars Sustainable Solutions (MSS). This powerful narrative brings to life the inspiring work of over 200 reef builders and the vital role ocean communities play in restoring our planet’s coral reefs. Created in partnership with AMV BBDO, the film highlights innovation at its core, showcasing technological breakthroughs, like the Reef Star, a steel structure that has turned decimated coral rubble fields into thriving ecosystems. By participating in SXSW, Mars and SHEBA® reinforce the idea that brands can be more than just providers of products—they can be forces for good.



The Brand Risks and Rewards of Creator Rizz

- Panelists:
- Glenda Garcia, Director of Brand Strategy, Instacart
 - Julia Melle, Director of Brand & Content, Southwest Airlines
 - Kelly Molnar, Senior Director of Global Integrated Marketing, Crocs
 - Kate Rush Sheehy, SVP of Strategy & Insights, GSD&M

Influencer marketing isn’t just a tactic anymore—it’s the main character in the story of brand relevance, and marketers are chasing creator “rizz” like their budgets depend on it. In this session, leaders from Southwest Airlines, Instacart, and Crocs made one thing clear: influencers are no longer sidekicks—they’re driving the plot. Southwest’s Julia Melle and GSD&M’s Kate Rush Sheehy explained how the airline swapped traditional ads for TikTok campaigns like “Shopifly,” where creators aligned their passions with destinations. The payoff? A six-point jump in consumer consideration. Instacart’s Glenda Garcia dropped gems about tapping cultural tastemakers like @deuxmoi to build buzz, while Crocs’ Kelly Molnar shared how the brand turned its “ugly shoe” rep into a cultural flex through partnerships with stars like Post Malone and Bad Bunny. Hand influencers the mic (with a solid brief), and let their authenticity carry your brand to Gen Z glory.

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Looking to amplify your brand’s cultural relevance?
Omnicom can help. Get in touch:
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