

The Moment Economy shows limits to trend-jacking marketing

Successful brands blend timely campaigns with consistent identity and reliable experience.

Gemma Calvert and Gita De Beer

In the past year, Singapore's social media feeds have been flooded with the latest dessert and snack crazes.

One week, it is banana-pudding inspired cakes and gelato-style tiramisu in sunlit cafes in Tanjong Pagar and Jalan Besar, every table pausing for Instagram. The next, matcha-pistachio croissants and lava cakes at hip bakeries in Joo Chiat and Tiong Bahru, sliced open for the camera.

Most recently, the "Dubai chewy cookie" – a thick, mochi-like cookie that travelled from South Korea – has appeared in pop-ups across the island, with customers filming the stretchy bite for TikTok before taking the next mouthful.

Even Chef Ahn Sung-jae, a judge on Netflix's Culinary Class Wars and chef-owner of Mosu Seoul, South Korea's only three-Michelin-starred restaurant, joined the trend with his daughter, posting a YouTube video demonstrating how to bake them. The clip drew 9.1 million views within a month.

This Chinese New Year, limited-run snacks such as playful "Huatssants" and premium bak kwa flights generate queues and same-day sell-outs, fuelled by a handful of viral posts.

These are small outlets, but the playbook mirrors one adopted by many large brands: design for a short spike of visibility, then move quickly to the next moment.

THE MOMENT ECONOMY

We are living in what might be called the Moment Economy – an environment where success is defined by what trends this week, rather than by which brands consumers still choose five years from now.

Long-running analysis by the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising shows that campaigns skewed heavily towards short-term activation may produce quick sales spikes but weaker long-term brand growth. The recommended balance remains roughly 60 per cent on long-term brand building and 40 per cent on activation. But in practice, many firms invert that ratio.



A bakery in Seoul with its hot-selling "Dubai chewy cookie". Novelty still has a role. A well-timed moment can attract, surprise and even delight. But it cannot substitute for the slower work of being reliable, say the writers. ST FILE PHOTO

Digital platforms reward speed and novelty. Campaigns are optimised to peak quickly. Performance is measured in impressions and engagement spikes that flare up and fade just as fast. In this environment, it is easier to be seen, but harder to be remembered.

Marketing budgets reflect this shift. Dentsu's Global Ad Spend Forecasts report released in December 2025 covering 56 markets worldwide projected digital advertising spend to grow by 6.7 per cent in 2026 –

representing 68.7 per cent of total global ad investment – while traditional broadcast television continued to decline. Paid social and search – both geared towards short-term results – are top budget priorities.

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There is a simple psychological reason novelty works. The human brain is wired to notice change. Limited-time offers, unexpected humour and bold visuals trigger curiosity. But attention does not equate to loyalty.

FOCUS ON TRUST

A recent Asia-Pacific consumer study commissioned by Twilio

found that 56 per cent of respondents would stop doing business with brands they did not trust, even if alternatives were more expensive or less convenient. Trust, not trendiness, shapes commitment.

Behavioural economist Daniel Kahneman's work suggests that while consumers may enjoy stimulation, routine decisions involving money, safety or daily convenience often favour familiarity. Familiar brands reduce uncertainty. They feel safer.

This is clearest in financial services. In the first half of 2025, Singapore recorded almost 20,000 scam cases and lost about \$456 million. A 2024 survey found that 92 per cent of retail banking customers were concerned about online fraud.

In such an environment, a bank's promise of security is not marketing copy. It is an operational test.

When Singapore's largest bank suffered repeated digital outages in 2023, leaving 2.5 million transactions unprocessed, regulators imposed restrictions and capital penalties. Senior executives took pay cuts. The episode showed how quickly trust can be shaken, and how visibly it must be rebuilt.

The lesson extends beyond banks. Reputation is built slowly, through consistent delivery, yet swiftly damaged by episodic operational failure. Singapore's standing as a safe, stable and predictable place to do business was not gifted, it was hard earned across six decades. As a financial centre and aviation hub, its credibility rests less on marketing and more on whether systems work when tested – by geopolitical uncertainty, supply chain shocks or worse. That credibility, accumulated over decades, can unravel quickly if short-term visibility is prioritised over reputational consistency. Trust, once lost, is costly to restore.

Brands with staying power recognise this instinctively, prioritising consistency over attention-grabbing communications. Their visuals, language and service experience align across years rather than weeks. Each interaction aims to reinforce the last, building the accumulated proof that trust requires.

If there is one lesson to take away, it is this: The Moment Economy tempts organisations into chasing brief bursts of attention, but what sustains them in the long term is far less dramatic. A brand becomes trusted when it behaves recognisably over time, when its app works as expected, its service resolves problems without friction, and its promises are matched by experience.

Novelty still has a role. A well-timed moment can attract, surprise and even delight. But it cannot substitute for the slower work of being reliable. Consumers are drawn to what is new, but they commit to what they can count on.

• Gemma Calvert is a professor of marketing and deputy director of the Nanyang Centre for Marketing and Technology at Nanyang Business School, NTU Singapore. Gita De Beer is chair of The Marketing Society Singapore and global director of strategic initiatives at Heineken.