STRATEGIC MARKETING for AFRICA

COHERENT. CREDIBLE. COURAGEOUS.

AMC AFRICAN MARKETING CONFEDERATION

Journal of the African Marketing Confederation

Issue 1 2026

Traceability

GIVING AFRICA A MARKETING EDGE THE WORLD CAN AUDIT

Three Conferences! One United Movement!

Cracking the Africa Code

FMCG in a digital-first economy

A.M.C. Members' News

ChatGPT advertising in Africa

Data analytics: Find the real insights

If we play to Africa's marketing strengths, we can create significant international impact

It is a pleasure to welcome you to another issue of *Strategic Marketing for Africa* with its new look and feel. I am sure you will agree that the updated layout and design adds a modern perspective to our well-established journal. As we know, marketing is always in a state of flux and innovation, and we trust that this journal assists in keeping you up to date with changing times and trends.

It has been a busy start to the year for the AMC, and preparations are well underway for our annual Conference to be held in September in Livingstone, Zambia on the banks of the spectacular Victoria Falls.

Our theme is *Africa Rising: From Continental Strengths to Global Impact through Marketing Leadership, Brand Power and Value Creation*, which underlines the AMC's hosting of the inaugural gathering of the World Marketing Council (WMC). We are a founding member and I am privileged to be 1st Vice President.

The first day of the conference will have a global perspective jointly hosted by the AMC and WMC, with speakers from across the globe. We look forward to welcoming you to another memorable networking and learning opportunity.

And with our newly reconstituted AMC Research, Events, Publishing and Education committees ready to go ahead with new initiatives, we will certainly have a lot to talk about in Zambia in September!

Yours in marketing,

Helen McIntee-Carlisle
BA MBA CM(SA) Hon.FCIM
First Vice President: World Marketing Council
Co-Founder and President: African Marketing Confederation

« Plans are now well underway for our annual conference to be held this year at mighty Victoria Falls in Zambia »

MESSAGE DE LA PRÉSIDENTE DE LA CONFÉDÉRATION AFRICAINE DU MARKETING

Les atouts de l'Afrique peuvent avoir un impact mondial

C'est un plaisir de vous accueillir pour un nouveau numéro de *Strategic Marketing for Africa*, désormais avec une nouvelle présentation et une nouvelle identité visuelle. Je suis persuadé que vous apprécierez la nouvelle mise en page et le design revisité, qui insufflent une touche de modernité à notre revue de référence. Comme nous le savons, le marketing est un domaine en constante évolution et en perpétuelle innovation. Nous espérons donc que cette revue vous permettra de rester au fait des changements et des tendances actuelles.

Le début de l'année a été chargé pour l'AMC, et les préparatifs sont bien avancés pour notre conférence annuelle qui se tiendra en septembre à Livingstone, en Zambie, sur les rives des spectaculaires chutes Victoria.

Notre thème est *L'Afrique en Essor : des atouts continentaux à un impact mondial grâce au leadership marketing, à la puissance de la marque et à la création de valeur*, ce qui souligne l'organisation par l'AMC de la première réunion du Conseil Mondial du Marketing (WMC). Nous sommes un membre fondateur et j'ai le privilège d'être le 1er Vice-président.

Le premier jour de la conférence, organisé conjointement par l'AMC et le WMC, s'inscrira dans une perspective mondiale et accueillera des intervenants venus des quatre coins du monde. Nous attendons avec impatience de vous accueillir pour une autre opportunité mémorable de réseautage et d'apprentissage.

Et avec nos comités Recherche, Événements, Édition et Formation de l'AMC, récemment remaniés, prêts à se lancer dans de nouvelles initiatives, nous aurons certainement matière à discuter en Zambie en septembre !

Cordialement,

Helen McIntee-Carlisle
BA MBA CM(SA) Hon.FCIM
Premier vice-président : Conseil mondial du marketing
Cofondateur et président :
Confédération africaine du marketing

MENSAGEM DA PRESIDENTE DA CONFEDERAÇÃO AFRICANA DE MARKETING

As forças de África podem criar impacto global

É um prazer dar-lhe as boas-vindas a mais uma edição do *Strategic Marketing for Africa*, com o seu novo visual e sensação. Estou certa de que concordará que a disposição e o design actualizados adicionam uma perspectiva moderna ao nosso jornal bem estabelecido. Como sabemos, o marketing está sempre em estado de mudança e inovação, e acreditamos que este jornal ajuda a mantê-lo actualizado com os tempos e as tendências em mudança.

Foi um início de ano agitado para a AMC, e os preparativos estão em pleno andamento para a nossa Conferência anual a ser realizada em Setembro, em Livingstone, Zâmbia, nas margens das fantásticas Cataratas Vitória.

O nosso tema é *África em Ascensão: Das Forças Continentais ao Impacto Global através da Liderança em Marketing, Poder de Marca e Criação de Valor*, que destaca a apresentação da AMC da reunião inaugural do World Marketing Council (WMC). Somos membros fundadores e tenho o privilégio de ser a 1ª Vice-Presidente.

O primeiro dia da conferência terá uma perspectiva global, co-organizada pela AMC e WMC, com palestrantes de todo o mundo. Aguardamos com expectativa dar-lhe as boas-vindas a mais uma oportunidade memorável de trabalho em equipa e aprendizagem.

E com as nossas recém-constituídas comissões de Pesquisa, Eventos, Publicação e Educação da AMC prontas para avançar com novas iniciativas, certamente teremos muito a discutir na Zâmbia em Setembro!

Cordialmente em marketing,

Helen McIntee-Carlisle
BA MBA CM(SA) Hon.FCIM
Primeiro Vice-Presidente: Conselho Mundial de Marketing
Co-fundadora e Presidente: Confederação Africana de Marketing

STRATEGIC MARKETING for AFRICA

PUBLISHER
African Marketing Confederation
https://africanmarketingconfederation.org
info@africanmarketingconfederation.org

A.M.C. PRESIDENT
Helen McIntee-Carlisle

A.M.C. SECRETARY GENERAL
David Balikuddembe

EDITORIAL
Simpson Media
Editor: Mike Simpson
mike@media-simpson.com

ADVERTISING SALES & COORDINATION
Avenue Advertising
Managing Director: Barbara Spence
Landline: +27 11 463 7940
Mobile: +27 82 881 3454
barbara@avenue.co.za

DESIGN & LAYOUT
Tamlin Lockhart Design
tamlin@tamlinlockhart.co.za

PRODUCTION
Reproduction: Tamlin Lockhart Design
Digital magazine: UXi Creative

IN ASSOCIATION WITH
Angola Marketing Network
Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana
Ethiopian Marketing Professionals' Association
Institute of Marketing in Malawi
Institute of Marketing & Management, Mauritius
Institute of Marketing Management, South Africa
L'Association Marocaine de Marketing et de la Communication
L'association Tunisienne des Professionnels de Marketing et de la Communication
Marketing Association of Botswana
Marketers Association of Zimbabwe
Marketing Society of Kenya
Mozambique Marketing and Communication Association
National Institute of Marketing of Nigeria
Tanzania Marketing Science Association
Uganda Marketers Society
Zambia Institute of Marketing
Le Club Marketing Avis+

Traceability: another way to tell our authentic story

Welcome to another issue of our official African Marketing Confederation publication. As always, we have worked hard to bring you the latest in marketing news and thought leadership from across Africa.

We're pleased to bring you contributions and insights from marketing industry leaders in countries as diverse as Côte d'Ivoire, Germany, Ghana, Indonesia, Libya, Nigeria, Malawi, South Africa, Uganda and Zambia. Plus, of course, the efforts of our team of journalists, designers and translators.

Eagle-eyed readers may notice some design changes to the magazine. After five years since the relaunch of the AMC, we thought it was time for a makeover. Like marketing, publishing is constantly evolving and we must keep pace.

Our design guru, Tamlin Lockhart, was in Europe at the end of last year and took time off from seeing the sights to study the latest magazine design trends there, bringing back a host of new ideas for *Strategic Marketing for Africa*. We do hope you'll like our makeover. If not, let us know. As with any art form, design is subjective.

Not your average marketing story

Our cover story for this issue is perhaps a little different from the norm – we're not talking AI, digital marketing, retail strategy, marketing research or consumer trends. I suspect that, like many people, the topic of traceability struck me as more of an administrative and tick-box exercise.

But, as I delved deeper, I came to realise that it is very much at the heart of a successful export marketing strategy – particularly at a time where Africa strives to become more export focused, to better brand itself globally, to protect its unique assets and USPs, and to better tell its treasure-trove of stories to the world. In essence, traceability can help to change the African narrative.

As one of our interviewees points out in the article: today's consumers want their buying decisions to mean something, and Africa can lead on genuine origins, real human stories and a product heritage (think Ethiopian coffee, Kenyan tea or South African wine) that can't be replicated or faked.

An African tourism brand

Something else that Africa has to sell to the world is its tourism potential, and some of you will already be aware that the AMC is collaborating with UN Tourism on its Brand Africa initiative to create a responsible, sustainable and attractive pan-African tourism brand. At last year's conference, the AMC also launched a dedicated Tourism Chapter for African tourism marketers.

Consequently, in this issue you'll find articles outlining a very upbeat tourism report on Africa, and a nation-branding exercise being undertaken by Angola. There will be more such articles in the future.

Lastly, please don't forget that our African Marketing Confederation news team also posts daily news articles on the AMC website. Click on the 'News Articles' tab for the latest African and world news relevant to marketing professionals and those working in allied industries.

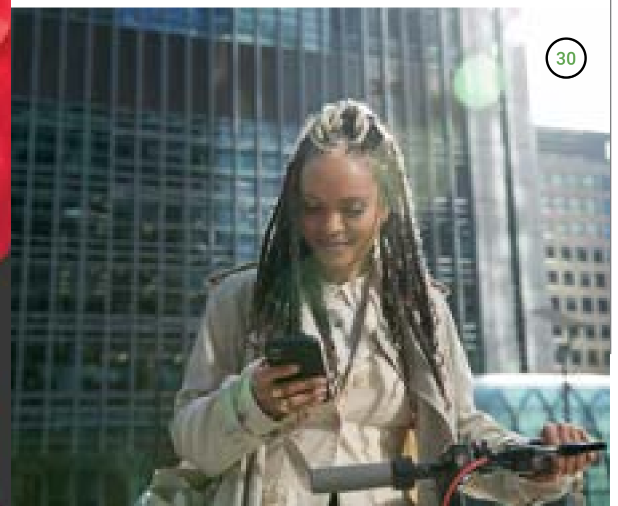
Until next time,

Mike Simpson
Editor

This issue's cover

Each issue, we do our best to create a cover that is interesting and thought-provoking. This issue's cover illustration depicts Traceability as it pertains to Africa. Our great continent is at the centre as we reach out to the world with traceable exports such as tea, coffee, wine and diamonds. Did this cover hit the mark? Let us know.

Contents



NEXT ISSUE:

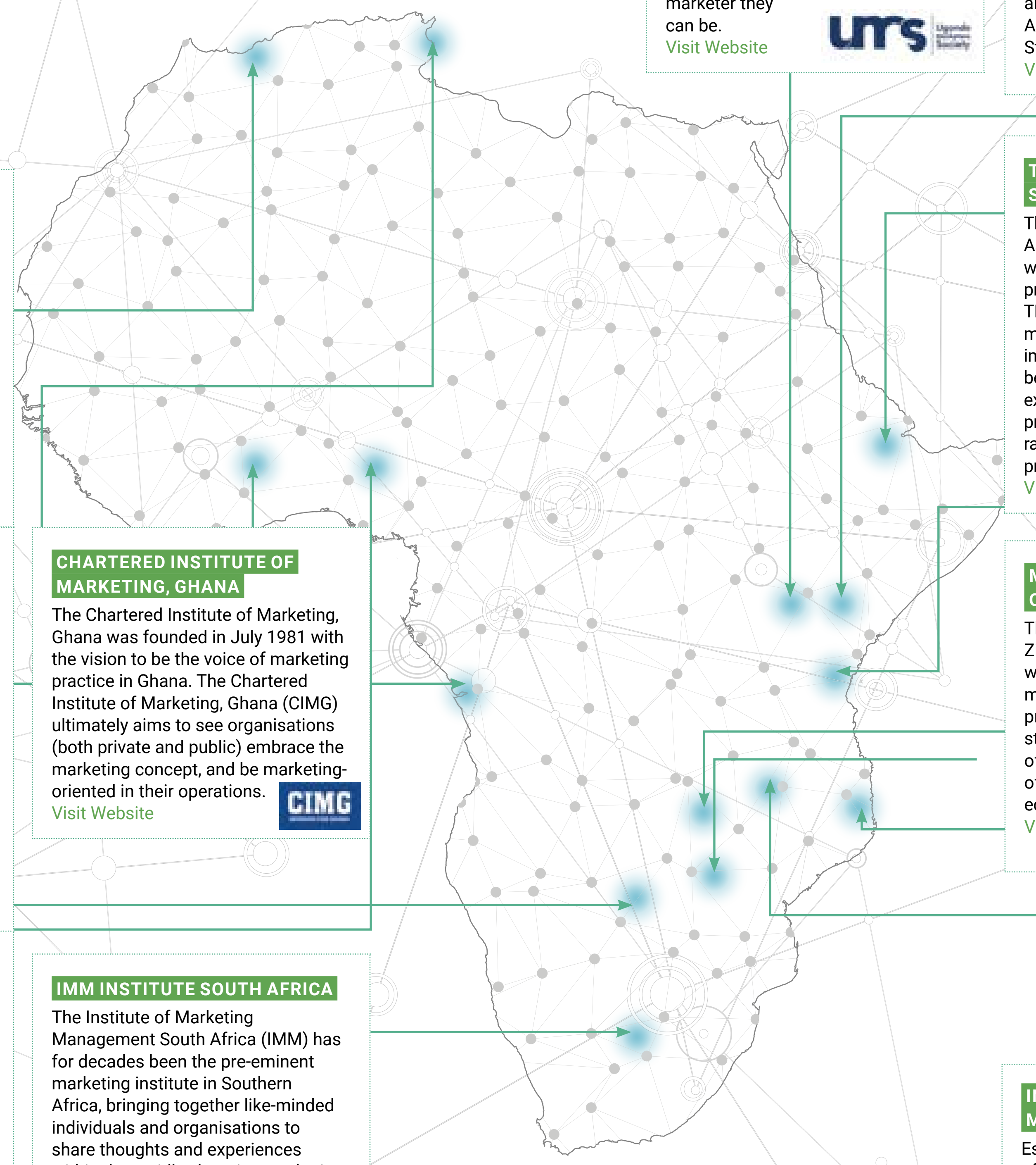
- Spotlight on an African success story
- Kenya's rapidly evolving beverages market
- SEO under threat as AI-based search takes hold

Introducing the African Marketing Confederation

The African Marketing Confederation is the ground-breaking pan-African body of marketing professionals spearheading the ongoing development of the highest possible standards of marketing across Africa.

Founded in 2011, the AMC is a collaboration between the various national marketing bodies and associations to exchange expertise and information, as well as to promote the marketing profession as a whole.

By unifying the bodies in the various countries, the AMC exchanges expertise and information, provides intellectual capital, and ensures that the continent has a platform for like-minded marketing professionals.



LE CLUB MARKETING AVIS+

Since 2019, the Avis+ brand of PVRM (Plus Value Research and Marketing) has united a dynamic community of 500+ French-speaking marketing leaders across eight African markets (Côte d'Ivoire, Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Congo, Guinea, Senegal, and Togo) through its flagship knowledge-exchange platform, the Avis+ Marketing Club.

Visit Website

L'ASSOCIATION MAROCAINE DE MARKETING ET DE LA COMMUNICATION

The AMMC (English name: Moroccan Association of Marketing and Communications) was created in 2013 as a platform for the country's marketing and communication communities. Its aim is to promote the professions, develop the skills and knowledge of members, and promote the economy of Morocco.

Visit Facebook page

MARKETING ASSOCIATION OF BOTSWANA

The Marketing Association of Botswana (MAB) is dedicated to empowering marketing professionals, fostering industry growth, and shaping marketing's future in Botswana. It exists to unite marketing leaders, strategists and creatives under one dynamic network. It also aims to elevate standards through knowledge-sharing, mentorship and learning, as well as advocate for marketing's strategic role in driving growth.

Visit LinkedIn page.

L'ASSOCIATION TUNISIENNE DES PROFESSIONNELLES DU MARKETING ET DE LA COMMUNICATION

Established in 2012, the aim of the ATPMC (English name: Tunisian Association of Marketing and Communications Professionals) is to offer the country's marketing and communications professionals privileged access to a network of colleagues and high-level industry experts. It also promotes the image of marketing and communications in Tunisia.

Visit website

CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MARKETING, GHANA

The Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana was founded in July 1981 with the vision to be the voice of marketing practice in Ghana. The Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana (CIMG) ultimately aims to see organisations (both private and public) embrace the marketing concept, and be marketing-oriented in their operations.

Visit Website

ANGOLA MARKETING NETWORK

More information coming soon!

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF MARKETING OF NIGERIA

NIMN was established by Act of the National Assembly no. 25 of 2003 with a chartered status conferred on it, the responsibility to regulate and standardise marketing professional practice through the conduct of professional examinations and certifications, training, retraining and consultancy services geared towards ensuring that members adopt a professional appro to marketing.

Visit Website

IMM INSTITUTE SOUTH AFRICA

The Institute of Marketing Management South Africa (IMM) has for decades been the pre-eminent marketing institute in Southern Africa, bringing together like-minded individuals and organisations to share thoughts and experiences within the rapidly changing marketing environment. The IMM Institute offers a range of activities and services for industry professionals.

Visit Website

UGANDA MARKETERS SOCIETY

Uganda Marketers Society is the premier organisation for marketers in the country, dedicated to promoting excellence in the field. UMS provides a range of resources and opportunities for skill-building, so members can stay up-to-date with the latest trends and best practices in marketing. We help members become the best marketer they can be.

Visit Website

MARKETING SOCIETY OF KENYA

MSK is the national umbrella body for all marketers in Kenya. Its key mandate is to empower and regulate the marketing industry by creating policy that governs the Marketing Industry (self-regulated), education and training of professionals, corporates and entrepreneurs, marketing and business mentorship, and arbitration through the Advertising Standards Board.

Visit Website

ETHIOPIAN MARKETING PROFESSIONALS' ASSOCIATION

The Ethiopian Marketing Professionals' Association is a beacon of marketing excellence, officially recognised and licensed by the Ministry of Justice under Proclamation No. 621/2009. The EMPA's goal is ambitious but tangible: To emerge as Africa's leading marketing association and catalyse engagement, education, inspiration, and the training of exceptional marketing professionals.

Visit Website

TANZANIA MARKETING SCIENCE ASSOCIATION

The Tanzania Marketing Science Association is a one-voice platform which harmonises the knowledge and practice of marketing in Tanzania. TMSA's aim is to achieve a strong marketing professional ecosystem in Tanzania by driving collaboration between industry and marketing experts. Its services include professional training programmes, ranging from certified to professional marketer.

Visit website

ZAMBIA INSTITUTE OF MARKETING

The Zambia Institute of Marketing is a professional marketing institution that was established by an Act of Parliament No. 2 of 2022 to regulate, promote, uphold and improve the standards of training, practice and professional competence of persons and organisations engaged in marketing and advertising in Zambia.

Visit Website

MARKETERS ASSOCIATION OF ZIMBABWE

The Marketers Association of Zimbabwe was launched in 2007 with a vision to be a leading body of marketing professionals promoting professionalism of the highest standards, and establishing channels of career development for the benefit of organisations and the Zimbabwean economy at large.

Visit Website

ASSOCIAÇÃO MOÇAMBICANA DE COMUNICAÇÃO E MARKETING (ACM)

The Associação Moçambicana de Comunicação e Marketing (English name: Mozambican Association of Communication and Marketing) was established in 2024 and is dedicated to the development and promotion of marketing practices in Mozambique. ACM's mission is to promote excellence in marketing and contribute to the development of the sector, providing assistance, training and resources to professionals.

Visit Website

INSTITUTE OF MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT, MAURITIUS

Established in 1991, the Institute of Marketing & Management is the leading professional marketing education and training institution of Mauritius.

No Website

INSTITUTE OF MARKETING IN MALAWI

IMM Malawi is a locally recognised and registered marketing body, whose agenda is to promote, enhance, and regulate the marketing profession in Malawi, with the aim of developing marketers into positions of influence. IMM Malawi started in January 2021, transitioning from the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) Malawi.

Visit Website

Celebrate Africa's Marketing Giants

AMC
AFRICAN MARKETING CONFEDERATION

2026 AMC Awards

Winning or being nominated for an AMC Award delivers powerful, long-term value:

- ✓ Continent-wide endorsement for Africa's leading marketing body
- ✓ Elevated visibility among industry leaders, brands, and decision-makers
- ✓ Credibility that builds trust with clients, partners, and stakeholders
- ✓ A lasting mark of excellence that strengthens your brand positioning

"Africa is rising and the AMC marketers are ready and not waiting"

Helen McIntee-Carlisle, President, African Marketing Confederation

25 September

Livingstone, Zambia

Nominate Now

Traceability: giving Africa a marketing edge the world can audit

For African brands navigating today's complex export markets, traceability can feel like another compliance headache. But smart marketers are turning it into a competitive edge, argues **Fiona Zerbst**.

Africa's food/agricultural-export sector is arguably the most obvious beneficiary of traceability – the ability of wholesalers, retailers and consumers to definitively track the origins of products such as tea, coffee, fruits, vegetables, nuts and animal products.

But the potential benefits of reassuring buyers anywhere in the world that you are who you claim you are can extend to a wide range of export-dependent industries.

Botswana's diamond sector, for example, can reassure buyers that they are not purchasing 'blood' diamonds or even synthetic ones. Wine producers from South Africa's famous Cape Winelands can assure shoppers in Europe or Asia that they're getting the real deal. Consumers in the United States can be confident that the shea butter personal care products they see on the shelves are indeed from the 'Shea Belt' of West Africa.

These examples are not just about regulatory compliance. From a marketing perspective, traceability enables premium pricing, assists with product positioning and protects brand reputation.

Food/agricultural sector

Aside from food safety, one of the biggest compliance issues the agricultural sector faces is fraud. This is on the rise as supply chains become longer and more complex, and price shocks hit due to climate change and geopolitical disruption.

The products most exposed to risk are among Africa's most important agricultural exports – high-value, climate-vulnerable products such as beef, cocoa, coffee, soya and palm oil. This is according to Chris Elliott, Bualuang Professor of Food Security at Thammasat University's Centre of Excellence in Global Food Security, in his article '*Out of Africa – the future of global food security*', published in *New Food Magazine* in February 2025.

Globally, regulations are tightening – for example, the updated FDA Food Safety Modernization Act (FSMA 204) in the United States and the European Deforestation Regulation (EUDR). In such instances, products that cannot comply may simply be designated as prohibited imports.

Unfortunately, many African producers are not ready for what's often perceived as a heavy compliance burden. In East Africa alone, more than US$3,24-billion in agricultural exports are estimated to be at risk due to missing geolocation data, poor documentation and limited digital traceability, according to *East African Policy Observer*.

Amy Sangaré ... traceability travels down the value chain and becomes part of how a brand tells its story

Aside from the financial risk, this lack of readiness exposes brands, and failure or fraud at any stage of the supply chain can undermine trust in African products as a whole.

Traceability becoming a brand's best friend

Food traceability exists so that, when a claim is made or something goes wrong, it's possible to tell exactly what happened, where it happened, and which products and people are affected. Traceability isn't about trust, transparency or storytelling – it's the data infrastructure that makes those things possible.

Solly van der Merwe, Manager for Southern Africa, Nigeria and Ghana at Videojet Technologies, a global manufacturer of industrial coding solutions, sees traceability as central to both brand protection and market positioning.

"Without traceability, there is simply no reliable way to track a product," he says. In practice, this makes traceability foundational to food security and brand integrity – protecting products from being perceived as fake, expired, or

« It will travel down the value chain and then becomes part of how a brand tells a story »

⌃ When tea or coffee can be traced to a particular district, it becomes easy to build a brand identity around its origins and create long-term partnerships

low-quality – particularly in markets where consumers are increasingly alert to risk.

Brands that understand this can secure a significant competitive advantage.

"Traceability isn't a defensive requirement – it's a structural cornerstone of our business model," explains Dr Patrice Bonnafoux, Head of Business Intelligence & Communications at Cashew Coast, which exports locally sourced, locally processed cashew kernels from Côte d'Ivoire. "Beyond price and volume, traceability shifts the conversation towards risk management, supply chain transparency, shared standards and long-term partnership."

Certifications and independent audits are necessary, but these are entry requirements rather than differentiators, says Dr Bonnafoux, adding that customers are increasingly interested in farm-level data. "Regulatory pressure requires them to demonstrate active due diligence, not passive reliance on certificates," he notes.

As a result, transaction-level traceability and documented sourcing practices often matter more than the logo on the packaging. This level of certainty becomes part of the "brand argument", according to Amy Sangaré, founder of Safi Roots, a company that builds reliable supply chains for premium African agricultural exports such as cashews, mangos, coconuts, and a variety of superfoods.

"Traceability is more than a compliance requirement buried in procurement," she says. "It travels down the value chain and becomes part of how a brand tells its story – it's moved from the back office to the front of the brand. We give buyers the ability to say not just that a product is safe, but exactly where it comes from, who produced it, and what happened to it along the way."

In more mature markets, traceability is also moving beyond risk mitigation to customer retention.

"Verified product data can be used to support loyalty mechanisms such as repeat-purchase incentives or market-specific promotions, turning traceability from a back-end safeguard into a front-end brand asset," Van der Merwe points out.

For marketers, this reinforces a crucial shift: traceability is no longer just about compliance, but about protecting brand value and strengthening long-term customer relationships.

For brands, a traceability first approach means being able to back up every claim – and use that evidence to strengthen storytelling and brand trust.

Evidence chains to strengthen origin stories

Manfred Borer, CEO and co-founder of Koltiva, a Swiss technology and services company with operations across Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America, says he often describes traceability as "making your work visible and valuable".

The company avoids technical language and makes the connection between hard data and outcomes such as access, trust and income stability.

"Knowing a product comes from Ghana, Ethiopia or Côte d'Ivoire provides only limited information. It doesn't tell you whether it was deforestation-free, producers were paid fairly, or standards were followed consistently," he says. "Traceability is not just a tool for visibility, but a system for verification and accountability. It enables businesses to move beyond assumptions and demonstrate compliance, while also creating the foundation for trust, market access and more stable incomes for producers."

Victoria Namaganda, Field Officer at Ibero Uganda Limited, a leading exporter of high-quality coffee in Uganda, recommends that brands invest in digital record-keeping, farm mapping, lot separation and farmer registration systems. "They will have an advantage as they'll be ready for buyer requirements," she says.

Real-world challenges to implementing traceability

Of course, there are real-world challenges to implementing traceability across Africa's agricultural value chains. Affordability aside, the primary challenge is that producers, aggregators, processors and exporters all operate differently. "Building consistency across that chain takes time and sustained relationship-building," Sangaré points out.

However, she says the bigger challenge for brands is internal: getting producers and cooperatives to understand that their story has value.

"The name of their region, the face of their cooperative, the specificity of their product – these are brand assets, not just operational details," she says. "Once that mindset shifts, the motivation to document and trace changes completely. It stops being paperwork and starts being the foundation of premium positioning."

Traceability is often viewed as a technology challenge, but in reality it depends as much on people and skills. "Traceability is never solved by technology alone. It requires alignment across farmers, processors, systems and governance structures, so we invest heavily in collaboration and surround ourselves with people who challenge our assumptions and bring diverse expertise," Dr Bonnafoux explains.

Without this type of coordination, even the best digital tools produce weak or unreliable data – and weak data undermines marketing claims, says Sangaré. This erodes trust, and trust lies at the heart of traceability's marketing value.

A 2023 large-scale consumer study by Purdue University's Centre for Food Demand Analysis and Sustainability, and agricultural technology (AgTech) venture studio DIAL Ventures, confirms that transparency about origin, production methods and ethical practices significantly influences purchasing decisions, particularly in food categories associated with health, sustainability and environmental impact.

The study found that 72% of respondents consider transparency 'extremely important' when choosing food brands, and that they link traceability to brand trust and loyalty. For marketers, this matters because trust doesn't just do wonders for a brand's reputation – it creates value, supports premium pricing and deepens brand engagement.

"The African brands that will win are those that treat traceability as a long-term brand investment, not a marketing moment," says Sangaré. "In this industry, trust is built over seasons, not campaigns."

African coffee illustrates the value of traceability

The coffee sector shows how this can work in practice. After the collapse of global price controls in 1989, smallholder farmers in Africa were left exposed to volatile markets while around 90% of profits flowed to roasters and retailers in the Global North. The relationship is being rebalanced thanks to traceability.

Producers in countries such as Ethiopia, Rwanda and Uganda are using geospatial mapping and the blockchain to prove the specific origin ('terroir'), quality, and ethical standards of their beans. This allows them to bypass commodity auctions, sell directly to speciality roasters, and earn prices that reflect the real value of their product.

"Traceability becomes a front-end marketing asset when companies stop treating it as just a system and start treating it as a brand feature," explains Namaganda. "The value of traceability is not in collecting data but in using that data and translating it into something consumers can see, trust and connect with."

Traceability may sit in export documents, but it can also be part of the consumer experience. "When coffee can be traced to a particular district, washing station (washing stations turn raw coffee into specialty grade products that command higher prices on international markets) or cooperative, it becomes easy to build a brand identity around its origins, process style, and so on," says Namaganda. "When combined with strong storytelling, traceability can allow smaller producers to be recognised for their uniqueness."

Farmers gain pride of place in the brand story. "When a cooperative's

Examples of traceability in luxury goods

- **LVMH (fashion & accessories):** LVMH uses blockchain technology to certify the authenticity of products, tracking them from the manufacturing stage to the final customer.
- **Burberry (leather goods):** The brand utilises traceability to ensure leather is sourced from environmentally certified tanneries, ensuring minimal environmental impact.
- **Vacheron Constantin (luxury watches):** The watchmaker uses blockchain to provide a 'digital passport', tracking the origin of components, assembly location and ownership history, which the brand regards as vital for provenance and resale.
- **Lamborghini (automobiles):** Lamborghini uses blockchain to document the lifecycle of its high-end vehicles, providing verifiable, immutable proof of maintenance, ownership and origin.
- **Everledger (jewellery & diamonds):** Everledger uses blockchain and IoT solutions to help luxury companies track diamond provenance, ensuring they are conflict-free and authentic.
- **Chanel (luxury fashion):** Chanel has invested in supply chain mapping to identify the specific sources of its raw materials such as leather and exotic skins, to ensure ethical compliance.

Cashew Coast believes traceability shifts the conversation towards supply chain transparency and shared standards

name and origin can be attached to a product arriving in Rotterdam or Hamburg, they're no longer an anonymous input – they're a contributor to a brand," says Sangaré. "That shift creates a basis for better pricing conversations, longer-term partnerships and genuine co-investment in quality."

"Brands can also mention washing stations directly on the packaging and use QR codes to link consumers to farm-level stories," explains Mbanganda. However, she emphasises that brands must ensure that farmers give consent before their names and images are used.

"Ethical inclusion is important, and brands should avoid marketing narratives that portray farmers only in terms of poverty and hardships. They should be positioned as professionals and skilled producers," she notes.

Brands can also include farmers ethically by sharing benefits such as incentives, community investments, and recognition that add long-term value to their production.

Focus on stories, not commodities

Unfortunately, African brands underuse traceability as a storytelling tool, says Sangaré. The reasons for this are complex.

"There are real operational constraints, of course – but the deeper issue is a confidence gap that we don't talk about enough," she explains.

"African producers sit on extraordinary brand material – specific regions and communities, products shaped by micro-climates, and generational knowledge. That's precisely the kind of origin narrative that commands premium positioning in European and North American markets. However, there's a collective discomfort with positioning African products as premium, as if it's presumptuous or as if we haven't yet earned the right. The brands that break that reflex first will define the category."

Clients are not always looking for price wins, but for something not easily replicated – a compelling brand story. Sangaré says the cashew market demonstrates how traceability can directly influence pricing, purchasing decisions and brand loyalty.

"Côte d'Ivoire has become Germany's third-largest supplier of processed kernels, which reflects a deliberate shift in how European buyers think about sourcing," she says. "The model of buying from multiple anonymous origins, processing and [then] reselling is losing ground – not just for ethical reasons, but because it produces brands with nothing to say."

Today's consumers want their buying decisions to mean something, and Africa can lead on genuine origins, real human stories, and an agricultural heritage that can't be replicated or faked. "We have spent too long being grateful just to be in the supply chain. The shift is understanding that we are the origin, and that the origin is where the value starts," says Sangaré.

As regulatory pressure intensifies and consumer scrutiny deepens, the question for African marketers is whether to use traceability defensively or strategically. Those who treat traceability as a storytelling engine – grounded in data, enabled by technology, and aligned with authentic practices – stand to reposition African products, not as an anonymous supply but as verified, differentiated and valuable.

In global food markets where trust has become scarce, traceability may prove to be Africa's most powerful marketing signal. ■

Fiona Zerbst has been a journalist and editor for over 20 years. She writes primarily about business and finance and has worked for publications and clients in South Africa, Botswana, Zambia, Nigeria, Canada, Finland and the UK.

What African brands can learn from Champagne

Champagne shows how provenance is defended over time – first through law, and now through data. As early as 1882, producers acted collectively to restrict the use of the name 'Champagne' to wines from the region, later confronting fraud when grapes grown elsewhere were passed off as local.

While geography still matters, Champagne houses no longer rely on place alone. Today, they use digital tools, including Internet of Things sensors and blockchain, to verify origin, handling and quality. Sensors capture data such as location, temperature and storage conditions as products move through the supply chain, creating a tamper-resistant digital record linked to each bottle. This creates a product 'passport', giving regulators confidence, producers control, and consumers proof.

Crucially, the same evidence used for compliance now supports marketing. Geofenced advertising allows Champagne houses to activate campaigns around vineyards, cellars or tastings, and link visits to measurable outcomes such as footfall and repeat engagement.

Champagne's strength lies in collective standards, shared data and agreed definitions of quality – and in treating traceability as long-term brand infrastructure.

PHOTOS: CASHEW COAST; ADOBE STOCK; SUPPLIED

Ethiopia opens centre to grow coffee exports to the Chinese market

Opening of an Ethiopian coffee-trading centre in Zhuzhou will establish direct sales channels, boost key relationships and host product displays.

Ethiopia is one of Africa's largest producers and exporters of coffee

A scene from the first Ethiopia-China Coffee Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference, which coincided with the centre's opening in January 2026

Ethiopia has moved to strengthen the presence of its world-renowned coffee in China by opening a dedicated coffee-trading centre in the city of Zhuzhou in Hunan province.

The centre will be a focus for coffee-related sales, product displays and trade transactions, as well as for cultural exchange. It promises to create tighter, more efficient links between Ethiopian coffee exporters and Chinese buyers, from major distributors to individual retailers.

China is now Ethiopia's fourth-largest export market for coffee, a dramatic rise from being its 33rd largest coffee-export market just five years ago.

According to a report by the Ethiopian News Agency, in the last five months of 2025 alone, Ethiopia exported 16,300 metric tons of coffee to China, valued at US$113-million.

At the opening event for the new coffee-trading centre in January 2026, Adugna Debela Bote, Director-General of the Ethiopian Coffee and Tea Authority, said the centre will help establish direct sales channels by utilising Zhuzhou's cross-border e-commerce pilot zone to improve efficiency and market access.

Immersive experiences

He also emphasised that promoting Ethiopian coffee culture through immersive experiences in key commercial areas would be essential for building long-term consumer loyalty.

The opening event coincided with the first Ethiopia-China Coffee Economic and Trade Cooperation Conference. Attended by almost 300 government officials, industry leaders and business representatives, the conference discussed strategies for expanding the footprint of Ethiopian coffee in China.

In a video address to delegates, Ethiopian President Taye Atske-Selassie Amde reaffirmed the country's commitment to deepening coffee trade cooperation with China.

Regarded as the origin of Arabica coffee, Ethiopia is one of Africa's largest producers and exporters of coffee.

According to a report published by the Chinese-based Xinhua news agency, the Ethiopian government has intensified efforts to expand coffee productivity and value addition in a bid to bolster much-needed foreign currency earnings from the sector.

"The shift toward expanding the export of value-added coffee from traditional raw beans is part of a broader strategy to maximise returns from Ethiopia's position as Africa's leading producer," Xinhua reported, quoting the state-run Ethiopian News Agency.

"In 2024, the Kenyan government inaugurated a tea trade centre in Fujian Province, China. This was a strategic move to enhance Kenya's presence in the Chinese market, one of the largest tea-consuming regions globally." ■

« In 2024, the Kenyan government inaugurated a tea trade centre in Fujian Province in China »

PHOTOS: ETHIOPIAN NEWS AGENCY

The journey to the 2026 AMC Conference in Livingstone is underway!

The Zambian government affirms its full support in making this year's groundbreaking gathering the most successful in the confederation's history.

« Ronald Mlalazi (far right), President of ASCON, acknowledges guests at the launch event as other dignitaries look on

« AMC President, Helen McIntee-Carlisle, at the podium in Lusaka

« Mwewa Besa (below left), President of the Zambia Institute of Marketing, which is hosting this year's marketing conference. (Below right): Matongo Matamwandi, prominent Zambian tourism marketer, was also among the speakers

The journey to the 2026 African Marketing Confederation Conference – taking place on the banks of the Victoria Falls at Livingstone, Zambia in late September – is well underway.

Speaking at a launch event in Lusaka in March, the Director of Domestic Trade and Commerce at Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Margaret Chikuba, declared the promotional campaign for the fifth AMC Conference officially launched.

"We (the government of Zambia) are here to affirm our full support … to ensure that this conference becomes the most successful gathering in the confederation's history," she said.

While 2026 is the fifth iteration of the AMC Conference, this year also marks the first time that three parallel Africa-wide conferences are taking place at a single location. The African Marketing Confederation is joining with the recently formed African Supply Chain Confederation (ASCON) and the Technology Information Confederation Africa (TICON Africa).

« The gathering will reflect how competitiveness is built through connected systems working in partnership »

Under the overarching theme of '*Africa Rising: From Continental Strengths to Global Impact*', this coming together of the three confederations reflects how competitiveness is built through connected systems that must move forward together.

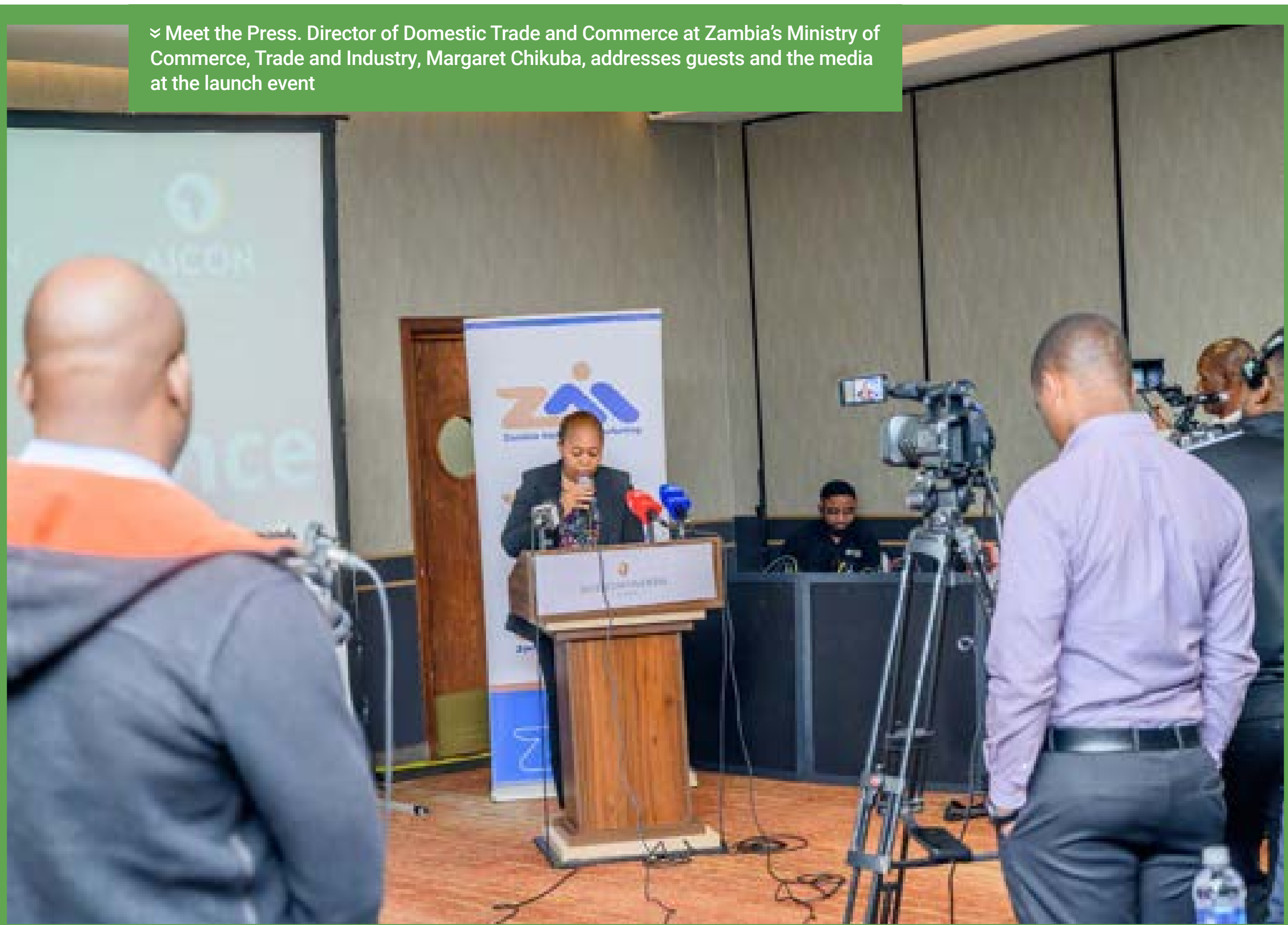
Addressing the three professions which will be present in Livingstone on 23-25 September for their respective gatherings, Mrs Chikuba emphasised that they form three interlinking pillars.

Any product or service requires an efficient supply chain. And for that product to scale up, it requires technology that is very robust. Then, to find itself worthy customers that will find value in the product, marketing of a world-class nature is required, she said.

"These pillars are the collective engines that will drive [the] African Continental Free Trade Area and unlock Africa's immense economic potential."

Strengthening the Zambian private sector

In his opening remarks at the launch event, which took place at the Intercontinental Hotel in Lusaka, the President of the Zambia Institute of Marketing, Mwewa Besa, said the presence of government officials,



» Meet the Press. Director of Domestic Trade and Commerce at Zambia's Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Margaret Chikuba, addresses guests and the media at the launch event

» One United Movement. Mrs Margaret Chikuba (front, centre) with representatives of the AMC, TICON Africa, ASCON and hosting associations

dignitaries and business leaders reflected the Zambian government's continued commitment to strengthening the private sector, advancing innovation and supporting professional institutions that help promote economic growth.

"Today's gathering represents far more than the launch of a conference. It represents a powerful moment of collaboration. For the first time, leading professional bodies representing technology, supply chain, marketing and communication are coming together to host a joint professional conference that will bring our members, partners and continental colleagues under one roof at the beautiful Avani Victoria Falls Resort in Livingstone," the ZIM President stated.

Coming full circle

In her address, AMC President Helen McIntee noted that the AMC's relationship with Zambia and the ZIM, which is the local host of the 2026 marketing conference, goes back to 2009 when she was invited to be a

« We've come full circle and now celebrate 15 years of the AMC here in Zambia - quite a milestone »

speaker at the annual ZIM national conference.

"Approximately two years later, in Livingstone, we had our first-ever meeting to discuss the formation of the AMC. We have come full circle and now celebrate 15 years of the AMC here in Zambia. It is quite an achievement."

She added that the recently formed World Marketing Council, of which the AMC is a founder member, will be a co-host of the 2026 marketing gathering in Livingstone. Representatives of the founding council of the World Marketing Council are expected to attend. Among them are Bangladesh, Singapore, Indonesia, Thailand, South Africa and China.

Driving the economy

Also among the speakers was Matongo Matamwandi, prominent Zambian tourism marketer and AMC Honorary Life Member.

In his remarks, he noted that the three professions at the 2026 gathering "are the three that convert everything we do into revenue – which we call the economy of any country, and which Africa desperately needs".

"Marketing adds value by communicating the product or service, supply chain ensures it is delivered where it's needed; and none of these two can happen if there are no ICT platforms."

Mr Matamwandi suggested that the Livingstone conference should see a focus on developing the tourism marketing component of the AMC to help create a stronger Brand Africa. "The commercial side of all these professions can create [an] Africa that we want to see; the real Africa and not the Africa that we see in international media."

Local hosting associations

Under the overarching theme of '*Africa Rising*', each confederation brings its own sector lens:

- AMC: *…through Marketing Leadership, Brand Power and Value Creation*.
- ASCON: *…with Supply Chain (Collaboration & Integration)*.
- TICON Africa: *…into Global Digital Impact with ICT*.

The three local hosting organisations are the Zambia Institute of Marketing (ZIM); ICT Association of Zambia (ICTAZ); and the Zambia Institute of Procurement and Supply (ZIPS).

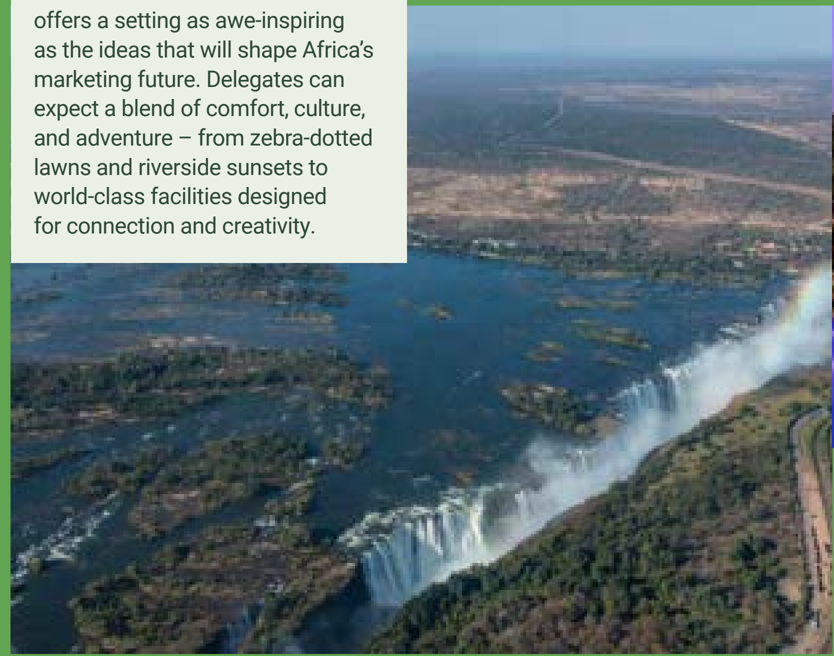
To find out more about the 2026 African Marketing Confederation Conference, visit the AMC website: www.africanmarketingconfederation.org or follow the AMC's social media platforms. ■

» The overarching theme of this year's groundbreaking gathering is '*Africa Rising: From Continental Strengths to Global Impact*'

Scenes from the 2025 African Marketing Confederation Awards in Ghana

Our Conference venue

Just steps from the Victoria Falls, the Avani Victoria Falls Resort offers a setting as awe-inspiring as the ideas that will shape Africa's marketing future. Delegates can expect a blend of comfort, culture, and adventure – from zebra-dotted lawns and riverside sunsets to world-class facilities designed for connection and creativity.



Glittering Awards evening is a highlight of the annual AMC Conference

The stage is set and the spotlight is waiting. Nominations for the 2026 African Marketing Confederation Awards are open until 26 June.

Each year, the Awards are a highlight of the annual AMC Conference, and 2026 will be no exception as high-achieving African marketers, marketing teams and campaigns are recognised for their excellence.

Whether you have pioneered a ground-breaking campaign or witnessed a peer redefine the industry, the African Marketing Confederation is inviting you to step forward. You may self-nominate or you may nominate others.

"The AMC Awards stand as the definitive celebration of marketing excellence across the continent," says AMC President, Helen McIntee-Carlisle.

"This distinguished platform brings together Africa's leading minds and boldest work, recognising campaigns and collectives that are not only shaping industries locally, but setting new benchmarks on the global stage. African creativity is world-class – it's time the world took notice."

Categories reflect the depth & diversity of our marketing

The AMC Marketing Awards span a wide range of categories, reflecting the depth and diversity of Africa's modern marketing ecosystem. This year's categories are as follows:

- Best Tourism & Destination Marketing Campaign.
- Best Social Media Campaign.
- Most Effective Campaign.
- Best Use of Local Insights.
- Best Cause-Related Campaign.
- Not-for-Profit / Public Sector Campaign of the Year.
- Brand of the Year.
- Campaign of the Year.

To be considered for the respective awards, entries must be able to demonstrate innovation, leadership, creativity and measurable impact within Africa's marketing landscape.

You can find out more about the 2026 African Marketing Confederation Awards and the nominations process on the AMC website: www.africanmarketingconfederation.org.

« The Awards bring together Africa's best minds and our boldest work, recognising campaigns and collectives that are setting new benchmarks »

PHOTOS: AFRICAN MARKETING CONFEDERATION; RADISSON; DIEGO DELSO, WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; LINKEDIN

AMC President, Helen McIntee-Carlisle (right, white outfit) pictured with the President of Zambia, his Excellency Hakainde Hichilema (centre, red tie) in Livingstone

Meeting the President

AMC President, Helen McIntee-Carlisle, was one of a select group of people invited to travel to Livingstone immediately after the Conference launch event in Lusaka to meet with the President of Zambia, his Excellency Hakainde Hichilema.

Mr Hichilema was in Livingstone as Guest of Honour at the annual conference of the ICT Association of Zambia (ICTAZ). The AMC President was part of a closed-door meeting with President Hichilema and had a rare opportunity to brief him on the African Marketing Confederation and its upcoming 2026 Conference in September.

She also emphasised to Mr Hichilema that the AMC has its roots in Zambia, given that the decision to form the AMC was taken at a meeting in Livingstone in 2011.

Zambia's marketers gear up for their 29th annual conference in May

Conference theme reflects ZIM's commitment to positioning marketing as a strategic driver of growth, innovation, competitiveness and national development.

The Zambia Institute of Marketing has officially launched the countdown to its 29th Annual Marketing Conference, marking the beginning of an exciting journey toward one of Zambia's premier marketing gatherings.

This year's conference will take place at the Avani Victoria Falls Resort in Livingstone from 27-29 May under the theme '*Redefining Marketing's Role in Zambia's Economic Development*'.

The theme reflects ZIM's commitment to positioning marketing as a strategic driver of industrial growth, innovation, competitiveness and national development.

The launch event at the Urban Hotel in Lusaka was graced by the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, Lillian Bwalya, who represented the Guest of Honour, Hon. Chipoka Mulenga MP.

Marketing an enabler of transformation

"Her presence underscored Government's recognition of marketing as a critical enabler of economic transformation," said Mwewa Besa, President of the Zambia Institute of Marketing, in a LinkedIn post.

"We are proud to have leading corporate partners already on board … their support demonstrates the private sector's belief in the power of strategic marketing to shape Zambia's economic future.

"The institute extends heartfelt gratitude to the corporate world for their continued partnership and to the various media houses for the coverage and amplification of this important milestone."

Meanwhile, the end of March saw ZIM hosting its annual Students Marketing and Business Conference at the Standard Chartered Bank head office. The theme for the gathering was '*Smart Minds. Smart Markets. Smarter Futures*', which was about preparing every student to lead in the era of AI and shifting market expectations.

Danny Chanda and Margaret Chikuba display the new Zambia Advertising Standards launched in February 2026 alongside the new Advertising Standards Board

Advertising Standards

In February, ZIM launched the Zambia Advertising Standards and welcomed the commencement of the new Advertising Standards Board to oversee them. The institute believes this marks a new era of accountability, professional excellence and consumer protection within the local advertising and marketing sector.

These new standards establish ethical and professional benchmarks for advertising across traditional and digital platforms, with marketing and advertising agencies now required to register and obtain practising licences in line with the country's laws.

"In today's highly digital environment, advertising is everywhere – from billboards to social media platforms. The key question is whether these communications meet acceptable standards. Are they appropriate? Do they add value? Do they protect consumers?" said Margaret M. Chikuba, Director of Domestic Trade and Commerce at the Zambian Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry.

She was speaking at the official launch in Lusaka of the mandatory compliance framework for agencies operating under the Zambia Institute of Marketing (ZIM) Act No. 2 of 2022.

Danny Chanda, CEO of ZIM, said the operationalisation of the Advertising Standards Board is a strategic move to align Zambia's advertising industry with global best practice.

The initiative strengthens ZIM's mandate to safeguard high standards of marketing practice and promote honest, responsible and ethical communication. ■

PHOTO: ZAMBIA INSTITUTE OF MARKETING

Odilon Gbaguidi says Avis+ Marketing Club will be at the AMC Conference in Zambia to strengthen ties between the different ecosystems of the continent

Why every African business must have a marketing mindset

Avis+ Marketing Club is a hub of marketing intelligence in Francophone Africa. Its next step is joining with marketing minds across the continent.

Odilon Gbaguidi, President of the newest AMC member body, Avis+ Marketing Club, believes the practice of marketing should not be confined to a department.

Rather, it must become a mindset shared by all decision-makers and be capable of permeating the entire organisation. In the long run, it should influence economic and social dynamics on a national and continent-wide level.

"Marketing can no longer be perceived as an isolated function, but as a living system that connects the company to its clients and its environment," he says. "We want this vision to be adopted not only by companies but also by public institutions. Because a society that understands marketing is a society that understands its citizens."

A space for marketing leaders to interact

Avis+ Marketing Club represents over 500 senior marketers from eight countries in French-speaking Africa and became an AMC member body in late 2025. It was founded by Gbaguidi to create a space where marketing leaders could interact, share their experiences and work together to develop a vision for the African market.

In his day job as Senior Consultant and Director of Strategy and Development at the firm Plus Value Research and Marketing in Abidjan, he had noticed that African marketing leaders possess a considerable wealth of information, yet this knowledge often remains fragmented, scarcely shared and sometimes invisible.

The initial informal gatherings gradually evolved into more formalised meetings, events and publications. Today, Avis+ Marketing Club has become a hub of marketing intelligence. It not only enables leaders to connect with one another, but also helps to train a new generation through certification programmes, conferences and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

While there has been much progress in uniting senior marketers across Francophone Africa under the club banner, Gbaguidi is adamant that there's still much to be done. For example, French-speaking African markets still lag their English-speaking counterparts in accessible marketing studies, publications, and abundance of resources.

"The real issue is therefore the production and dissemination of knowledge. It is essential for African leaders to speak up, write and document their experiences. Without this, much of the continent's marketing potential will remain untapped," he tells *Strategic Marketing for Africa*.

Part of the process of gathering and sharing marketing knowledge requires Avis+ Marketing Club to internationalise and interact with the best marketing minds elsewhere in Africa.

"A large portion of quality resources are produced in English, which creates a barrier for many [of our] professionals," Gbaguidi points out. "But these constraints should not obscure the [fact that] the opportunities are considerable. African markets are still under construction, usages are rapidly evolving, and technological adoption is particularly dynamic.

"This creates a unique environment conducive to innovation. The integration of Avis Plus within the African Marketing Confederation fits perfectly into this logic of collaboration and collective construction." ■

« Our African markets are still under construction, creating an environment conducive to innovation »

PHOTO: SUPPLIED

Toute entreprise africaine doit adopter un état d'esprit marketing

Odilon Gbaguidi affirme que le Club Marketing Avis+ sera présent à la conférence AMC en Zambie pour renforcer les liens entre les différents écosystèmes du continent

Le Club Marketing Avis+ est une plateforme d'intelligence marketing en Afrique francophone. Sa prochaine étape consiste à collaborer avec des experts en marketing à travers le continent.

CRÉDIT PHOTO : FOURNI

Odilon Gbaguidi, président du plus récent organisme membre de l'AMC, le Club Marketing Avis+, estime que la pratique du marketing ne devrait pas se limiter à un seul département.

« Le marketing ne peut plus être perçu comme une fonction isolée, mais comme un système vivant qui met en relation l'entreprise avec ses clients et son environnement », explique-t-il. « Nous souhaitons que cette vision soit adoptée non seulement par les entreprises, mais aussi par les institutions publiques. Car une société qui comprend le marketing est une société qui comprend ses citoyens.»

Un espace pour les responsables marketing

Le Club Marketing Avis+ représente plus de 500 responsables marketing de haut niveau issus de huit pays d'Afrique francophone et est devenu membre de l'AMC fin 2025. Il a été fondé par Gbaguidi dans le but de créer un espace où les responsables marketing pourraient interagir, partager leurs expériences et travailler ensemble à l'élaboration d'une vision pour le marché africain.

Dans le cadre de son travail quotidien de consultant senior et de directeur de la stratégie et du développement au sein de la société Plus Value Research and Marketing à Abidjan, il avait constaté que les responsables marketing africains possédaient une mine d'informations considérable, mais que ces connaissances restaient souvent fragmentées, rarement partagées et parfois invisibles.

Les premières réunions informelles ont progressivement évolué vers des réunions, des événements et des publications plus formalisés. Aujourd'hui, le Club Marketing Avis+ est devenu une plateforme d'informations stratégiques sur le marketing. Il permet non seulement aux responsables de nouer des liens entre eux, mais contribue également à former une nouvelle génération grâce à des programmes de certification, des conférences et des initiatives de partage des connaissances.

Bien que des progrès considérables aient été réalisés pour fédérer les responsables marketing de haut niveau à travers l'Afrique francophone sous la bannière du club, Gbaguidi insiste sur le fait qu'il reste encore beaucoup à faire. Par exemple, les marchés des pays d'Afrique francophone accusent encore un retard par rapport à leurs homologues anglophones en matière d'études marketing accessibles, de publications et de disponibilité des ressources.

« Le véritable enjeu est donc la production et la diffusion des connaissances. Il est essentiel que les responsables africains prennent la parole, écrivent et documentent leurs expériences. Sans cela, une grande partie du potentiel marketing du continent restera inexploitée », déclare-t-il à *Strategic Marketing for Africa*.

Le processus de collecte et de partage des connaissances en marketing exige notamment que le Club Marketing Avis+ s'internationalise et interagisse avec les meilleurs experts en marketing d'Afrique.

« Une grande partie des ressources de qualité est produite en anglais, ce qui crée un obstacle pour nombre de nos professionnels », souligne Gbaguidi. « Mais ces contraintes ne doivent pas occulter le fait que les opportunités sont considérables. » Les marchés africains sont encore en construction, les usages évoluent rapidement et l'adoption des technologies est particulièrement dynamique.

« Cela crée un environnement unique, propice à l'innovation. L'intégration d'Avis Plus au sein de la Confédération africaine du marketing s'inscrit parfaitement dans cette logique de collaboration et de construction collective. »" ■

Cracking the Africa Code: The functional path to market leadership

What makes brands successful in Africa? **Catherine Burton**, **Kim Larsen** and **Rhulani Baloyi** summarise their award-winning paper presented at the European Society for Opinion and Marketing Research (Esomar)'s first conference in Africa.

Kim Larsen (left), Catherine Burton and Rhulani Baloyi celebrate *'Cracking the Africa Code'* winning Best Presentation at Esomar Africa 2026

What makes brands succeed in Africa? Eleven years of Ipsos brand equity data and research reveals why Africa's winning brands build from function to feeling – not the reverse.

The research reveals a formula where functional excellence provides the foundation for trust and cultural resonance, which enables emotional connection and ultimately drives market leadership.

This sequence, decoded from 37.9-million interviews across five regions, 142 countries and 175 categories, explains why MTN scaled to 300-million subscribers, why M-Pesa processes more transactions than many global banks, and why local champions consistently outmanoeuvre international giants. The findings provide marketers with an empirically validated blueprint for brand success in Africa.

The problem is not what you think it is

With 35.5% of Africa's population under the poverty line (6.8 times higher than the global average) it is easy to assume that the biggest obstacle that prevents people being able to buy what they want is price, i.e. where brands, products or services are too expensive.

The data tells a different story. In Africa, price ranks only fourth among purchase barriers at 10.5%, compared to accessibility at 28% and product range at 23%. Woolworths' Nigerian exit exemplifies this – the disconnect wasn't about pricing, rather it was about shopping behaviour. Meanwhile, Shoprite thrived in southern Africa by understanding shopping as a social activity requiring frequent, convenient access.

Accessibility, the most prevalent barrier, means not finding desired brands instore or online. Product range, ranked second, involves missing formats, variants, or pack sizes. These two barriers rank first and second across the five global regions studied.

While other regions of the world grapple primarily with accessibility, product range and price, African consumers face deeper challenges that operate at the trust level: precisely where Africa differs most from global markets. Africa's third-ranked 'other barrier' group, reaching a high of 15% in 2025, revealed these unexpected trust-related nuances: complexity and usability issues, inadequate support, service failures, and credibility and transparency gaps.

Another unique insight about Africa emerged where the 'lack of information' barrier rose from 1.3% in 2015 to 10.4% in 2025. This is not about brand awareness, but understanding the offer. Complex contracts and unclear propositions create clarity crises that prevent purchases, despite desire. At a global average of only 3%, this unique, growing African phenomenon means that clear, accessible information has become a competitive differentiator. Every percentage point of this barrier represents millions of potential customers unable to buy products they actually want.

The Ipsos/MTN team engage with the audience in Nairobi

Connection, representation, trust and Brand Desire

Any marketer will agree that brand building is not just about facilitating easy choices, it is about making brands desirable so that people want to buy them. Ipsos' Bayesian modelling reveals Africa's unique emotional architecture for driving Brand Desire. Three pillars form what the research terms a 'love triangle':

1. Emotional connection: 'A brand I love/ is my favourite.'
2. Cultural authenticity: 'For people like me'.
3. Trust: The critical differentiator.

That third dimension changes everything. Trust ranks 5th in Latin America, 9th in Europe, 14th in North America and 15th in Asia Pacific. Only in Africa does trust achieve top-three status, fundamentally altering the brand-building equation.

MTN's strategy on the African continent demonstrates their mastery of the trust imperative. In 2024, they implemented a sophisticated trust measurement model across three dimensions: competency, integrity and benevolence, which enabled them to build trust systematically rather than hoping it would emerge naturally.

Africa is a continent of contrasts; and unsurprisingly, the research revealed how trust manifests differently across African markets, using MTN's operations as a lens. In Nigeria, trust means network reliability for local and international calls; in Ghana trust connects to aspiration and progress. In Uganda, trust means universal access regardless of location or circumstance. These variations demonstrate why pan-African strategies require local calibration. While trust matters universally across the continent, its construction differs by market.

Analysis of Ipsos Brand Mental Network metrics revealed that 53% of spontaneous brand associations by African consumers focus on functional attributes – the highest globally. Yet paradoxically, emotional factors drive Brand Desire.

This apparent contradiction resolves through sequence: functional excellence doesn't compete with emotional connection; it enables it.

With low emotional articulation but the highest strength scores, African consumers tend to have focused, crystallised brand perceptions rather than rich, multi-faceted ones. Success requires crystal-clear functional messages that demonstrate how functionality enables emotional needs: trust, enjoyment and belonging.

From startup to 300-million subscribers: MTN's blueprint is validated

MTN's transformation from a 1994 South African startup to Africa's largest mobile network operator, serving over 300-million subscribers across 14 markets, provides the definitive validation of the African blueprint. Their journey demonstrates what happens when the code is not just understood but systematically applied.

Here are the four pillars of MTNs success:

1. Distribution revolution
MTN created Africa's largest informal distribution network – the 'Army of Yellow' – comprising 1.3-million agents embedded in communities. This wasn't just about reach; it was about trust. When technical issues arose, customers knew exactly where to find help. The agents became the face of the brand in townships, villages and urban centres, far from the footprint of formal retailers.

2. Micro-innovation at scale
Micro-airtime vouchers starting at 50 cents seemed trivial but proved transformational. They didn't just make telephony affordable; they made it accessible to millions with irregular incomes. This innovation laid the foundation for MTN Mobile Money, which by 2024 processed US$15-billion in monthly transactions.

3. Cultural fluency through autonomy
Granting operational autonomy to local teams enabled rapid market-specific adaptation. While competitors pushed standardised solutions, MTN's decentralised model meant that what worked in Cameroon could differ from Côte d'Ivoire without compromising brand coherence.

4. The ubuntu narrative
'*Everywhere You Go*' wasn't just a tagline but a promise of presence. MTN positioned itself as an enabler of connection and progress, resonating with collectivist values while delivering individual utility.

Quantifying the formula's impact

A unique winner-takes-most phenomenon was observed in Ipsos' brand equity data for Africa, and this dynamic amplifies success. In 2025, market-leading brands in Africa captured 40% equity versus 20% for leading brands in North America, demonstrating that achieving leadership pays dividends.

MTN's systematic application of the formula – functional excellence through network reliability and accessibility, trust through community presence, cultural resonance through local adaptation, leading to emotional connection – created a virtuous cycle. Each element reinforced the others, creating barriers to competition that transcended price or features.

In Africa, price ranks only fourth among purchase barriers at 10.5%, compared to accessibility at 28% and product range at 23%

Four principles for brand success in Africa

The research points to key principles to unlock market success for brands in Africa:

1. Solve real problems first
Solve for accessibility, product range and information barriers, which means simplified contracts, clear pricing and accessible product information designed for diverse literacy levels and languages. Before emotional campaigns, ensure functional delivery.

2. Build a trust infrastructure
Trust requires tangible mechanisms embedded into operations, not just in communications. Community presence, local problem resolution, transparent communication – these aren't nice-to-haves but competitive necessities.

3. Prioritise joy over status
African consumers choose brands that deliver immediate enjoyment and practical pride over those signalling premium status. This inverts luxury market assumptions and demands recalibration of portfolio strategies.

4. Recognise binary outcomes
Partial success yields minimal share returns. The winner-takes-most dynamic means brands must excel across all dimensions – functional delivery, trust building and cultural resonance – or risk marginalisation.

Will you embrace Africa's blueprint for growth?

The evidence is clear: Africa operates by different brand-building principles, and success requires acknowledging this reality. The formula is proven: functional excellence earns permission for trust and cultural resonance, which enables emotional connection, ultimately driving market leadership.

MTN's journey from startup to 300-million subscribers validates every element. M-Pesa's $15-billion in monthly transactions confirms the model. Mr Price's continental expansion demonstrates its replicability.

For African marketers, the blueprint provides liberation from imported strategies that consistently underperform. For international brands, it offers a roadmap to avoid joining the ranks of those that didn't make it in Africa. For local champions, it validates instincts while providing empirical foundations for strategic decisions.

The path from functional excellence to market leadership is clear. For brands willing to build trust before demanding love, Africa's growth potential remains unmatched. ■

Catherine Burton, Global Equity Lead for Brand Health Tracking at Ipsos, specialises in brand equity measurement and consumer insights. Kim Larsen heads Research at Ipsos South Africa, leading multi-country studies across sub-Saharan Africa. Rhulani Baloyi is Senior Manager of Brand Insights at MTN Group, where he drives consumer intelligence across 14 African markets.

Editor's note

This research was presented at Esomar Africa 2026, where it was awarded Best Paper and Best Presentation. Data: Ipsos Brand Value Creator. (BVC) Database 2015-2025.

PHOTOS: IPSOS

The future of African FMCG in a digital-first economy

Olaonipekun Timothy Okunowo explores the structural shifts, emerging business models and strategic imperatives that will define the next decade of African FMCG.

We are a continent at the inflection point. Africa's FMCG sector – spanning food, beverages, personal care and household products – is undergoing a seismic transformation. Historically reliant on informal retail channels, cash transactions and fragmented supply chains, the industry is now being reshaped by digital infrastructure, mobile penetration and a rapidly urbanising middle class.

As of 2025, Africa is home to over 500-million smartphone users, with internet penetration exceeding 43% continent-wide (*World Bank, 2024; GSMA Intelligence, 2025*). This digital leap is not merely incremental; it is redefining how brands reach, serve and retain consumers.

But what does a 'digital-first' economy truly mean for African FMCG? It is not just about e-commerce. It encompasses end-to-end digitisation: from AI-driven demand forecasting and blockchain-enabled traceability to social commerce, fintech-integrated payments and hyperlocal last-mile delivery via motorbike logistics startups.

The future belongs not to the largest conglomerates, but to those who can embed agility, data literacy and consumer-centricity into their DNA.

The legacy landscape – strengths and frictions

For decades, African FMCG thrived in a paradox: massive scale coexisting with extreme fragmentation. Nigeria alone hosts over 30-million smallholder retailers, mom-and-pop shops known locally as kiosks or chemist stores.

In Kenya, dukas account for nearly 80% of FMCG sales (*Euromonitor, 2023*). These informal outlets offer proximity, credit and cultural familiarity, but suffer from stockouts, counterfeit goods and limited data visibility.

Meanwhile, formal retail supermarkets – such as Cash & Carry, Carrefour and Spar – remain concentrated in urban centres and serve only a fraction of the population. Distribution is hampered by poor road networks, customs inefficiencies and high logistics costs (*averaging 14–20% of product value vs. 8% in Asia, per AfDB, 2023*).

Yet this very fragmentation created resilience. During the pandemic, while global supply chains froze, local distributors pivoted quickly. Now, digital

« Africa's digital-first economy must be about more than just e-commerce. It is end-to-end digitisation »

tools are turning these micro-retailers into connected nodes in a smart distribution web.

Transform the value chain

Digitising the informal retailer

Platforms like Thrive Agric (Nigeria), Twiga Foods (Kenya), and MaxAB (Egypt) are digitising B2B supply chains. They provide small retailers with mobile apps to order inventory, access credit and receive same-day delivery; all powered by real-time demand data.

MaxAB, for instance, reported US$1-billion in annualised gross merchandise value (GMV) by Q3 2024, serving over 200,000 retailers across Egypt (*TechCrunch, 2024*). Its model combines dynamic pricing, predictive restocking and embedded finance, proving that informal retail can be both scalable and efficient when digitised.

Social commerce and influencer-led discovery

Unlike Western markets, where e-commerce begins with search, African consumers often discover products through WhatsApp groups, Instagram Reels, or TikTok influencers.

In Nigeria, 68% of Gen Z consumers say they've purchased an FMCG item after seeing it promoted by a micro-influencer (*PwC Africa Consumer Insights, 2025*).

Brands like Chi Limited (makers of Hollandia milk) and Dangote have launched creator-partnership programmes, equipping local influencers with branded content kits and performance-based commissions. This blurs the line between marketing and sales.

Fintech integration

Cash remains dominant, but mobile money is accelerating digital adoption. In 2025, over 700-million mobile money accounts existed across sub-Saharan Africa (*GSMA, 2025*). FMCG companies are integrating payment options like M-Pesa, OPay, and PalmPay directly into ordering platforms, reducing friction and enabling loyalty rewards.

Unilever's Shakti programme in East Africa now uses mobile wallets to pay its network of 50,000+ female micro-distributors, improving transparency and financial inclusion.

Data-driven product innovation

Digital footprints allow brands to test concepts faster. Tropical General Investments (TGI) used social listening tools to identify rising demand for plant-based snacks in Lagos and Accra, launching a new line within 90 days, half the traditional R&D cycle.

Similarly, Promasidor leveraged point-of-sale data from its digital distributor network to reformulate its Cowbell milk powder for lower-income households, increasing repeat purchase rates by 22% (*Company Earnings Call, Q2 2025*).

The digital transition

Despite momentum, significant hurdles remain:

- **Digital literacy gaps:** Many small retailers struggle with app navigation or data entry.
- **Infrastructure volatility:** Power

Platforms like MaxAB are digitising B2B supply chains in Egypt

outages and network downtime disrupt operations.

- **Data privacy concerns:** Africa's patchwork of data laws (e.g., Nigeria's NDPA vs. Kenya's Data Protection Act) complicates cross-border scaling.
- **Platform dependency:** Over-reliance on third-party aggregators risks margin erosion.

Moreover, digital doesn't eliminate the need for physical presence. As one FMCG executive in Johannesburg noted: "You can't deliver detergent via drone if the customer can't afford it." Affordability and trust remain foundational.

Strategic imperatives for FMCG leaders

1. **Adopt a 'phygital' mindset:** Blend digital efficiency with human touchpoints. Train field agents to onboard retailers onto apps while maintaining relationship-based selling.
2. **Invest in first-party data:** Own your consumer relationships through branded apps, loyalty programmes and direct SMS engagement.
3. **Localise tech solutions:** Avoid importing Silicon Valley playbooks. Build for low-bandwidth, multilingual and cash-plus-digital hybrid environments.
4. **Collaborate, don't compete:** Partner with fintechs, logistics startups and telcos to co-create ecosystems (e.g., MTN + Jumia + Unilever bundles).
5. **Prioritise sustainability:** Digital traceability can verify ethical sourcing – critical as EU deforestation regulations (EUDR) impact palm oil and cocoa supply chains (*Editor's Note: See our feature article on traceability elsewhere in this issue*).

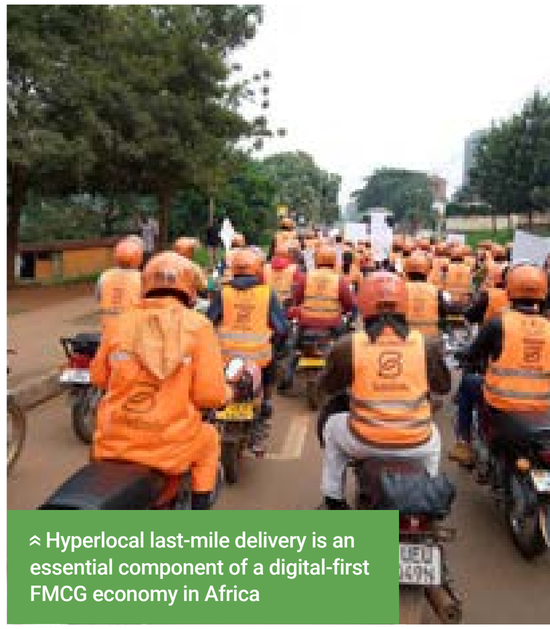
Conclusion: From survival to sovereignty

The future of African FMCG isn't about replicating Western models; it's about leapfrogging them. By harnessing digital tools rooted in local realities, African brands can build resilient, responsive and inclusive systems that serve 1.4-billion people – not as 'emerging' consumers, but as central players in the global economy.

The winners will be those who see digital not as a channel, but as a culture; one that values speed, empathy and co-creation. ■

Olaonipekun Timothy Okunowo is a seasoned global marketing and commercial strategist with over two decades of cross-sector experience. Passionate about Pan-African economic advancement, digital trust, and the future of African consumer markets, Olaonipekun advises organisations at the intersection of entrepreneurship, sustainable business and inclusive growth.

Readers of our Digital Edition can access the original version of this article on LinkedIn.



Hyperlocal last-mile delivery is an essential component of a digital-first FMCG economy in Africa

Olaonipekun Timothy Okunowo

PHOTOS: FREEPIK; OLAONIPEKUN; TIMOTHY OKUNOWO/AI; MAXAB; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

Predictions on how Nigeria's B2B commerce will evolve in 2026

The market will favour businesses that can stay standing when conditions shift, rather than those built to perform only when conditions are calm. By **Deepankar Rustagi**.

Nigeria's B2B future will be defined by traceable payment systems, reliable inventory data, trustworthy partner behaviour, data protection and compliance

« When inventory data is reliable, then credit decisions improve. When partner behaviour is visible, trust will become scalable »

Deepankar Rustagi

Over the last few years, I have spent time in markets across Nigeria, speaking with distributors, warehouse operators and retailers who are trying to run businesses in an environment that is constantly changing beneath their feet.

The conversations sound different today. People are no longer asking when stability will return. They are asking how to build businesses that can operate consistently even when conditions remain uncertain.

Nigeria's recent economic reforms and the push towards a stronger digital economy are accelerating that shift. By 2026, African tech and Nigerian tech, in particular, will be defined by three big words: discipline, infrastructure and embeddedness.

The unification of the foreign exchange market has removed the illusion of predictability that many businesses were pricing around.

- Input costs now move faster.
- Pricing decisions can no longer wait for monthly reviews.
- Procurement teams are asked to respond in days, sometimes hours.

Businesses that still rely on static price lists or informal adjustments are already feeling the pressure. The ones that will survive are those that can see their costs clearly and act on that visibility without delay.

The next phase of African fintech

This is part of a broader shift I see across African tech. The first decade of African fintech was about wallets, agency banking and payments. The next phase is about rails, identity, risk, collections, reconciliation and cross-border flows. Globally, embedded finance is growing at over 20% annually, with emerging markets driving much of that growth.

By 2026, many of the most significant 'fintech' businesses will no longer resemble banks. They will be commerce, software, or distribution platforms with finance integrated quietly inside daily workflows. Nigeria's embedded finance market was projected to reach around US$4.3-billion by 2025, and is still expected to grow rapidly.

Interest rates have also changed behaviour in a way that deserves more attention. Cheap working capital once covered up weak discipline. That cushion is gone. Today, the ability to rotate inventory faster and collect on time has become a leadership issue, not a finance department issue. In 2026, the strongest B2B players are not those with the biggest balance sheets. They are the ones with the shortest cash cycles and the most predictable partner behaviour.

This is why SME finance is moving inside the tools businesses already use. Globally, platforms that combine software, payments and credit now outperform standalone lenders on repayment and retention. Nigeria's SME credit gap alone exceeds $150-billion, highlighting why traditional lending models have struggled to meet demand.

The same architecture is emerging in West Africa. When orders, payments and inventory are digitised first, credit becomes a data outcome. That shift alone will redefine how risk is priced in Nigerian B2B markets.

Nigeria is increasingly becoming the operating lab for African scale. It accounts for 30–35% of all fintech funding in Africa in recent years. Lagos has emerged as the continent's most active fintech ecosystem.

At the same time, growth itself is being redefined. Capital is no longer rewarding vanity metrics. It is rewarding margin discipline and predictable unit economics. Many African startups are now operating with 'default alive' principles. During 2026, cash-efficient growth will not be an advantage. It will be the minimum standard.

Trade processes are slowly moving toward more formal digital rails. Initiatives like the National Single Window are not just policy announcements. They signal a future where documentation, compliance and traceability matter more. Informality does not disappear overnight, but its cost keeps rising. Serious businesses should read that signal clearly.

Editor's Note: Nigeria's National Single Window is an electronic platform that allows traders to submit required documents through a single online portal, instead of dealing with multiple government agencies separately. It went live on 27 March 2026 and is administered by the National Orientation Agency, Nigeria.

I saw this reality up close years ago while speaking with a distributor in a secondary city who was struggling to scale despite strong demand. His problem was not sales. It was inconsistency. He could not always tell when stock would arrive, how much credit was truly outstanding, or which routes were quietly leaking value. The business looked healthy from the outside. Inside, it was fragile. That story repeats itself across markets.

This is where the digital economy matters in very practical terms. When payments move through traceable systems, collections improve. When inventory data is reliable, credit decisions improve. When partner behaviour is visible, trust becomes scalable. Data protection and compliance are part of that trust. Not as legal checkboxes, but as adoption drivers. Partners commit to systems they believe will protect them.

Reliability matters more than reach

So, what does this mean for businesses and investors looking at Nigeria's B2B future? First, reliability will matter more than reach. Distribution networks will be judged more by consistency.

Second, informal trade will become harder to sustain as costs rise and compliance tightens. Businesses with structured processes-clear pricing, traceable payments and predictable supply will scale more reliably under pressure.

During 2026, Nigeria's B2B commerce market will reward leaders who treat operations as strategy and trust as infrastructure. Growth will still exist, but it will favour businesses that can stay standing when conditions shift.

The question every serious leader should be asking now is simple: Is your B2B model built to perform only when conditions are calm, or can it still function when the market forces discipline on everyone? ■

Deepankar Rustagi is the Founder and CEO of OmniRetail, a B2B commerce and supply-chain enablement company focused on digitising the FMCG value chain in Africa. OmniRetail was ranked Africa's #1 fastest-growing company in 2024 by the Financial Times (Africa's Fastest-Growing Companies list).

Readers of our Digital Edition can access the original version of this article on LinkedIn.

PHOTOS: SUPPLIED; WIKIMEDIA COMMONS


Become the
BUSINESS LEADER
Africa needs & wants
We support your learning journey with online distance postgraduate studies.
Study wherever you are in Africa.
Marketing
Postgraduate Diploma
Honours
Masters
Supply Chain
Honours
Masters
Globally Recognised Postgraduate Qualifications
Recognised by the Chartered Institute of Marketing & the Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport.
IMM
Graduate School
CIM The Chartered Institute of Marketing
The Chartered Institute of Logistics and Transport
The IMM Graduate School (Pty Ltd) is registered with the Department of Higher Education and Training (DHET) as a Private Higher Education Institution under the Higher Education Act, 1997. Registration certificate number 2000/HEQ7/013.

CIMG expands access to professional marketing education across Ghana

Institute is contributing to the development of future marketing leaders and further strengthening the marketing profession in Ghana. By **Clarence Pappoe**.

CIMG is on a drive to nurture competent marketing practitioners across the country

Some of the CIMG members involved in the Accelerator Marketing Programme

The first quarter of 2026 has proved to be a very busy time for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana (CIMG) as it works to enhance its education and upskilling offerings to the country's marketing fraternity.

In mid-January, the institute officially launched its long-awaited CIMG Accelerator Marketing Programme.

This is as an exclusive, high-impact executive programme designed to equip senior leaders, faculty members and entrepreneurs with advanced marketing expertise without the need for years of traditional study.

The CIMG Accelerator Marketing Programme is crafted for visionary decision-makers who operate at the highest levels of leadership and influence. The programme delivers practical, strategic and future-focused marketing capabilities required to navigate complex market environments, drive innovation and significantly amplify organisational impact.

Speaking on the rationale behind the programme, the National President of CIMG, Mr Michael Abbiw, said the initiative was developed in direct response to feedback from senior professionals and business leaders seeking a faster pathway to formal marketing qualification.

"We listened to practitioners, business owners and senior leaders who wanted a marketing qualification but simply didn't have the time to go through years of study. This programme is our response, built on your experience and designed to help you contribute even more to the growth of the profession. Participants will gain cutting-edge insights, practical tools and strategic foresight to strengthen competitive advantage and deliver measurable business results," he stated.

Mr Abbiw further assured participants of the credibility and global recognition of CIMG's qualifications, stressing the institute's strong legal and international standing.

"CIMG has a charter and the legal backing to award qualifications that are recognised not only in Ghana, but across Africa and beyond. With our partnership with the African Marketing Confederation and Chartered Institute of Marketing UK, participants can be confident they are earning a qualification with real international standing," he added.

The programme is delivered through three intensive modules:

Module One: Marketing Risk Management
This module provides a laser-focused approach to managing marketing risks. It adopts a risk management framework that enables marketers and business leaders to effectively handle risks in marketing decisions, from strategic envisioning through to strategy implementation.

Module Two: Marketing Execution Management
This module takes a strategic and practical approach to managing marketing execution, with a strong emphasis on market creation and market security. It explores the principles of marketing and how they are applied to secure markets and achieve strategic marketing objectives. The module integrates legal and financial perspectives into marketing, offering participants deeper insights into market creation, growth and protection as foundations for effective strategy.

Module Three: Integrated Sustainability Marketing
This module delivers an integrated approach to sustainability marketing, focusing on the transition from 'brown marketing' to 'green marketing' practices. It extends into social and governance considerations within the broader Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) framework, preparing participants to lead responsible, future-ready marketing strategies.

The Accelerator Marketing Programme reinforces CIMG's commitment to providing senior professionals with a fast-track pathway to advanced marketing competence and strategic excellence.

New BSc programme

Later in February, the University of Professional Studies, Accra (UPSA), in partnership with CIMG, officially launched a Bachelor of Science (BSc) in Applied Marketing programme, the first of its kind in the sub-region to integrate an academic degree with a direct pathway to professional marketing qualification.

The programme enables students to earn a UPSA degree while simultaneously meeting requirements for the CIMG Professional Marketing Qualifications (PMQ). Graduates will automatically qualify for the Professional Diploma in Marketing under CIMG, positioning them as 'Chartered Marketers in the making' and ready for immediate industry impact.

Approximately 40% of the course load is aligned with CIMG professional papers, ensuring that academic instruction is closely integrated with industry standards. The curriculum focuses on emerging and high-demand areas including Artificial Intelligence in Marketing, Marketing Metrics, Ethics and Sustainability Marketing, and Strategic Brand Management.

The initiative was conceptualised under the tenure of immediate past CIMG National President, Dr Daniel Kasser Tee, whose vision promoted stronger integration between academia and professional practice.

The current CIMG National President described the programme as a major step forward in Ghana's education landscape, noting that it bridges the gap between theory and professional mastery while creating a pipeline of ethical, innovative marketing leaders.

Professional content

CIMG Chief Examiner, Dr Francis Mensah Sasraku, emphasised the strategic curriculum alignment, stating that graduates will be automatically eligible for CIMG's Professional Diploma in Marketing due to the embedded professional content.

UPSA Vice-Chancellor, Professor John Kwaku Mensah Mawutor, reaffirmed that the programme aligns with the university's statutory mandate to deliver both academic and professional education, equipping students with a comprehensive understanding of marketing within a broader business context.

The programme has received formal approval from the Ghana Tertiary Education Commission (GTEC), endorsing it as a forward-looking model that strengthens collaboration between academia and industry to meet evolving labour market demands.

Through CIMG's partnerships with the African Marketing Confederation and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM-UK), qualifications earned under the programme will carry international recognition, enhancing graduates' global competitiveness.

The launch reinforces UPSA's leadership in professional education and strengthens CIMG's mandate to regulate and promote marketing practice in Ghana, producing a new generation of globally competitive marketing professionals.

CIMG partnership to redefine student journey

In March, The Chartered Institute of Marketing Ghana signed a Memorandum of Understanding with Kings University College, officially recognising the institution as a CIMG Accredited Study Centre.

The partnership represents a significant milestone in advancing professional marketing education in Ghana. Through the accreditation, Kings University College will offer programmes that align with CIMG's professional standards and curriculum, providing students and professionals with access to recognised marketing qualifications.

» The programme enables students to earn a UPSA degree while simultaneously meeting requirements for the CIMG Professional Marketing Qualifications

Speaking at the signing ceremony, representatives from both institutions highlighted the importance of strengthening collaboration between academia and professional bodies to build capacity in Ghana's marketing industry.

Professor Albert A. Addo-Quaye, President of Kings University College, remarked: "It is a privilege to partner with CIMG and to have our campus recognised as an accredited study centre. This collaboration opens a meaningful avenue for our students to take the necessary steps toward chartered status, something we will actively encourage. We see this as a truly beneficial arrangement and we are fully committed to fulfilling every obligation that comes with it."

The accreditation will enable students at Kings University College to pursue professional marketing training within a structured academic environment, equipping them with the knowledge, skills, and practical insights required to thrive in today's competitive business landscape.

Deepen CIMG's roots

As National President of CIMG, Mr Abbiw underscored the transformative potential of the partnership: "I am happy, because at CIMG we want to deepen our roots. But, most importantly, we need to bring service to the team and graduates.

"I am hoping that students do not finish school before they charter. By integrating CIMG's professional marketing qualification into the Kings University College experience, a student can begin their degree and attain their professional certifications within the same four years."

The National President added: "This directly addresses the gap we keep

» Dr Prince A. Hammah of Kings Business School and CIMG National President, Michael Abbiw (right) sign the MoU. At the rear are Professor Addo-Quaye (left) and Kwabena Agyekum, CEO and Registrar of CIMG (right)

hearing about: that graduates are not industry-ready. When you balance academic training with professional certification, you close that gap.

"Beyond marketing students, this opportunity extends to those studying journalism, sociology, information studies and beyond, because marketing touches every industry. I look forward to a collaboration that transforms how we develop the next generation of marketing professionals in Ghana."

The collaboration also forms part of CIMG's broader strategy to expand access to professional marketing education and nurture competent marketing practitioners.

Officials from both institutions expressed confidence that the partnership will contribute significantly to the development of future marketing leaders and further strengthen the marketing profession in Ghana.

The MoU marks the beginning of a long-term institutional relationship anchored in a shared commitment to excellence, relevance and the advancement of the profession. ■

Clarence Pappoe is Deputy Manager, Corporate Communications for the Chartered Institute of Marketing, Ghana.

PHOTOS: DC STUDIO ON FREEPIK; VECSTOCK ON FREEPIK; CHARTERED INSTITUTE OF MARKETING, GHANA

ChatGPT ads in Africa: A game changer or a trust gamble?

For marketers, Chat GPT ads are a new intent-based frontier, arguably higher-quality than passive social feeds. But the cost is high. By **Candice Burgess-Look** and **Bryan Look**.

« On occasion Africa is leading the world in the use of ChatGPT tools, with Kenya's usage on top »

« In Africa, young mobile-first professionals and students use AI for education, side hustles and business building

» Unlike spray-and-pray social feeds, ChatGPT ads have the potential to reach users who are actively searching, asking and solving problems

On 9 February 2026, OpenAI began testing ads for users on its Free tier and a new lower-cost '$8 Go' plan starting in the US only. While there's no confirmed date for an African rollout, it's inevitable – this is a phased approach, and global expansion is expected throughout 2026.

Here's where it gets interesting for us on the African continent. The more affordable 'Go' plan has already launched across 54 African countries (as of October 2025). So, while ads are currently US-focused, the infrastructure and the audience are already here.

If you're in marketing, advertising, or making business decisions in Africa, it's just a question of when ChatGPT advertising lands here ... and how we as an industry need to prepare.

Indeed, it's possible you're already getting questions from your clients about it. So, let's explore.

A measured start

Naturally, there's been a lot of questions about why and how this offering is going to take shape, how it' s going to look, and how it compares to advertising formats and models we are already familiar with.

Right now, it's intentionally subtle, and to OpenAI's credit, a measured start. Ads are being tested only for adult users (no under 18s), and they appear as clearly labelled, banner-style placements at the bottom of the chat interface.

Importantly, they don't interrupt or alter the AI's response; the conversation remains intact, with ads sitting separately in the user interface ('UI' if you're a techie). For example, if the user is talking about travel, a sponsored banner would appear at the bottom of the chat advertising a product in line with the search, such as a hotel package or flight deal. Basically, the model is aimed at introducing a new revenue layer without compromising user trust. CEO of Open AI, Sam Altman, says: "We will not accept money to influence the answer ChatGPT gives you, and we keep your conversations private from advertisers… It is clear to us that a lot of people want to use a lot of AI and don't want to pay, so we are hopeful a business model like this can work."

The African appetite for using ChatGPT

Interestingly, Africa isn't just using ChatGPT, in some cases it's leading the world. According to the July 2025 *Global Digital Report* by DataReportal and Meltwater, Kenya tops the global rankings for ChatGPT use, with 42.1 % of internet users aged 16+ engaging with the tool monthly – more than in the US, UAE and Israel.

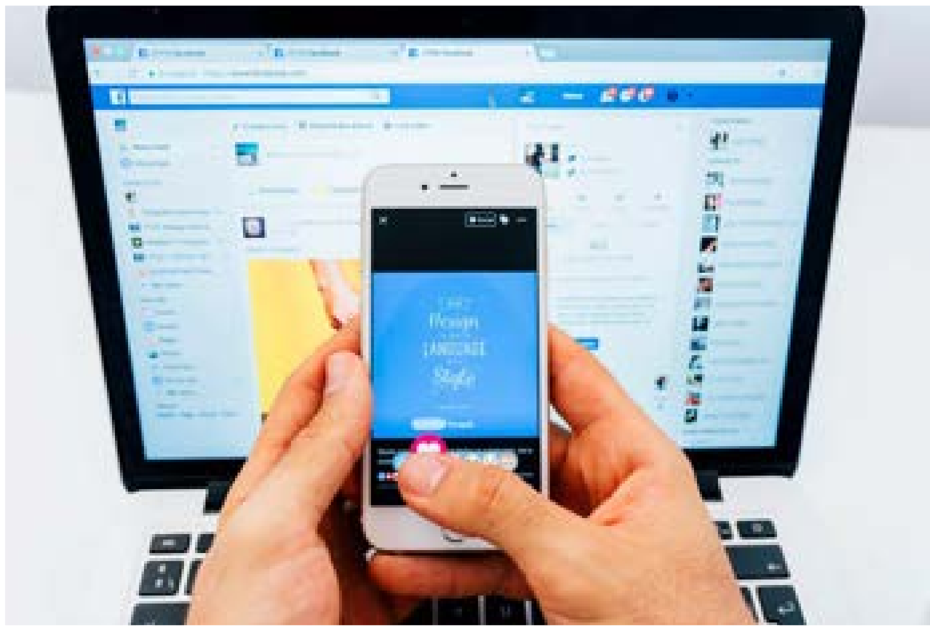
South Africa also stands out, with roughly 34 % of its online population actively using ChatGPT, placing it among the top adopters globally. Elsewhere in Africa, countries like Egypt and Nigeria feature in the top 20 for usage too. Morocco reports high engagement as well, reflecting a broader pan-African appetite for generative AI.

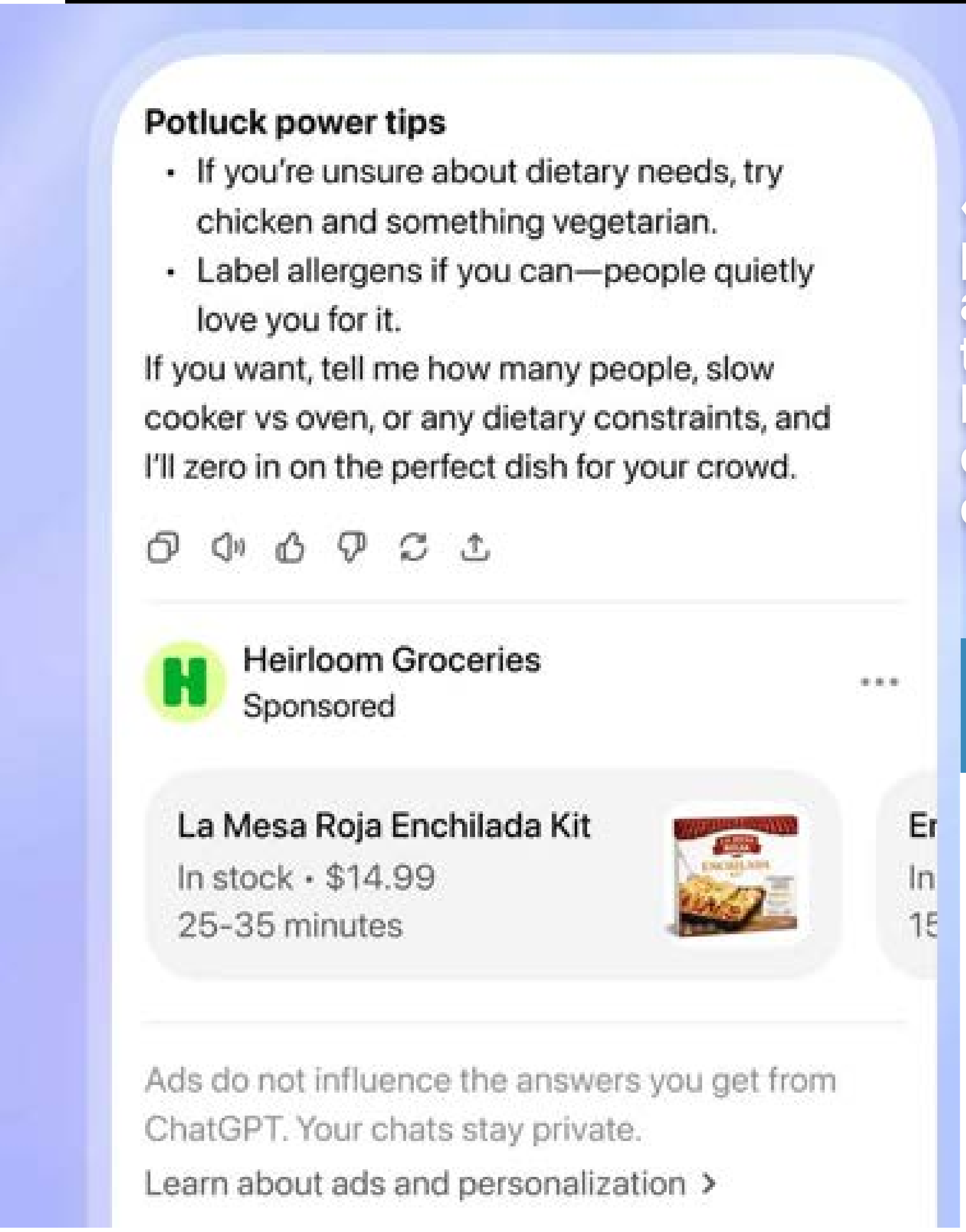
What's driving this? Much of Africa's use is rooted in youth and mobility: markets like Kenya and South Africa have young, tech-savvy, mobile-first populations leveraging ChatGPT for everything from education and skill building to content creation, entrepreneurship and business tasks.

This pattern highlights a deeper shift: Africa's digital users are embracing AI at scale and shaping how it's used in real contexts.

Examining the African marketing opportunity

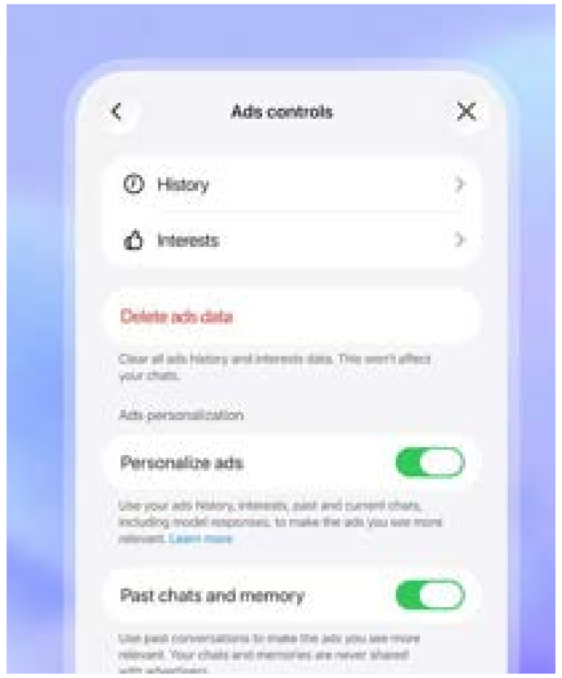
So, is this an opportunity for African

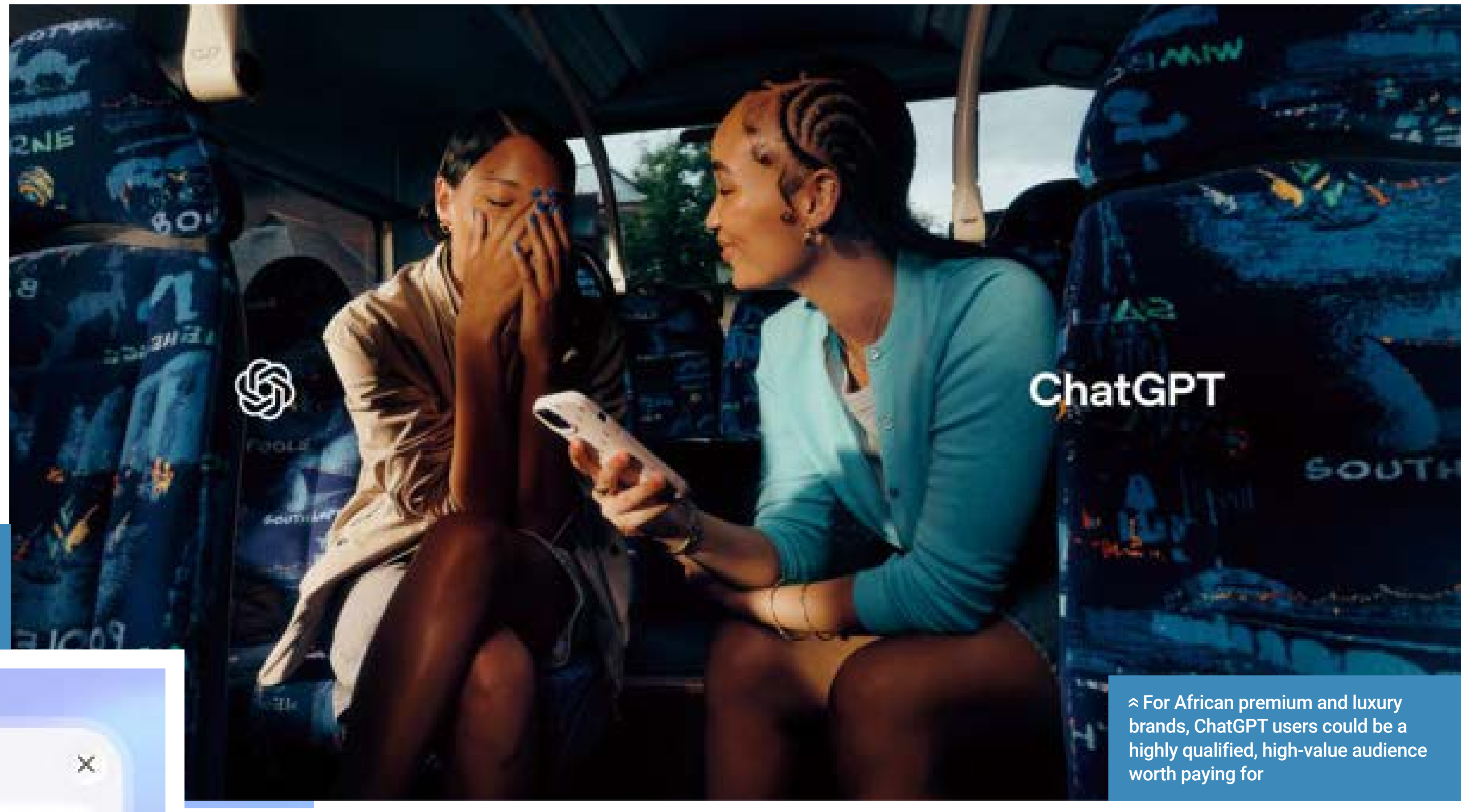




« Early reports position the ads firmly in the premium bracket and out of reach of our SMEs »

« ¥ Ads don't interrupt or alter the AI's response; the conversation remains intact, with ads sitting separately in the user interface





« For African premium and luxury brands, ChatGPT users could be a highly qualified, high-value audience worth paying for

marketers? Absolutely. Unlike spray-and-pray social feeds and search engines, ChatGPT ads have the potential to be intent-driven, reaching users who are actively searching, asking and solving problems. That's powerful. You're not interrupting passive scrolling; you're meeting someone in the middle of a real question, in real time.

For premium brands especially, that context creates a far more qualified audience. And in Africa – where a significant share of users are young, mobile-first professionals and students using AI for education, side hustles and business building – the youth targeting opportunity is obvious.

A big selling point here is that ChatGPT ads are not like past-tense advertising based on something you searched days or even weeks ago, instead it's contextual, immediate and potentially far less irritating if done well.

There's a costly catch

Early reports position ChatGPT ads firmly in the premium bracket. OpenAI is reportedly pricing inventory at around $60 Cost per Mille (CPM) – roughly three times higher than the average Meta CPM, which typically sits between $10–$25 in the US.

There's also talk of a $200,000–$250,000 minimum commitment for early beta advertisers. That immediately shifts this out of the SME 'test and learn' space and into serious brand-budget territory.

Ads will only show to 'Free' and $8 'Go' tier users, with Plus, Pro and Enterprise remaining ad-free – meaning advertisers are paying to reach a specific, cost-sensitive but highly engaged audience.

Why so expensive? OpenAI is clearly positioning this as a high-intent environment. Users aren't doom-scrolling; they're actively asking questions, researching and planning. The ads are contextual to the conversation rather than based on historic browsing behaviour. This, in theory, makes the attention more valuable.

But it's not without limitations. At launch, reporting is expected to be relatively light: impressions and clicks, with limited conversion tracking and no deep post-click attribution.

In a privacy-first ecosystem where conversational data isn't sold or repurposed for tracking, performance marketers may feel constrained.

Does the price tag push African brands out of the game? Possibly in the short term. But for premium and luxury brands – particularly in markets like South Africa, where luxury retail trading density is reportedly rising above the global average – this could be a highly qualified, high-value audience worth paying for. The real question won't just be cost. It will be ROI.

Elephant in the room

Advertising on ChatGPT introduces a fundamentally different environment. This isn't someone casually liking holiday photos; this is a user actively problem-solving, brainstorming business ideas, asking health questions, planning finances. The intent is deeper. The data is more nuanced. Which raises the obvious concern: will users trust that their conversations aren't being mined or compromised?

We've been here before. Platforms like Meta once reassured users that their data would never be misused, and we all know how that story evolved. The difference here is that the stakes feel higher. Conversations inside ChatGPT can be commercially, professionally and personally sensitive. OpenAI has stated that it will not sell user data or allow ads to influence responses. But in an era of heightened data scepticism, perception may matter as much as policy.

What will be critical for marketers is understanding exactly who they're talking to. Research shows that younger generations are deeply cautious about how their data is collected and used. They may embrace the utility of AI, but they are not blind to the risks.

That means brands entering this space, particularly premium brands targeting youth or high-value consumers, need to tread carefully. Contextual, high-intent advertising can be powerful. But if it feels intrusive, opportunistic or vaguely 'data-grabby', it could tarnish brand reputation overnight.

Interestingly, while OpenAI moves into advertising, competitor Claude (developed by public benefit corporation Anthropic) has leaned hard in the opposite direction, publicly emphasising that it will not introduce ads into its platform. This positions Claude as the trust-first alternative at a time when the market is hypersensitive about data. It's sharp, strategic positioning.

Bravo, Claude! A stroke of marketing genius if you ask us.

But AI infrastructure is expensive. And as adoption scales, so does the pressure to monetise. Whether 'no ads, ever' is a permanent philosophy or a moment-in-time marketing advantage remains to be seen.

And here's the bigger truth: as marketers, it's our job to meet people where they are. To understand our audience. To offer solutions. To add value to their lives. To build brands. To generate revenue. To contribute to the economy. We don't chase platforms for novelty; we go where attention and intent intersect.

For marketers, this is a new intent-based frontier, arguably higher-quality than passive social feeds. The opportunity is real. The cost is high. But trust will be the real currency. Get that right, and this could redefine digital advertising in Africa. Get it wrong, and it leaves a very bad taste in the mouth of the very audience you're trying to win. ■

Candice Burgess-Look and Bryan Look are the founders of KOJ Communication, an integrated PR and marketing agency servicing brands across Africa in the B2B sector.

PHOTOS: OPEN AI; FREEPIK; WIRESTOCK ON FREEPIK

Data and decisions: Are you shifting the needle for your clients?

By translating metrics into actionable intelligence, brands can better envisage their next move. Agencies and marketing partners can help by filtering out straightforward, no-jargon insights, writes **Cara Bouwer**.

» One of the biggest capability gaps in companies today is translating data into usable insights

At almost every digital marketing touchpoint, data is there to be harvested. Each online article. Each purchase. Each marketing campaign. Every choice. Yet, many African agencies still battle to turn mountains of data into insights that help clients achieve return-on-investment impact.

During a webinar hosted by Norah Thuo, Projects and Growth Lead at the Pan African Agency Network (PAAN), the message was clear: agencies must stop hiding behind dashboards that showcase every single data point, and learn to distil volume into quality insights that inform action.

This strong foresight requirement may seem at odds with the largely retrospective use of data, where "we wait for the campaign and everything to end before we start giving the client the result of what happened", argued Maureen Ngwu, MD of Nigeria-based Media Seal WPI. "We are always answering 'what happened', and never the 'why'."

With a background in maths and statistics, Ngwu may be more at home with data than the average marketer. She spoke strongly against the tendency to collect every scrap of data, or getting hung up about the volumes being produced. Instead, she advocated for focusing on data that matters for business decision-making.

If data does not talk to a client's key performance indicators, then you are missing an opportunity to really make the numbers sing, Ngwu told webinar attendees. If, as an agency, the data is pointing to 90% but the "client is bleeding", then you are looking at the wrong numbers, she said, adding: "I usually have a rule of thumb: use five seconds to look at it, if you can't pick a decision from it, discard that data. That's not the data you need."

« If data does not talk to a client's KPIs, you're missing an opportunity to really make an impact »

Ngwu and her fellow panellists – Thomas Henderson, Lead Performance Strategist at South African full-service creative agency WeFuse, and Yannick Lefang, Founder and CEO of Kenyan market research firm Kasi Insight – agreed that with the right data, agencies and their clients can draw out insights that counter risk and identify emerging opportunities.

However, as the **six core takeaways** from the webinar show us, this can only be achieved if all the pertinent data is available for scrutiny, the specific metrics are clear, and the entire process is carefully aligned to each client's desired outcomes.

1. Start with the impact in mind

If revenue, retention and efficiency are the business outcomes a client is looking to achieve, then metrics that speak to these business imperatives should permeate your data analysis strategy, said Henderson. "Any insight, if it doesn't influence business outcomes, [is] not an insight. It's just data analysis," he said.

For Lefang, cutting out the noise to spotlight data that can be used as "input for decisions", starts with clear framing built around each client's end goals. "Not every data source is relevant. Not every data platform is relevant," he said, highlighting the case of a consumer-facing brand that wants to reach, engage and convert.

If your campaign metrics can't answer those questions, then you need to ask more specific questions like 'why are customers buying certain products' or 'why are they disengaging emotionally from a brand?' When agencies have this sort of intelligence, it then becomes possible to sit down with the client and discuss a meaningful plan of action to help them grow sales and reach coverage targets, Lefang noted.

This is a far cry from the usual 'dashboard' data discussion approach. "A dashboard is not telling you what to do next," he said. "There has to be a translation of my dashboard to a plain-English insight that I can use to make my next move."

2. Shift from silos to increased integration

Equally important, said Henderson, is increased platform integration – which he calls the missing piece of the data intelligence puzzle.

"Collecting the right data, and integrating it to inform more accurate metrics that can drive decisions is the biggest blocker in a lot of agencies and businesses these days… Working together is obviously the best course of action for these businesses to try and connect all the data silos together," he said.

In the digital space, noted Lefang, this integration requires capturing information in the digital net and using tools like PowerBI and Tableau, as well as AI, to make sense of it and extract the critical 'so what' insights.

Yet, in Africa, not everyone operates in the digital space, so a two-pronged approach is still necessary across the continent – from manually recording information gathered during in-person market activations, to the continued harvesting of digital touchpoint metrics.

3. Translate the data into useful insights

No matter where data comes from, or how it is recorded, "one of the biggest capability gaps in companies today is translating data into insight", stressed Lefang. Fortunately, drawing out insights from data can be taught.

"It's as simple as having your team unlock insight with small data sets, or on a frequent basis translating data into tangible insights for customers," Lefang said. "The client should feel like you understand his business so much that he doesn't have to do any translation. As you're speaking to him [it should be like] you're speaking as … part of the team."

4. Empower the team to capture key insights

Team work should, ideally, permeate the entire agency approach, said Ngwu, who cautioned against leaving data analysis only to the analysts in any team.

"It would be good if, at every point, everybody across everything you are doing knows how to come up with, or make out, an insight from your work," she said. "Everybody in the agency, whether it's an accounts person, whether it's a creative, whether social media, whether digital, should be able to draw insight from whatever database or tools they're using. Not just a particular group."

5. Speak the language of the business world

It's not just the language of data and analysis that needs to be developed, but the ability of agencies to mature into strong thinking partners. This requires getting closer to clients to understand

« Generating vast amounts of data can be overwhelming. Have a clear strategy for filtering and prioritising information

their needs and pain points more clearly, believes Ngwu, as well as becoming comfortable using the language of business. "The CFOs and the CMOs will love you if you understand their pain and show ways to address it. Those kinds of things will actually make the agency stand out," she noted.

This level of understanding can, at times, be difficult to achieve if clients hoard data and ringfence information from agencies, but when clients see value in the insights being brought to the table, then trust will be bolstered and the potential for even stronger partnerships emerge, she stressed.

To get to this point, however, agencies must be bold and knowledgeable, and they need to have a point of view and be confident in their recommendations, said Lefang. It's about "cutting out the clutter [and] the noise from all this data to bring clarity to our clients".

6. Speed and decisiveness

Finally, agencies that will continue to stand out as data decision-making partners are those that can pivot in the face of changing consumer wants and needs. This requires both speed and decisiveness, which can also be supported and developed by building strong intra-agency alignment and cooperation, said Henderson.

From considering data takeaways from different perspectives, to providing a framework to help guide decision-making, teams that are no longer siloed can present a more coordinated – and faster – effort that speeds up debate and internal decision-making. Ultimately this results in well-formulated and aligned insights making it onto the client's Monday-morning agenda. Ready for action...

Cara Bouwer is an experienced writer, independent researcher, journalist and editor. Her words appear in media articles around the world, in business case studies, white papers, insight reports and corporate copywriting.

Readers of our Digital Edition can access the original webinar on YouTube here. ■

Challenges in using marketing data analytics

While marketing data analytics offers significant advantages, implementing it effectively is not without obstacles. According to Park University in the United States, organisations must be aware of common challenges that can limit the impact of their analytics efforts.

- **Data silos** – When data is stored separately across departments or platforms, it becomes difficult to integrate and analyse. Data silos can lead to incomplete insights and missed opportunities for cross-channel optimisation.
- **Privacy regulations** – Legislation such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and various national laws require businesses to handle customer data responsibly. Marketers must navigate compliance requirements, which can limit how data is collected, stored and used.
- **Skill gaps** – Advanced analytics tools require specialised knowledge in data analysis, statistics and marketing strategy. Without skilled professionals, businesses may struggle to interpret data correctly or leverage it for decision-making.
- **Too much data** – Having vast amounts of data can be overwhelming. Lacking a clear strategy for filtering and prioritising information may mean marketers spending more time sifting through numbers than acting on meaningful insights.

PHOTO: DC STUDIO ON FREEPIK;

AI is no silver bullet, say senior marketers on three continents

For marketers, the journey towards data- and AI-driven customer interaction remains in its formative stages, new study emphasises.

The European Marketing Confederation, along with the African Marketing Confederation and Asia Marketing Federation, have released the results of a study covering around 1,900 CMOs and senior marketers from across the three continents.

This gives a clear image of where marketers across the three regions stand, and what their priorities are for the year ahead.

The results are published in the '*European Marketing Agenda 2026*', an annual study which for the first time incorporates insights from members of the African Marketing Confederation (AMC) and Asia Marketing Federation (AMF). The AMC, AMF and European Marketing Confederation (EMC) last year formed the World Marketing Council.

There's still a lack of AI understanding

According to the study, the number one challenge for top marketers in 2026 is a lack of understanding and knowledge of how AI will fundamentally change the way businesses operate (30%).

While numerous AI pilots have been launched, only a small fraction have reached a productive, fully integrated operational phase (12%).

Current expectations for AI agents focus primarily on process efficiency – including automated content creation, A/B testing and optimisation, automated email delivery, and customer service automation – rather than advanced, data-driven optimisation.

The conclusion of the report regarding artificial intelligence in marketing is that, right now, AI is no silver bullet.

Tension between knowledge and the pace of technology

The shift toward GenAI-based search (Artificial Intelligence Optimisation and Generative Engine Optimisation) is proving to be game-changing, with content once again evaluated on depth, contextual relevance and user intent in 'zero-click' environments.

PHOTO: EUROPEAN MARKETING CONFEDERATION

Challenges persist in areas such as retail media, where limited in-house expertise, unclear value contribution and restricted access to retailers' critical data assets continue to hinder progress – underscoring a broader tension between linear organisational development and the exponential pace of technological change.

Customer centricity is still a leading priority

Customer centricity also continues to be a leading strategic priority for many organisations (43%). Yet execution clearly lags, with only around a third reporting that they are 'somewhat satisfied'. This highlights a persistent gap between ambitious strategies and operational reality.

Another strategic focus in 2026 is the shift toward sales and performance marketing in the lower funnel, closely linked with increased use of AI. At the same time, only 22% of companies position themselves as 'AI and automation pioneers', while most (53%) operate as 'balanced growth marketers' in the mainstream.

Despite economic uncertainty, inflationary pressure and geopolitical risks, marketing budgets remain resilient, with approximately 75% of companies reporting stable or increasing spending.

Comments Ralf Strauss, Chairman of the European Marketing Confederation: "While technology develops exponentially, organisations remain pretty flat in their development. The bottleneck is in the know-how of most companies.

"The revolution and journey towards data- and AI-driven customer interaction has just started, requiring true cross-functional collaboration."

Readers of our Digital Edition can download the full document here. ■

Uganda Marketers Society members and guests enjoy a stimulating evening under the stars at the first *#UMSIgniteSession* of 2026

Marketers: What to carry forward and what to leave behind

Marketing must move from activity to commercialisation, from channel updates to unified performance, and from cost centre to investment engine, UMS members hear. By **Danny Kwizera**.

All smiles at the first Ignite gathering of the year

The panellists (from left to right): Rommel Jasi; Macklean Kukundakwe; Racheal Musiima Senyondo; John Earnest Ssekisonge; David Okayan

> « Understand the market properly and build with clarity rather than opting for hype »

Uganda Marketers Society (UMS) opened its 2026 calendar with a bold challenge to the profession: marketing must move beyond activity and reclaim its place at the centre of commercial decision-making.

Held at the Saladin Media Offices in Kampala, the first *#UMSIgniteSession* of the year brought together senior marketing and business leaders to examine what marketers must leave behind, and what they must now embrace, if they are to remain credible and effective in an increasingly demanding marketplace.

The session, themed around recalibrating modern marketing, focused less on trends and more on judgement, discipline and measurable business contribution.

Leave behind short-term campaign-only thinking

Responding to the moderator's opening question on what marketers must abandon, panellists were united in their view that the era of short-term, campaign-only thinking must end.

Rommel Jasi, General Manager at Saladin Media Uganda, argued that tomorrow's marketer must carry a commercial leadership mindset. "You must be comfortable in conversations with the CFO and CEO," he said, urging marketers to shift from short-term campaign cycles to long-term value creation.

Macklean Kukundakwe, Trade and Marketing Manager at Coca-Cola Beverages Uganda, called for an end to siloed working. Marketing, she noted, cannot operate as an isolated function. Cross-functional engagement is no longer optional; it is essential.

John Earnest Ssekisonge, Managing Director at Kasi Insight, challenged the profession's long-standing obsession with differentiation for its own sake. "Whatever you do must be backed by budget and data," he said, emphasising the need to build brands deliberately over the long term rather than chase surface-level distinction.

For Racheal Musiima Senyondo, Head of HNI Business Unit at Prudential Uganda, customer intimacy remains non-negotiable. As markets become more competitive, she stressed that meaningful connection with customers will define the marketer of tomorrow.

From vanity metrics to full commercial accountability

A recurring theme throughout the session was accountability.

Jasi outlined three critical shifts Ugandan brands must adopt. First, the move away from vanity metrics. If a metric cannot be linked to revenue or margin impact, he argued, it is a distraction. Second, brands must move beyond last-click thinking and rigorously test what truly drives performance. Third, reporting must shift from fragmented channel updates to unified measurement aligned to the organisation's profit and loss account.

"Marketing must prove it is an investment," he stated, urging practitioners to understand the wider commercial architecture of their businesses.

The panel reinforced that reporting alone is not impact. Data must inform decisions and influence outcomes.

Learn from the costly mistakes of others

In a candid reflection on missteps, David Okayan, CEO of Colorsy Coatings Ltd, shared lessons from his entrepreneurial journey. One of his most significant errors, he admitted, was prioritising brand building before establishing sufficient substance in the business.

"First ensure the fundamentals are right," he advised. "Understand the market properly. Build with clarity, not hype." He also underscored the importance of relevant partnerships, noting that some journeys cannot be undertaken alone.

Effectiveness as the ultimate differentiator

When asked what distinguishes effective marketing approaches today, Kukundakwe pointed to one word: effectiveness.

"What sets a marketer apart is delivering value consistently," he said. "Whatever the sector, you must deliver on business outcomes and key performance indicators."

He added that integrating brands into consumers' everyday lives, educating the market and building trust are critical in a competitive environment. Agencies, he noted, must equally carry the same commercial KPIs as their clients.

Musiima Senyondo echoed the commercial imperative, summarising it plainly as "money in the bank". She emphasised that return on investment cannot be discussed in abstraction. Conversion, she noted, is not built in isolation but through collaboration across departments. Relatability and customer experience remain central to sustainable growth.

The data question: Move from mere reports to real-time customer relevance

Earnest Ssekisonge challenged brands to rethink how they use consumer data. Too often, he argued, organisations rely on recycled reports while consumer behaviour shifts within weeks.

"Move from recycled data to real-time understanding," he urged, encouraging brands to examine share of wallet and real consumer prospects more closely.

« Above: Charity Kamusiime (UMS President & Head of Marketing, DFCU Bank) with Carol Ampaire (Vice President, UMS & Digital Marketing Manager, Diageo Uganda – UBL)
« Left: Eric Zachary (Marketing Manager, Vaal Estates) with Elizabeth Mutamuliza (Marketing Manager, UBL)

PHOTOS: UGANDA MARKETERS SOCIETY

Industry support

The session was made possible with the support of Saladin Marketing, which hosted the event, alongside Coca-Cola Beverages Uganda, Uganda Breweries Limited, Bavaria, CoCREATE Advertising (creative partner), and Hedge Marketing.

Beyond producing reports, marketers must ask what additional value they are contributing to the business.

Jasi added a caution: data without proper interpretation can mislead. "Your ability to tell a story from the data is critical," he said. He called for stronger collaboration with data scientists and clearer governance frameworks to ensure commercial value is extracted responsibly.

He warned against confusing activity with impact. "Opportunities do not respond to desperation; they respond to value," he remarked, encouraging marketers to adopt a disciplined commercial lens.

Ignition point of growth

In her closing remarks, UMS President Charity Winnie Kamusiime Asiimwe (MCIM) reinforced the session's central message: marketing must reclaim its strategic authority.

"We affirmed that marketing is not an accessory to strategy, it is the ignition point of growth," she said. "It drives revenue, protects margins, shapes culture and anchors the voice of the customer."

She reminded attendees of several hard truths: if a metric cannot demonstrate commercial value, it is a distraction; reporting must be advisory, not merely descriptive; and data without interpretation is noise.

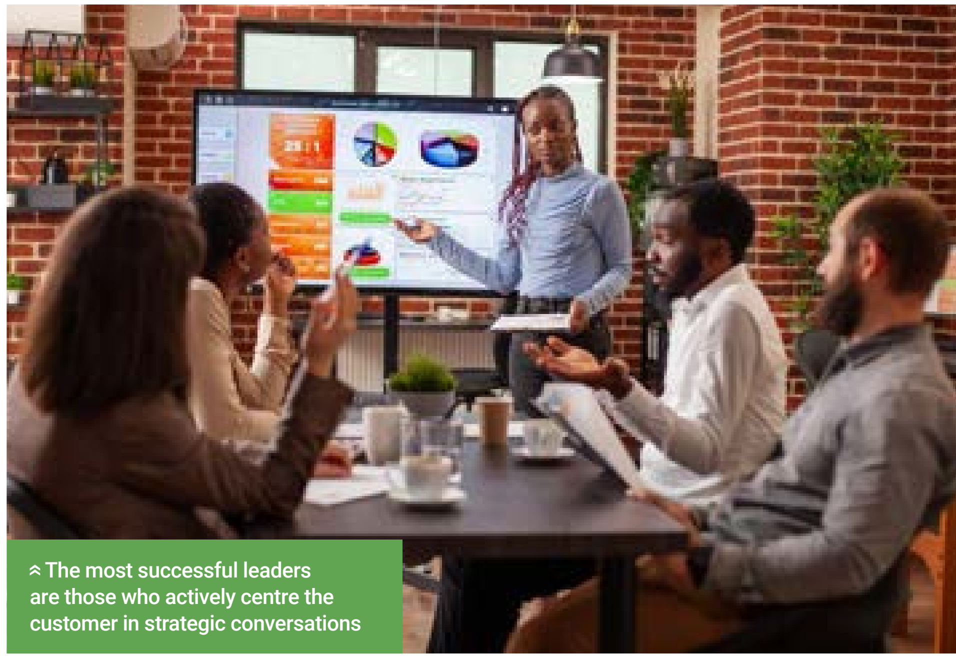
Her call was clear, marketing must move from activity to commercialisation, from channel updates to unified performance, and from cost centre to investment engine. ■

Danny Kwizera, MBA, ACIM, is Director of Public Relations and Media for the Uganda Marketers Society.

A framework for developing marketing leaders in Africa's transforming retail industry

Dr Belinda Wagner discusses the competencies marketing leaders need to navigate the future of South Africa's formal grocery retail sector.

^ Marketing leadership in African markets must be shaped by African insight, conditions and experience



^ The most successful leaders are those who actively centre the customer in strategic conversations

Almost anyone working in African retail will tell you that the landscape has never been straightforward.

It is vibrant, full of possibility and rich with entrepreneurial energy, but it is also demanding. Markets shift rapidly. Economic and political conditions can change direction without warning. Consumers are better informed, more connected and far less predictable than they were even five years ago.

In this constantly evolving environment, marketing leaders play a crucial role. They ensure the customer's perspective is heard, they shape strategic direction and they drive organisational relevance.

But here is the issue. While the demands on marketing leaders have grown significantly, research shows that the competencies required for these leaders to succeed are still not clearly articulated within African markets (as per marketing researchers and academics, Homburg and Tischer). Many organisations acknowledge that they need stronger marketing leadership, but few can pinpoint exactly what skills and capabilities that entails.

This lack of clarity creates real consequences. It becomes difficult to develop talent pipelines, design meaningful training, or prepare leaders for the complexities of the future. Skills are developed in fragments rather than through a coherent approach. Capability gaps widen. Competitive advantage erodes.

Africa is at a stage where this leadership clarity is urgently needed.

The evolving demands of marketing leadership in Africa's retail sector

To understand the leadership gap, we need to look closely at the unique pressures shaping African retail. The continent's markets are not only fast paced; they are influenced by infrastructure limitations, regulatory complexity, energy instability, supply chain fragility and significant economic volatility. These factors influence how strategies are built, how quickly decisions must be made and how adaptable leaders need to be.

At the same time, African consumers are changing. Studies highlight that customers across the continent increasingly rely on mobile technology, digital platforms, peer reviews and social media for information and brand engagement. Consumers expect more personalised experiences, more convenience and more transparency. They do not simply accept what brands tell them. They interrogate, compare, share and influence others.

Yet despite this shift, organisations do not always succeed in bringing the customer's voice into strategic decision making. There is a disconnect in African companies, where customer insight often remains operational rather than strategic. This disconnect reduces marketing's influence, slows innovation and limits responsiveness to consumer needs.

These challenges are not theoretical. They play out daily in the formal grocery retail sector.

« People shift their buying behaviour in response to economic and various other pressures »

SA's retail environment offers a view of what marketing leaders are up against in 2026

South African retailers operate in a context marked by high unemployment, economic inequality, fluctuating consumer confidence and rising cost sensitivity. Consumers shift their buying behaviour quickly in response to economic pressure, value perception or social influence.

Leaders must also navigate significant regulatory requirements, including labour legislation and Black Economic Empowerment frameworks, which are essential but administratively demanding.

Add to this the socio-political landscape, where protest action, service delivery interruptions, crime and governance challenges regularly disrupt operations, and it becomes clear why marketing leadership in South

Dr Belinda Wagner

Africa requires a level of strategic and emotional agility that goes far beyond technical marketing skill.

Technology and digital influence add another layer of complexity. Research indicates that SA consumers increasingly base their decisions on online reviews, WhatsApp groups, influencer content and price comparison tools. Leaders must therefore understand not only the customer, but the ecosystems of influence surrounding the customer.

With all of these pressures converging, it became evident that existing leadership frameworks did not fully speak to the realities of African retail. A new approach was needed.

A research journey that led to developing a new competency framework

Before diving into the findings, it is important to note that this competency framework emerged from research I personally conducted as part of an in-depth qualitative study.

Although the focus was placed specifically on the formal grocery retail sector due to its closeness to the consumer and its fast-moving nature, the insights that surfaced apply far more broadly.

The patterns, pressures and leadership gaps identified through this research are relevant across industries, particularly for marketing leaders operating in any African context where consumer behaviour, technology, socio-economic dynamics and organisational complexity intersect. Retail provided the most immediate lens, but the resulting competency framework offers guidance for developing all future marketing leaders on the continent.

It was against this backdrop that a qualitative research study was conducted to identify the competencies marketing leaders need to navigate the future of South Africa's formal grocery retail sector. Through semi-structured interviews, focus groups and reflexivity journals, insights were gathered from chief marketing officers with deep industry experience.

What emerged was clear. Existing global frameworks did not adequately capture the contextual demands, emotional pressures or strategic complexities faced by African marketing leaders. The data consistently pointed to the need for a new, context-appropriate competency framework that reflects the realities of African retail rather than relying on frameworks imported from different markets and conditions.

The result of this research is a new 10-competency framework designed for marketing leadership in African retail environments. While not prescriptive, the framework provides a structured way to understand what future leaders require in order to operate effectively.

Three themes repeatedly surfaced across the data and form the foundation of the framework:

1. Strategic Leadership and Foresight

Participants stressed that leaders must be able to look beyond immediate challenges. African markets shift unpredictably, and leaders need the ability to anticipate change, interpret complexity and plan for multiple scenarios. Strategic foresight, systems thinking and contextual intelligence were highlighted as essential capabilities.

2. Customer Insight and a very clear Market Orientation

The research showed that the most successful leaders are those who actively centre the customer in strategic conversations. They do not rely solely on data dashboards. They interpret behaviour, understand cultural nuance, challenge assumptions and drive organisational alignment around customer value. The ability to convert customer insight into strategy was consistently emphasised.

3. Digital, Data and Innovation Acumen

Technology has become inseparable from how African consumers behave. Leaders must understand digital ecosystems, data interpretation, innovation mindsets, automation, artificial intelligence and the social influence structures that drive purchasing decisions. Being digitally aware is no longer enough; leaders need digital fluency.

Why this new competency framework matters

The strength of the new framework is not that it replaces existing thinking, but that it contextualises leadership in a way that aligns with African realities. It recognises the pressures, the volatility and the opportunities present in the continent's retail environments. It respects the fact that African leadership cannot simply be shaped by global frameworks that were never designed for the lived complexity of African markets.

This framework provides organisations with:

- A clearer way to design leadership development.
- A consistent framework for talent and succession planning.
- A research-grounded view of the future leadership landscape.
- A better understanding of the strategic demands placed on marketing teams.
- An opportunity to align internal expectations with external market realities.

Most importantly, it helps ensure that the next generation of marketing leaders is equipped for the world they are actually stepping into.

Some closing reflections

African retail is full of potential, but it is also full of challenge. To thrive in this environment, organisations need marketing leaders who understand the continent's complexity, can anticipate change and are grounded in a deep understanding of the customer.

This research contributes a new competency framework designed with these realities in mind. It offers clarity in an area where organisations have long needed direction and provides a foundation for developing strong, resilient and future-ready marketing leaders.

As the retail industry continues to transform, this framework serves as a reminder that leadership development in Africa must be shaped by African insight, African conditions and African experience. Only then can the continent build the marketing leadership capacity it needs for the future. ■

Dr Belinda Wagner is a marketing strategist, leadership consultant, and executive coach. She lectures at leading South African business schools and is CEO of Wagner Consulting. She is also founder of Living with Cancer SA and creator of the NAVIGATE marketing leadership competency framework.

PHOTOS: JEPPESTOWN ON FLICKR; DC STUDIO ON FREEPIK

Malawi's inaugural Superbrand Awards raise the bar for brand recognition

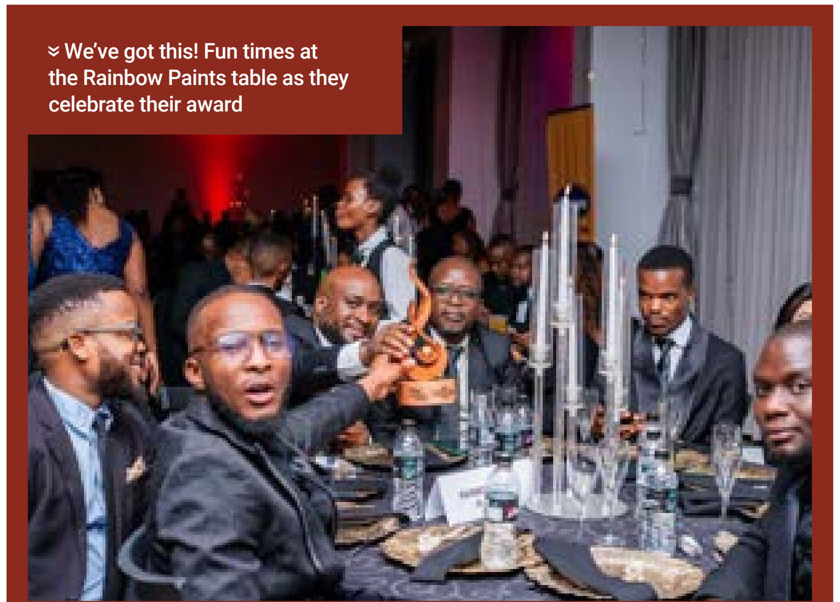
Awards signal a new era in recognising organisations that are not only market leaders but also contributors to Malawi's broader economic narrative. By **Daniel Ngwira**.

⌃ Thumbs up to the inaugural IMM Superbrand Awards! Members of the Institute of Marketing in Malawi and award winners celebrate a great event

Malawi's corporate and marketing community witnessed a historic milestone with the successful hosting of the inaugural IMM Superbrand Awards, a landmark initiative designed to recognise the country's most outstanding and influential brands.

The maiden awards introduced a new concept in Malawi's recognition landscape; a research-driven national ranking of brands based on market credibility, performance and consumer trust. To populate the rankings, the Institute of Marketing in Malawi (IMM) commissioned independent market research conducted nationwide to identify brands that defined excellence in 2025.

Over several months, brands across multiple sectors – including construction,



⌄ We've got this! Fun times at the Rainbow Paints table as they celebrate their award

» Akossa Hiwa leads the National Bank of Malawi team in accepting the award for winning Superbrand in the Banking Sector

« Over several months, brands across multiple business sectors were evaluated »

finance, banking, FMCGs and small and medium enterprises – were evaluated and ranked. The research process ultimately identified *Malawi's Top 200 Brands*, with the leading brands in each industry category recognised during the awards ceremony.

The prestigious event was held at the iconic Amaryllis Hotel Blantyre, drawing a record attendance from across the country's corporate sector. Executives, entrepreneurs, policymakers, and marketing professionals gathered to celebrate brand excellence in what has quickly become one of Malawi's most significant corporate recognition platforms.

Guest of Honour at the event was Ms Jean Munyenyembe, Principal Secretary in the Ministry of Trade, Tourism, Industrialisation and Business, whose

⌃ The team from Illovo Sugar Malawi feeling a little crazy after earning the distinction of Malawi's Number One Superbrand

IMM President George Damson and Guest of Honour, Ms Jean Munyenyembe

presence underscored the national economic significance of strong and competitive brands.

Superbrand Awards chair Darles Kasonda, who is Chief Executive Officer for the Insurance Association of Malawi, commended all the efforts behind the event – including the companies and organisations who supported the project.

At the pinnacle of the awards, Illovo Sugar Malawi emerged as the overall winner, earning the distinction of Malawi's Number One Superbrand following the nationwide assessment.

Independent research

The research underpinning the awards was conducted by Impact Research Centre, which spent nearly eight months gathering data and consulting consumers across districts throughout Malawi. Lead consultant Graciano Bwanali praised the IMM for introducing what he described as a groundbreaking initiative in Malawi's marketing and business environment.

According to Bwanali, the methodology ensured that the results reflected the voice of the market itself. By engaging consumers directly across the country, the research captured authentic perceptions of brand performance, trust and relevance within the Malawian marketplace.

IMM President George Damson described the inaugural edition as a major achievement and an important step in strengthening the country's marketing ecosystem.

"The first edition of the IMM Superbrand Awards was a massive success. Brands that had never previously participated in our annual awards, which usually take place alongside our annual conference, found an opportunity to engage through this new platform. The overwhelming turnout demonstrated the level of interest the initiative generated," he said.

Damson added that the awards had already begun strengthening the institute's membership base, with several organisations expressing interest in joining the professional marketing body.

"We saw a surge in requests for corporate membership because brands feel IMM has given them a reason to belong to the professional community we are building. We look forward to an even stronger edition in 2026 as we refine the processes and apply lessons learned from the 2025 event," he stated.

Celebrating excellence

The awards ceremony itself was a vibrant celebration of business excellence. Despite the extensive programme recognising multiple categories, the audience remained engaged throughout the evening, reflecting the significance of the recognition being bestowed upon the country's leading brands.

The night concluded with live entertainment from Mingoli Band, bringing the audience to the dance floor in a celebratory atmosphere led by the IMM President, the Guest of Honour, and members of the Institute's Board of Directors.

Among other notable attendees was Isabel Kachinjika, the institute's first president, whose longstanding contribution to the marketing profession continues to inspire new generations of marketers in Malawi and beyond.

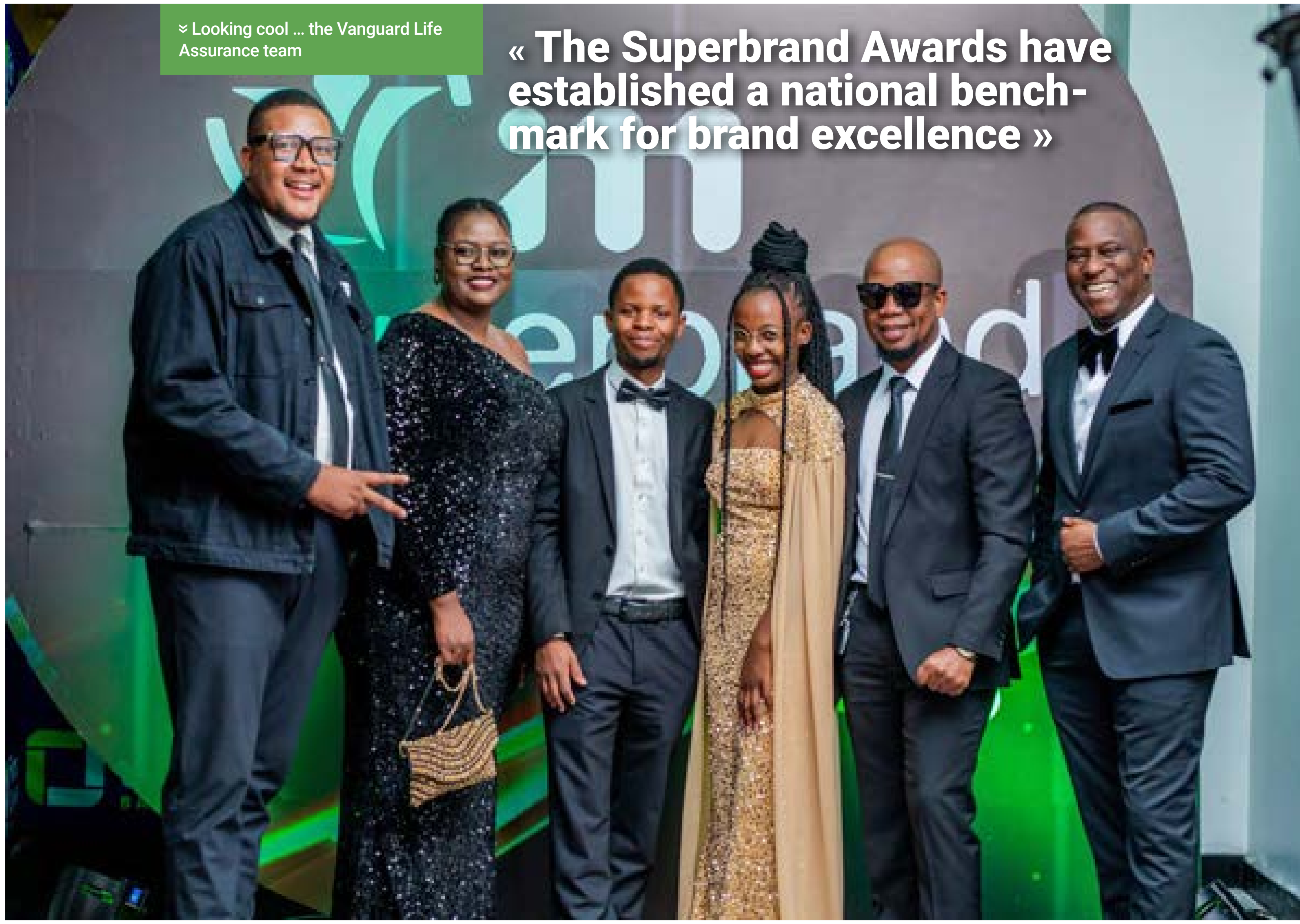
With its successful debut, the IMM Superbrand Awards in Malawi has established a new national benchmark for recognising brand excellence across industries. The initiative is expected to grow into a defining platform that celebrates companies shaping consumer trust, driving innovation, and strengthening Malawi's economic competitiveness.

As the country continues to pursue industrial growth and private-sector development, the Superbrand Awards signal the beginning of a new era in recognising organisations that are not only market leaders but also key contributors to Malawi's broader economic narrative. ■

Find all the successful Superbrands here: https://imm.mw/superbrands/.

Daniel Ngwira is a brand maverick, passionate about emerging trends in the marketing industry. He is also Director of Communications at the Institute of Marketing in Malawi.

PHOTOS: INSTITUTE OF MARKETING IN MALAWI



Looking cool ... the Vanguard Life Assurance team

« The Superbrand Awards have established a national bench-mark for brand excellence »

The team from mobile telecommunications company Airtel Malawi receive their award from the IMM's Daniel Ngwira

Winner of the Superbrand in Renewable Energy, Inflo Limited, receive their award

Actor Will Smith helps Angola's brand to step onto the world stage

As part of a sponsorship partnership with the Hollywood superstar's electric powerboat racing team, Angola will receive global brand exposure.

Will Smith enjoys a colourful welcome

US actor, producer and musician Will Smith visited the Angolan capital of Luanda recently as part of an ongoing nation branding strategy being implemented by the Southern African country.

Smith was a member of an E1 League delegation led by Alejandro Agag, co-founder and Chairman of the UIM E1 World Championship, the world's first all-electric hydrofoil powerboat racing series designed to promote sustainability and ocean conservation. The organisation will hold an edition of the Electric Boat World Championship in Angola on 12-13 September 2026.

The Hollywood superstar has his own electric powerboat racing team, called Westbrook Racing, in the E1 Series.

During the Luanda visit, Westbrook Racing announced a title partnership with Angola Tourism and '*Visit Angola – The Rhythm of Life*', the brand of the national tourism authority.

As part of the partnership, '*Visit Angola – The Rhythm of Life*' will benefit from permanent branding across Westbrook Racing's key assets, including the race boat (called RaceBird) and team environment throughout the E1 Championship season.

The collaboration establishes '*Visit Angola – The Rhythm of Life*' as title partner of the team, with integrated visibility across sporting, digital and commercial platforms.

Commenting on the decision to award a championship race – the fifth round of the UIM E1 Series World Championship – to Angola, Westbrook Racing said in a social media post: "This new location will provide us an incredible opportunity to race in uncharted waters and engage further with our African fanbase. A great addition to the calendar."

Filming movie scenes

During his visit Smith met Angolan president João Lourenço and discussed the possibility of filming scenes for movies and series in the country, especially from the *Bad Boys* action-comedy franchise. Smith plays a fast-living, stylish Miami narcotics detective in the series.

The actor and artist told journalists that he had discussed issues related to the development of cinema and the promotion of national tourism with the Angolan Head of State. The meeting allowed for the analysis of opportunities for cooperation in the audiovisual field.

On his first trip to Angola, Smith praised the atmosphere, energy and hospitality of the Angolan people.

He noted the 'exciting climate' in the country and emphasised that the positive energy of the population is a key factor in his desire to return, the official Angolan news agency, Angop, reported.

New brand identity

In late 2025, Angola Tourism, with the support of Zurich-headquartered consulting and marketing agency Kleber Group, unveiled a new brand identity designed to put the country on the global travel map.

The launch of a new brand identity under the '*The Rhythm of Life*' slogan coincided with the expansion of Angola's international tourism promotion to four additional markets: the United Kingdom, Spain, Poland and South Africa. ■

PHOTO: ANGOLA TOURISM

Will Smith ajuda a marca de Angola a ganhar destaque no cenário mundial

Como parte de uma parceria de patrocínio com a equipa de corrida de barcos eléctricos do actor de Hollywood, Angola terá uma exposição global da sua marca.

Will Smith desfruta de uma recepção colorida

O actor, produtor e músico americano Will Smith visitou recentemente a capital angolana, Luanda, como parte de uma estratégia contínua de criação da marca nacional implementada pelo país da África Austral.

Smith foi membro de uma delegação da E1 League liderada por Alejandro Agag, co-fundador e presidente do UIM E1 World Championship, a primeira série mundial de corridas de barcos a motor eléctricos hidrofólios, concebida para promover a sustentabilidade e a conservação dos oceanos. A organização realizará uma edição do Campeonato Mundial de Barcos Eléctricos em Angola nos dias 12 e 13 de Setembro de 2026.

O actor, produtor e músico de Hollywood tem a sua própria equipa de corridas de barcos eléctricos, chamada Westbrook Racing, na Série E1.

Durante a visita a Luanda, a Westbrook Racing anunciou uma parceria de título com a Angola Turismo e '*Visite Angola – O Ritmo da Vida*', a marca da autoridade nacional de turismo.

Como parte da parceria, '*Visite Angola – O Ritmo da Vida*' beneficiará de uma criação de marca permanente nos principais activos da Westbrook Racing, incluindo o barco de corrida (chamado RaceBird) e o ambiente da equipa ao longo da época do Campeonato E1.

A colaboração estabelece '*Visite Angola – O Ritmo da Vida*' como parceiro titular da equipa, com visibilidade integrada em plataformas desportivas, digitais e comerciais.

Comentando sobre a decisão de atribuir uma corrida do campeonato – a quinta ronda do Campeonato Mundial da Série UIM E1 – a Angola, a Westbrook Racing afirmou numa publicação nas redes sociais: "Esta nova localização nos oferecerá uma oportunidade incrível de competir em águas inexploradas e de nos envolvermos mais com a nossa base de fãs africana. Uma óptima adição ao calendário."

Filmagem de cenas de filme

Durante a sua visita, Smith encontrou-se com o presidente angolano, João Lourenço, e admitiu a possibilidade de filmar cenas para filmes e séries no país, sobretudo da franquia de acção-comédia *Bad Boys*. Smith interpreta um detective de narcóticos de Miami estiloso e de vida agitada na série.

O actor e artista disse aos jornalistas que discutiu questões relacionadas ao desenvolvimento do cinema e à promoção do turismo nacional com o Chefe de Estado angolano. A reunião permitiu a análise de oportunidades de cooperação no campo audiovisual.

Nova identidade de marca

No final de 2025, a Angola Turismo, com o apoio da agência de consultoria e marketing Kleber Group, com sede em Zurique, revelou uma nova identidade de marca projectada para colocar o país no mapa de viagens globais.

O lançamento de uma nova identidade de marca sob o slogan '*O Ritmo da Vida*' coincidiu com a expansão da promoção do turismo internacional de Angola para quatro mercados adicionais: Reino Unido, Espanha, Polónia e África do Sul. ■

CRÉDITO DA FOTO: TURISMO DE ANGOLA

Here's why influencer marketing success requires all hands on deck

Laurelle James outlines the Accountability Equation – the often-neglected, but vital, three-way partnership between creators, brands and their marketing agencies.

Professionalism is how influencers protect credibility, sustain business opportunities and build client trust

We need to talk. Influencer marketing continues to make headlines for its growth, yet there's one headline we rarely see: accountability.

According to the IAB '*South Africa Influencer Marketing Perceptions Report*' released in 2025, 97% of marketers believe influencer marketing works, but only 52% of brands allocate proper budgets for it.

Many opinions can be formed as to why this is, but the main reason for scepticism is due to the lack of accountability. Real, tangible and measurable accountability is what's missing from too many collaborations.

Here's the uncomfortable truth: influencer marketing isn't about paying for a pretty video and calling it a day. It's about investing in audience access, retention, influence, engagement and measurable ROI. When we strip away the glamour and the lifestyle shots, we're left with a business transaction that requires professionalism from all parties involved.

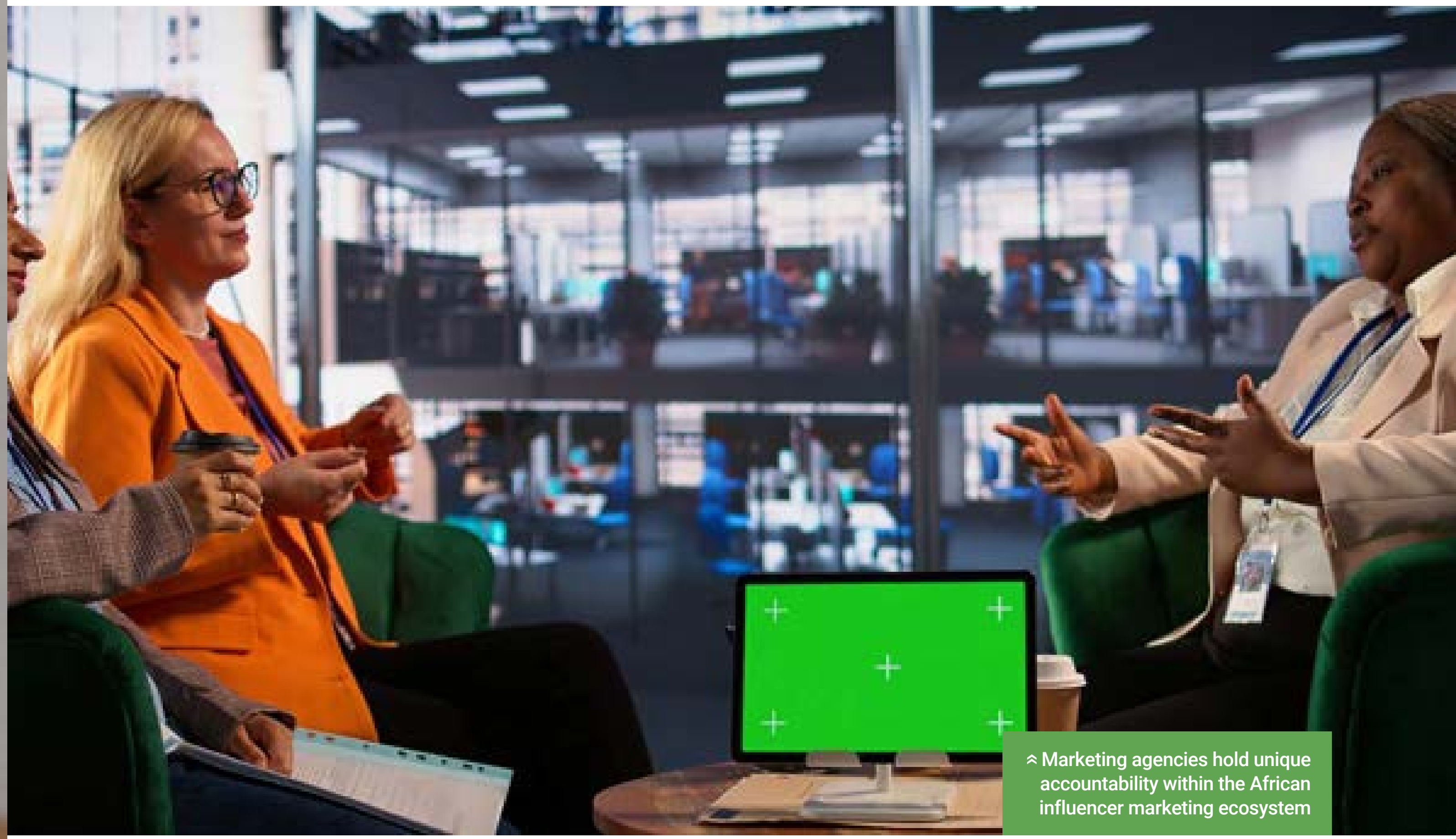
This isn't about throwing anyone under the bus. It's about recognising that accountability is a three-way partnership between marketers, agencies and creators. Yet, right now, it feels like we're all driving in different lanes instead of moving in the same direction.

Creators, it's time to treat this like the business it is

With new requirements by the South African Revenue Service (SARS) for creators to declare their incomes, products and travel, the industry has reached a defining moment. Creators are being called to put on their CEO hats and come to the table as business owners, not just content producers. This is no longer an industry built on casual collaborations. It's a commercial ecosystem where professionalism and accountability carry real weight.

Professionalism in this space isn't a buzzword; it's how we protect credibility, sustain opportunities and build trust across the board. These are the bare-minimum basics for influencers:

- **Meet your deadlines.** When you commit to a date, entire campaign ecosystems move with you, from PR to owned channels, to paid amplification. Missing it doesn't just delay a post; it disrupts momentum, erodes trust and impacts everyone involved.
- **Fulfil the brief.** Co-creation isn't about ignoring brand objectives; it's about interpreting them through your creative lens to meet brand objectives while staying true to your voice. Read the brief, ask questions early, and deliver work that feels both authentic and aligned. That's where long-term partnerships are built.
- **Be honest about your stats.** Inflated metrics don't just hurt one creator; they damage the credibility of the entire industry. Media kits should reflect reality, not aspiration. And when you commit to specific performance numbers, marketers expect you to deliver on them. Transparency isn't just ethical; it's good business.
- **Be transparent about your fees.** Valuing your craft matters, but pricing should reflect the value you deliver, aligned with industry benchmarks rather than inflated aspirations. Fair, transparent rates build trust and create space for sustainable growth across the industry.
- **Know when to say 'no'.** Not every brand fits every creator, and that's



Marketing agencies hold unique accountability within the African influencer marketing ecosystem

okay. Forced partnerships only erode authenticity, which is the very currency of influence. Protecting your credibility today preserves your influence tomorrow.
- **Show up for co-creation.** True collaboration means being present, responsive and proactive. Join the briefing calls. Contribute your audience insights. And when content underperforms, bring solutions – not silence. Offer creative pivots or distribution tweaks that show partnership, not just participation. Your creativity is your craft, but your professionalism is your power.

That said, creators can't operate with business-level professionalism in a vacuum. Accountability flows in multiple directions, and brands carry equal responsibility in creating the conditions that make professional partnerships possible.

Marketers: transparency is your responsibility

Most friction in influencer collaborations stems not from creative shortcomings but from unclear expectations at the outset. Ambiguity is expensive. These are the bare-minimum basics for marketers:

- **Define everything upfront.** Deliverables, timelines, approval processes, exclusivity terms, usage rights and success metrics must be clear from the first conversation. What seems obvious internally – posting windows, revision rounds, content ownership – may be opaque to a creator juggling multiple partnerships. Early clarity doesn't constrain creativity; it enables it.
- **Be honest about success metrics.** Whether the goal is sales, awareness, or engagement, creators need to understand how their work will be judged. Context is currency; sharing product details, brand position, audience insights and competitive landscape equips creators to develop content that meets brand objectives while resonating with audiences.
- **Trust creators with creative freedom.** Paying for authentic voices means allowing creators to interpret key messages within defined parameters. Transparency and context transform creators from vendors into co-strategists, unlocking content that performs both creatively and commercially.

The next era of influencer marketing is about growth with integrity

Even with professional creators and transparent brands, campaigns require strategic orchestration. That's where agencies become critical, not as transactional middlemen but as the connective tissue that holds accountability together.

Agencies are the bridge within the ecosystem

Agencies hold unique accountability in the influencer marketing ecosystem. You're not just facilitating transactions; you're educating brands vetting creators and setting ethical standards. When agencies step up as true collaborators, partnerships work better. When they only handle the basics, accountability slips through the cracks. These are the bare-minimum basics for agencies:

- **Bridge the knowledge gap.** Much of the hesitation brands feel about influencer marketing comes from misunderstanding the channel. Many decision-makers still see influencer partnerships as experimental rather than strategic. Agencies help clients understand realistic timelines, why authentic collaborations outperform scripted content, and how to measure success based on real business impact rather than vanity metrics.
- **Champion ethical practices.** The '*IAB South Africa Content Creator Charter*' wasn't created as a theoretical framework; it exists because the industry identified concrete needs for standardised ethical standards. Agencies are uniquely positioned to implement these principles, especially when brand requests conflict with creator authenticity or audience trust.
- **Facilitate co-creation.** Campaigns don't succeed organically; they require structure. Agencies create the frameworks that make collaboration possible through structured briefings, respectful feedback loops, and strategic project management.

Self-regulation: The ICAS view

The International Council on Ad Self-Regulation (ICAS), set up in 2008 by the European Advertising Standards Alliance, also emphasises that "brands, agencies, influencers, and all participants in the advertising chain bear some responsibility for ensuring marketing communications are responsible".

Says ICAS: "When done well, influencer marketing is an effective, authentic, engaging way for brands to reach specific audiences and grow their businesses. However, the key to successful influencer marketing is leveraging the trust and connection influencers have built with their followers.

"If done irresponsibly – e.g., by failing to disclose the nature of the content, promoting age-restricted products like alcohol or gambling to a protected age group such as children and young people, or otherwise disregarding applicable advertising regulations – it can mislead the audience, produce irresponsible or harmful content, cause reputational damage, and erode trust in the influencer, the brand, and advertising generally."

Editor

« **Campaigns don't simply succeed organically. Structure is required** »

The IAB '*South Africa Influencer Marketing Perceptions Report*' highlights agencies' biggest challenges as "professionalism of influencers" and "efficiencies in execution", pain points cited by 50% of respondents. These challenges diminish significantly when agencies invest in a solid plan, clear strategy and shared vision, serving as the creative bridge between influencer authenticity and brand messaging.

Agencies don't just connect brands and creators. They set the professional standard for the entire ecosystem.

Influencer marketing only works when everyone plays their part. Creators, brands and agencies each hold a piece of the puzzle, but only when those pieces fit together do we unlock the full potential of this industry. The next era of influencer marketing is about growth with integrity. Let's not just watch our industry thrive. Let's build it to last.

To learn more, or pledge the '*IAB South Africa Content Creator Charter*', readers of our Digital Edition can visit the IAB website here. ■

Laurelle James is Senior Influencer Manager at 8909, a digital agency based in Johannesburg, South Africa. She is also a member of the IAB SA Influencer Marketing Committee. The IAB South Africa strives to empower the media and marketing industries to thrive in a digital economy.

PHOTOS: FREEPIK; SUPPLIED ILLUSTRATION: IAB SOUTH AFRICA

Real, tangible and measurable accountability is what's missing from too many collaborations

» Laurelle James … Influencer marketing only works when everyone plays their part. Creators, brands and agencies each hold a piece of the puzzle

Africa's luxury tourism advantage lies in its experiences and stories

New report also emphasises the rapid transformation of travel marketing through large-language models and AI-driven discovery tools.

African tourism is moving into a decisive period of growth as destinations across the continent capitalise on an emerging middle class, mounting inbound tourism arrivals and record-high hotel development activity.

These are among the key conclusions from the first Africa-themed edition of Skift's annual *Megatrends* report released earlier this year.

Skift *Megatrends* is considered a key barometer for the global travel industry, influencing the strategies of airlines, hotel groups, investors and others. The first Africa issue is being presented in partnership with the Millat Group, an Africa-focused investment firm with interests in tourism.

"Tourism demand for Africa is real and accelerating," said Hamza Farooqui, CEO of Millat Group, during a presentation introducing the report.

"What will determine success is whether destinations can translate that demand into investable opportunities supported by reliable infrastructure, policy certainty and long-term capital."

Among the most significant themes highlighted is the continued expansion of luxury travel, with Africa increasingly identified as the next frontier for high-value, experience-led tourism. Skift notes that luxury travel is moving beyond traditional concepts of opulence, placing greater emphasis on privacy, authenticity, access and cultural depth.

Develop infrastructure and create confidence

"Africa's luxury advantage lies in its experiences and its stories," Farooqui said. "But those advantages only convert into value when supported by air access, quality operators and investor confidence that extends beyond a single property or season."

The report also highlights the growing economic role of music residencies and live tourism, as destinations leverage cultural events to drive visitation, extend length of stay and broaden their tourism economies. For African cities, Skift identifies this as an opportunity to link tourism more closely with creative industries, urban regeneration and job creation.

» Africa is increasingly identified as the next frontier for high-value, experience-led tourism

Another major theme in the *Megatrends* report is the rapid transformation of travel marketing, as large-language models and AI-driven discovery tools increasingly influence how destinations are discovered and evaluated by travellers.

"Destination visibility is being reshaped by technology," Farooqui noted. "How Africa's tourism story is structured, verified and surfaced in AI-driven systems will increasingly influence traveller choice and investment decisions."

Rafat Ali, CEO and founder of Skift, said the 2026 *Megatrends* show that the next phase of global travel growth will favour destinations that are investable, well connected and narrative-led.

"Africa has many of the underlying demand drivers in place, particularly in experiential and luxury travel, but the winners will be those markets that align infrastructure, policy and storytelling with how modern travellers discover and evaluate destinations."

« AI-based systems will increasingly influence traveller choice and investment decisions »

Across all themes, Skift's analysis points to the need for a more integrated approach to tourism development, recognising tourism as an interconnected system spanning transport, energy, water, skills and capital.

The African Marketing Confederation is collaborating with UN Tourism on its Brand Africa initiative to create a responsible, sustainable and attractive pan-African tourism brand. The AMC is also launching a dedicated Tourism Chapter for African tourism marketers. ■

PHOTO: I AM ALEX FROM PEXELS

A vantagem do turismo de luxo em África reside nas suas experiências e histórias

O novo relatório também destaca a rápida transformação do marketing de viagens por meio de modelos de linguagem abrangentes e ferramentas de descoberta baseadas em IA.

O turismo africano está a entrar num período decisivo de crescimento, à medida que destinos em todo o continente capitalizam sobre uma classe média emergente, havendo um aumento das chegadas de turistas estrangeiros e uma actividade recorde de desenvolvimento hoteleiro.

Essas são algumas das principais conclusões da primeira edição do relatório anual das *Megatendências* da Skift, com foco em África, divulgada no início deste ano.

As *Megatendências* da Skift são consideradas um barómetro fundamental para a indústria global de viagens, influenciando as estratégias de companhias aéreas, grupos hoteleiros, investidores e outros. A primeira edição sobre África está a ser apresentada em parceria com o Millat Group, uma empresa de investimentos focada em África e com interesses no sector de turismo.

"A procura turística por África é real e está a acelerar", afirmou Hamza Farooqui, CEO do Grupo Millat, durante uma apresentação do relatório.

"O que irá determinar o sucesso é se os destinos conseguirem traduzir essa demanda em oportunidades de investimento, apoiadas por infra-estrutura confiável, segurança política e capital de longo prazo."

Entre os temas mais importantes destacados está a expansão contínua do turismo de luxo, com África sendo cada vez mais identificada como a próxima fronteira para o turismo de alto valor e focado em experiências. A Skift observa que as viagens de luxo estão a ir além dos conceitos tradicionais de opulência, dando maior ênfase à privacidade, autenticidade, acesso e profundidade cultural.

Desenvolver infra-estrutura

"A vantagem do luxo africano reside nas suas experiências e nas suas histórias", disse Farooqui. "Mas essas vantagens só se convertem em valor quando são sustentadas por acesso aéreo, operadores de qualidade e confiança do investidor que se estende para além de uma única propriedade ou época."

O relatório também destaca o crescente papel económico das residências musicais e do turismo ao vivo, à medida que os destinos aproveitam eventos culturais para impulsionar as visitas, prolongar a duração da estadia e diversificar as suas economias turísticas.

Outro tema importante no relatório das *Megatendências* é a rápida transformação do marketing de viagens, à medida que modelos de linguagem abrangentes e ferramentas de descoberta baseadas em IA influenciam cada vez mais a forma como os destinos são descobertos e avaliados pelos viajantes.

"A visibilidade dos destinos está a ser remodelada pela tecnologia", observou Farooqui. "A forma como a história do turismo em África é estruturada, verificada e apresentada em sistemas baseados em inteligência artificial irá influenciar cada vez mais as escolhas dos viajantes e as suas decisões de investimento."

A Confederação Africana de Marketing está a colaborar com o Departamento de Turismo das Nações Unidas na sua iniciativa Marca África, com o objectivo de criar uma marca de turismo pan-africana responsável, sustentável e atraente. A AMC também está a lançar um capítulo dedicado ao turismo para profissionais de marketing turístico africanos. ■

CRÉDITO DA FOTO: EU SOU O ALEX, DO PEXELS

US$2.7bn being spent to upgrade Libya's biggest port and free zone

Misurata Free Zone Port will help solidify Libya's role as a regional supply chain hub linking Europe with North Africa and the African hinterland.

PHOTO: MISURATA FREE ZONE PORT

The North African country of Libya is aiming to transform its Misurata Free Zone Port on the Mediterranean coast into a major logistics gateway and a regional trans-shipment hub.

An agreement signed in January 2026 with two international partners represents the largest non-oil infrastructure investment in Libya since 2011, marking a pivotal step in rebuilding national infrastructure and strengthening the country's integration into regional and global supply chains.

The two partners are Qatar-based Maha Capital Partners, and Terminal Investment Limited, the investment and operating arm of the MSC Group, the world's largest container shipping company.

According to a statement released following the signing of the agreement, the partnership seeks to gradually increase the port's capacity to 4-million TEUs (a standard measurement for cargo capacity, based on a 6.1m standard shipping container) per year through a phased development programme that includes:

- Comprehensive upgrades to operating systems, equipment, berths and yards.
- Integration of advanced digital Terminal Operating Systems (TOS) to improve efficiency and reduce turnaround times.
- Development of facilities capable of accommodating deep-sea and ultra-large container vessels.
- Direct integration of the port with the Free Zone and the surrounding industrial and logistics ecosystem.
- Implementation of the highest standards of safety, security and environmental sustainability in line with international best practices.

Total investment under the strategic partnership is expected to reach US2.7-billion. When fully operational, the redeveloped Misurata Free Zone Port will help solidify Libya's role as a regional supply chain hub linking Europe with North Africa and the African hinterland.

Globally competitive

"This partnership reflects the Misurata Free Zone's determination to build modern, globally competitive infrastructure that supports new industries, creates local jobs and strengthens Libya's position within regional and international supply chains," said Muhsin Sigutri, Chairman of the zone, at the signing ceremony.

"The Free Zone was established as a gateway for investment and growth, and today we take a decisive step toward realising that vision."

In his remarks, Prime Minister of Libya's Government of National Unity, Abdulhamid Aldabaiba, said the project "represents a strategic investment in Libya's economic future, places the country on the map of key Mediterranean hub ports, supports income diversification, creates tens of thousands of jobs, and strengthens international investors' confidence in the stability and attractiveness of the Libyan market."

The port currently handles 60–65% of Libya's container trade, making it the country's most important maritime gateway.

Relative stability

Libya is enjoying a period of relative stability following years of internal conflict that began in 2011 with the overthrow of long-time leader Muammar Gaddafi.

The African Development Bank's economic outlook for Libya is positive, with a projected growth rate of 4% in 2026, following on from good growth of more than 12% in 2025. This is contingent on political stability and moderate rising oil production. ■

La Libye modernise son plus grand port et sa zone franche

Le port de la zone franche de Misrata contribuera à consolider le rôle de la Libye en tant que centre névralgique des chaînes d'approvisionnement régionales.

PHOTO: MISURATA FREE ZONE PORT

La Libye, pays d'Afrique du Nord, entend transformer le port de la zone franche de Misurata, situé sur la côte méditerranéenne, en une plaque tournante logistique majeure et en un centre régional de transbordement.

Un accord signé en janvier 2026 avec deux partenaires internationaux représente le plus grand investissement dans les infrastructures non pétrolières en Libye depuis 2011, marquant une étape cruciale dans la reconstruction des infrastructures nationales et le renforcement de l'intégration du pays dans les chaînes d'approvisionnement régionales et mondiales.

Les deux partenaires sont Maha Capital Partners, basé au Qatar, et Terminal Investment Limited, la branche d'investissement et d'exploitation du groupe MSC, la plus grande compagnie de transport maritime de conteneurs au monde.

Selon un communiqué publié après la signature de l'accord, le partenariat vise à augmenter progressivement la capacité du port à 4 millions d'EVP (une mesure standard de la capacité de cargaison, basée sur un conteneur d'expédition standard de 6,1 m) par an à travers un programme de développement par étapes qui comprend :

- Des améliorations complètes des systèmes d'exploitation, des équipements, des postes à quai et des parcs à conteneurs.
- L'intégration de systèmes d'exploitation de terminal numériques avancés pour améliorer l'efficacité et réduire les temps de rotation.
- La construction d'infrastructures capables d'accueillir des navires de haute mer et des porte-conteneurs géants.
- L'intégration directe du port avec la zone franche et l'écosystème industriel et logistique environnant.
- La mise en œuvre des normes les plus élevées de sécurité, de sûreté et de durabilité environnementale conformément aux meilleures pratiques internationales.

L'investissement total dans le cadre de ce partenariat stratégique devrait atteindre 2,7 milliards de dollars américains. À pleine capacité, le port réaménagé de la zone franche de Misurata contribuera à consolider le rôle de la Libye en tant que plaque tournante régionale de la chaîne d'approvisionnement reliant l'Europe à l'Afrique du Nord et à l'intérieur du continent africain.

Compétitif à l'échelle mondiale

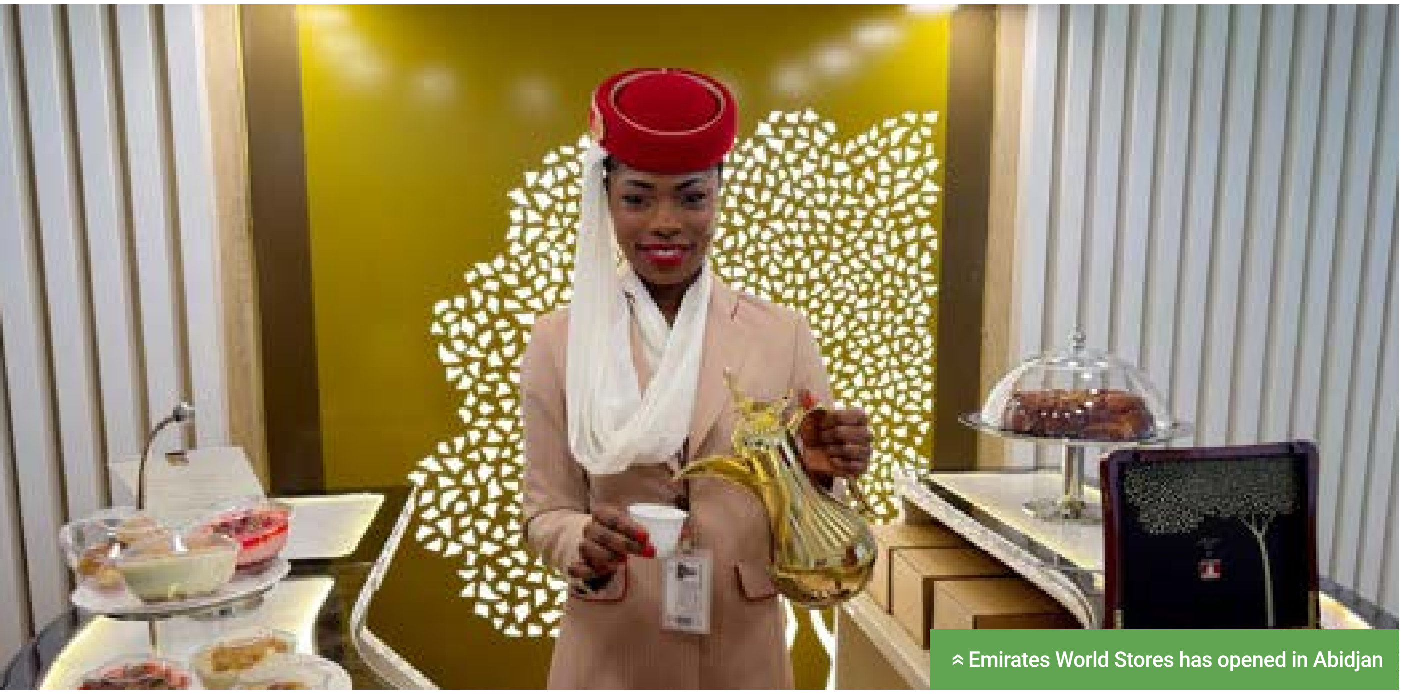
« Ce partenariat reflète la détermination de la zone franche de Misurata à bâtir une infrastructure moderne et compétitive à l'échelle mondiale qui soutient de nouvelles industries, crée des emplois locaux et renforce la position de la Libye au sein des chaînes d'approvisionnement régionales et internationales », a déclaré Muhsin Sigutri, président de la zone, lors de la cérémonie de signature.

Dans ses remarques, le Premier ministre du Gouvernement d'unité nationale de Libye, Abdulhamid Aldabaiba, a déclaré que le projet « représente un investissement stratégique dans l'avenir économique de la Libye, place le pays sur la carte des ports centraux clés de la Méditerranée, soutient la diversification des revenus, crée des dizaines de milliers d'emplois et renforce la confiance des investisseurs internationaux dans la stabilité et l'attractivité du marché libyen. »

Le port gère actuellement 60 à 65 % du trafic de conteneurs de la Libye, ce qui en fait la principale porte d'entrée maritime du pays. ■

Emirates takes its World Stores luxury retail concept to Côte d' Ivoire

Airline opens its 10th global flagship store in Abidjan as it expands its brand-engagement opportunities with global travellers.



Emirates World Stores has opened in Abidjan

PHOTO: EMIRATES

Dubai-based Emirates airlines is forging ahead with its Emirates World Stores retail concept and has hit a key expansion milestone with the opening of its 10th flagship store in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire.

More than just a retail store or upmarket passenger lounge, the Emirates World Stores concept is designed to be a retail destination.

According to industry website *Travel and Tour World*, since its debut in Dubai's Jumeirah district in late 2022, the concept has attracted over 1.4-million walk-in customers. "Why? Because it treats travel planning as an event rather than a chore," the publication says.

It continues: "In an era where most airlines are pushing customers toward cold, automated chatbots, Emirates is doing the opposite. They are inviting you in for a coffee and a conversation.

"For decades, the 'Emirates Experience' was something reserved for 35,000 feet in the air – a world of private suites, walnut-trimmed showers and the famous A380 onboard lounge. But as we move through 2026, the world's largest international airline is proving that you don't need a boarding pass to immerse yourself in luxury."

A statement from Emirates explains that no two stores are alike. Each carries its own charm, localised to the customer preferences of each market. In addition, strategic location assessment, footfall patterns and emerging consumer trends have guided store concept development.

Reinforcing a premium positioning strategy

"The newest store in Abidjan features an A380 onboard lounge and a Business Class seat, reinforcing Emirates' premium positioning and commitment to immersive retail experiences," the airline says.

Emirates' retail expansion strategy has a strong Africa focus, with global flagship store openings already completed in Nairobi, Casablanca and Cairo. In parallel, the airline has opened similar mid-sized concept travel stores in Accra and Mauritius, and plans to open in Cape Town during 2026.

Comments Adnan Kazim, Emirates' Deputy President and Chief Commercial Officer: "As we accelerate the global rollout of our Emirates World Stores concept, we are cultivating opportunities for travellers and our travel partners to engage with our brand, immerse themselves in our iconic products and experiment with cutting-edge tech to imagine what their journeys could look like."

Brand equity

Emirates is ranked as the world's fourth most valuable airline brand in the Brand Finance *Airlines 50 2025* report.

The airline's brand value surged by 27% to US$8.4-billion last year, driven by its award-winning in-flight service, strong financial performance, extensive route expansion and high-profile sponsorship campaigns – including partnerships with European soccer giants Real Madrid, Arsenal and AC Milan.

Delta airlines is the world's most valuable airline brand. United airlines is second and American Airlines is third. All are from the US. ■

Editor's Note:
This article was compiled just as hostilities broke out in the Middle East. It is likely that, in the short term at least, Emirates' brand equity and brand-building activities will be impacted by the fallout.