

The CMOcircle

A Global Room of Distinct Voices

CMO in the Age of Experience Economy

Circle 03: Gurugram | 15th May 2026



 Locobuzz

VERBINDEN

Table of Contents

A practical exploration of how today's CMOs are rethinking growth through experience-led marketing.

- 01 About TheCMOcircle
- 02 Who's in the Room
- 03 The Question That Opened the Room
- 04 Shifts in the Customer Reality
- 05 Implications for the Modern CMO
- 06 Operating Frameworks for Experience-Led Growth
- 07 Final Reflections

About TheCMOcircle

TheCMOcircle began with a simple realization: CMOs are among the most connected leaders, yet often lack spaces for honest, no-posturing conversations.

Today's marketing leaders are expected to drive growth, navigate complexity, protect brand credibility, and influence across functions, often all at once. However, most forums reward visibility over vulnerability.

TheCMOcircle was created to change that. It is a deliberately small, invitation-only gathering built for peers to share experiences, challenge assumptions, and learn from one another.

The Bengaluru Circle was the first edition and explored trust as a new KPI. **The Mumbai Circle** examined personalization in an age of volume explosion. Building on these themes, the **third Circle in Gurugram** focused on how customer experience reshapes the role of marketing and redefines the modern CMO's mandate.



Who's in the Room

The circle brought together marketers across industries and experiences, united by a common question: What does leadership look like when experience becomes the brand?



Alok Agarwal

Chief Marketing Officer,
Orient Bell



Angela Toppo

Cofounder and Chief
Marketing Officer,
Be.



Ashish Aggarwal

Chief Marketing Officer,
True Balance



Chirag Jagwani

Chief Marketing Officer
FIXDERMA



Kriti Awasthi

Marketing Director IMEA,
Whole Earth Brands



Nidhi Rastogi

Director, Head of Marketing,
UNIQLO India



Rachit Nayyar

Regional Lead EMEA- Cloud
Marketing, Google Operations
Center



Ravpreet Ganesh

Chief Marketing Officer,
Rukam Capital



Rini Goel

Head of Marketing,
Loopie



Rohit Gupta

Marketing Lead - Consumer
Division, AMD



Shubhodip Das

Head - Marketing & Sales Operation
Management, Asia Pulp & Paper



Vijay Nair

Vice President and Head
Branded IP, HT Media Group

The Question That Opened the Room

The evening began with a simple question:

“Describe one brand experience you still remember — good or bad.”

Marketing leaders revealed more than any formal framework. It was evident that taglines, media spends, or awareness campaigns were not the ones that were recalled. They recalled moments of frustration, relief, care, neglect, surprise, and trust.

That opening exercise quietly established the playbook's central thesis: People remember brand experiences emotionally, memory outlives advertising, and brands are often judged or loved in moments of vulnerability

This also set the context for the evening's theme:

“CMO in the Age of Experience Economy ”

What follows is a distilled summary of the patterns, frameworks, and operating priorities that emerged from that conversation.



Shifts in the Customer Reality

The conversation revealed a common shift: customers no longer experience brands in neat stages, but through fluid, emotional, and cumulative moments that shape memory and choice.

1. The Funnel Is No Longer an Adequate Model

Several speakers challenged the continued dominance of the funnel as the default framing device for marketing strategy. When teams are built only for awareness, consideration, and conversion, they underinvest in the touchpoints that actually shape loyalty and advocacy. Conversion still matters, but a linear funnel can no longer explain how value is created in modern journeys.



Ravpreet Ganesh:

“Marketers need the courage to invest in moments that may not necessarily ‘convert.’ Customers no longer move linearly; they discover, validate, revisit, and decide in unpredictable loops.”



Rohit Gupta:

“The customer journey is becoming more fluid across validation, discovery, purchase, communities, etc. Decisions are now a cumulative experience shaped by YouTube reviews, Reddit threads, sustainability commitments, and after-sales promises.”

2. Experiences That Stay Are Intensely Emotional

Customers rarely remember average interactions. They remember moments charged with emotion, whether driven by vulnerability, relief, frustration, surprise, or delight. These moments often arise when a brand understands what the customer is feeling or needing in a specific context and responds thoughtfully. Brand value is often shaped by well-designed moments that customers carry forward and retell.



Kriti Awasthi:

“Brands that make the customer journey wholesome, especially with an emotional connection, are the ones customers keep coming back to. It determines the customer stickiness.”



Angela Toppo:

“If we reach out to our clockwork consumers and make their journey even more special, they would be our brand’s voice. Word of mouth works better than Meta or Google Ads.”

3. Trust Is Emerging as the Real KPI

Trust emerged as one of the room’s strongest themes. Trust is built when the brand shows up at the time of risk, friction, or vulnerability in the customer’s life. A single episode of neglect can permanently reshape a customer’s decision, while positive moments create loyalty that lasts for years.



Nidhi Rastogi:

“The concept of ‘Simple made better’ is rooted in customer insight and the overall experience. That is what builds trust and turns customers into loyalists.”



Alok Agarwal:

“Marketing is all about doing things right when nobody’s watching. It’s difficult, and people don’t get recognized for it. It’s not in your KPI, but you have to.”

4. Experience Is Not Reserved for Luxury Brands

The discussion moved decisively away from the assumption that “experience economy” is mostly about premium retail, luxury hospitality, or aspirational categories. Some argued that commodity and low-interest categories are often the richest spaces for experience innovation because expectations are low and differentiation is usually weak.

The room landed on a strong proposition: there is no such thing as a commodity from the customer’s perspective. It’s how a brand chooses to design the experience around it.



Shubhodip Das:

“One can reposition a commodity into a premium or luxury brand. It all depends on what story you create, where you position, how you position, and the emotional connection you create with your customer.”



Chirag Jagwani:

“At the end of the day, the product is the most important thing. You can sell a bad one once, but not twice. Going deep into what the product actually solves and telling that truth consistently can build loyalty.”

5. Consistency Is a Growth Mechanism

One of the strongest strategic points made in the room was that consistency compounds. When brands show up with the same promise, tone, and experience over time, they stop competing only for attention and start occupying mental and cultural space.

This pattern reframes consistency from a branding cliché into a growth mechanism. In an experience economy, consistency across product, communication, service, and behavior gives customers a stable story to carry forward. Without it, every new campaign must start from zero.



Rachit Nayyar:

“Marketing can’t stop at acquisition because trust is built across the entire lifecycle. It is consistent service and transparency that turn one sale into repeat business.”



Ashish Aggarwal:

“A series of experiences pushes the customer to make decisions subconsciously. The experience should be continuous, not a one-time thing.”

6. After-sales Is a Strong Driver of Customer Experience

The strongest brand memories are often created after purchase, where support, service recovery, delivery, and execution come into play. Throughout the discussion, examples ranged from support failures and poor escalation handling to thoughtful interventions that created lasting loyalty.

Customers do not separate strategy from execution. If the last mile fails, the brand fails. Post-purchase moments are where the brand becomes real.



Vijay Nair:

“Go-to-market is outdated. Staying in the market is what every marketing leader will have to continuously engage in. Cross-functional coordination involving product, marketing, and after-sales is important for the brand story.”



Rini Goel:

“Brands need to ensure people don’t have a broken experience through after-sales. Quality and features aside, that’s one of the reasons people choose one brand over the others.”



Implications for the Modern CMO

As customer behavior becomes more experience-led, the CMO's role must expand from managing campaigns to diagnosing, orchestrating, and improving the end-to-end brand experience

From the Pharma Rep to the Physician

The experience economy asks the CMO to move from 'pharma rep' to 'physician'. The pharma rep pushes messages and features, chasing scripts, samples, and conversions. The physician begins by diagnosing reality: context, friction, and the problem beneath the decision. Success is no longer about closed acquisitions, but relationships strengthened over time.

From Campaign Owner to Experience Orchestrator

The traditional view of the CMO places marketing at the center of communication, media, and brand-building. But in the experience economy, the CMO must increasingly work across product, customer experience, support, sales, hiring, retail operations, and culture. The CMO must be responsible for identifying and addressing the customer experience breakpoints.

From Conversion Logic to Relationship Logic

Customers do not live in campaign cycles, but in continuing contexts where products remain in use. Brand memory evolves across months and years. That's why the CMO has to move from "campaign planning" to "relationship planning." Brands must invest in moments that may not produce immediate conversion but deepen salience and affection.

From Isolated Metrics to Enterprise-Level Outcomes

Most organizations prioritize activities like reach and awareness. They measure them through numerous tools, touchpoints, and data. However, what actually matters is the lived experiences that affect retention, repeat behavior, resolution quality, sentiment, recommendation, and trust. If not addressed well, it raises the Customer Acquisition Cost (CAC).

Operating Frameworks for Experience-Led Growth

To translate these insights into action, the circle arrived at a set of practical frameworks for designing, measuring, and strengthening experience-led growth.

● Framework 1: The Fluid Experience Journey Model

Customer journeys are now fluid loops, not linear funnels. Decisions form through reviews, communities, product use, and service interactions that repeat over time. Planning and measurement must focus on tracking repeat behavior, sentiment, retention, and validation across the journey.

● Framework 2: The Promise–Delivery Gap Bridger

The biggest marketing challenge is to identify the gaps between brand promises and customer experiences. A compelling brand promise matters only when delivery consistently lives up to it. This bridge can fail through poor recovery, broken last-mile execution, or fragmented operations. CMOs must build mechanisms to close them.

● Framework 3: The Experience Differentiation Lens

Experience advantage is not limited to premium brands. Three intervention models matter most: remove friction, elevate meaning, and design for repeatability. Make the product easier to choose, use, trust, or remember. If the intervention improves lived experience, it is working; if it only makes the communication louder, it is not real experience design.

● Framework 4: The Loyalty-Building Experience Engine

Loyalty is built through a series of reliable, respectful, and valuable lived experiences, not through a single campaign. Each team across product, service, pricing, escalation, packaging, and communication contributes to these experiences. When trust is high, customers are more likely to be loyal.

● Framework 5: The New Success Math

Success cannot be judged through top-of-the-funnel outputs in the experience economy. Reach, impressions, and acquisition are incomplete without tracking trust building, churn reduction, repeat behavior, and long-term customer value. Measure what the customer carried forward, not just what marketing delivered.

Final Reflections

| From Insights to Action

The third edition of TheCMOcircle surfaced a pattern language for modern marketing leadership in the age of the experience economy.

Customers do not remember brands as positioning statements, but as stories. Stories about moments when the brand delivered the promise or disappointed them. Those moments shape reviews, recommendations, and future decisions.

For CMOs, the task is no longer only to craft the message, but to shape the experiences that make the message believable.

A Closing Action Agenda for CMOs

Here's a practical agenda for CMOs in the age of experience economy:

01

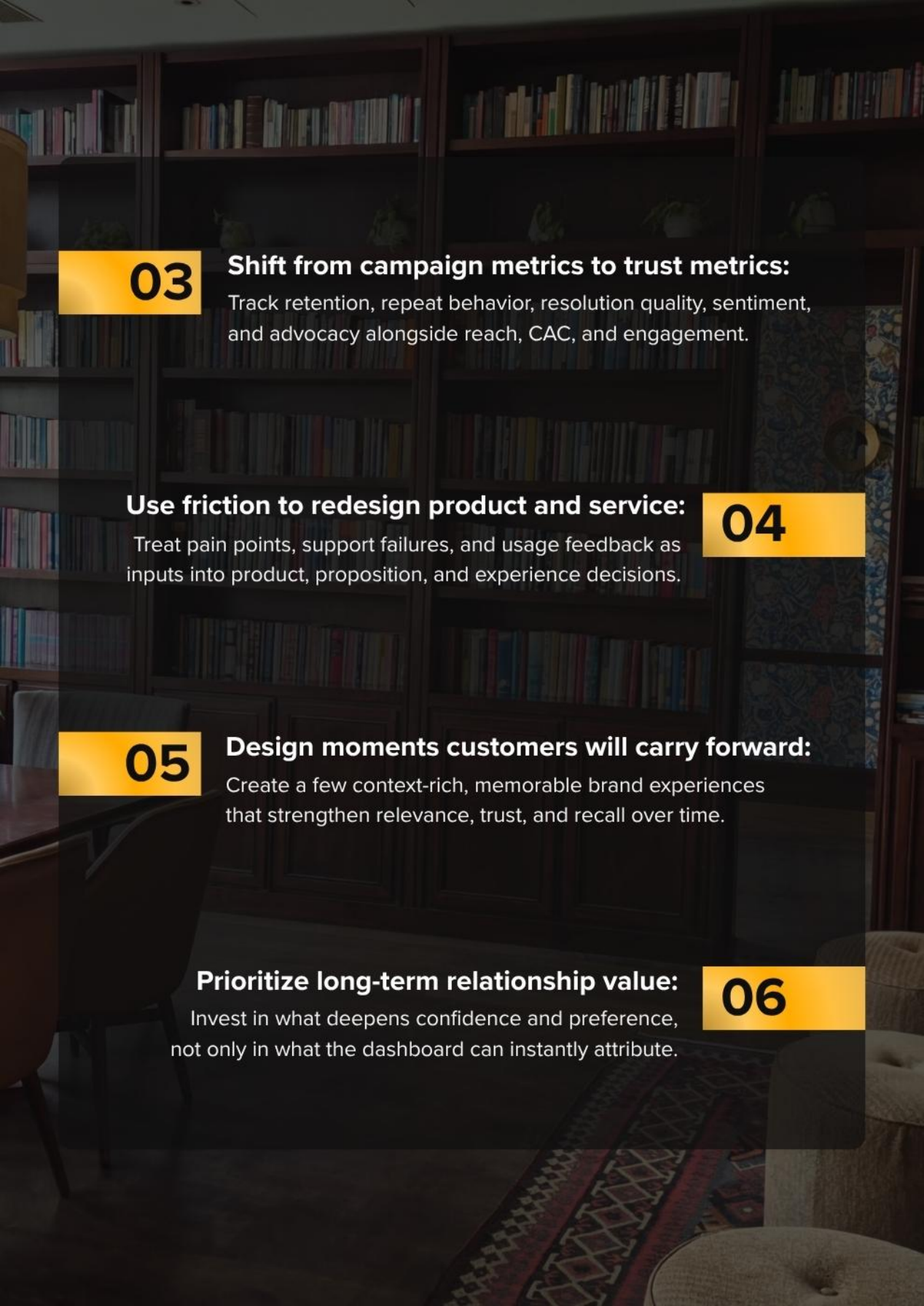
Identify emotionally loaded moments:

Map the points in the customer journey where emotion, risk, and memory are highest. E.g., complaints, cancellations, onboarding, replacements, and service recovery.

Run a promise-delivery gap review:

Create a recurring cross-functional mechanism to examine where the brand promise breaks in the lived customer experience.

02

A background image of a library or study. It features tall wooden bookshelves filled with books. In the foreground, there is a patterned rug and a portion of a chair. The lighting is soft, creating a warm atmosphere.

03

Shift from campaign metrics to trust metrics:

Track retention, repeat behavior, resolution quality, sentiment, and advocacy alongside reach, CAC, and engagement.

Use friction to redesign product and service:

Treat pain points, support failures, and usage feedback as inputs into product, proposition, and experience decisions.

04

05

Design moments customers will carry forward:

Create a few context-rich, memorable brand experiences that strengthen relevance, trust, and recall over time.

Prioritize long-term relationship value:

Invest in what deepens confidence and preference, not only in what the dashboard can instantly attribute.

06

Where the Circle Goes From Here



TheCMOCircle is structured enough to spark meaningful discussions and let insights emerge organically. Without the pressure to perform, leaders share, engage, and challenge ideas respectfully.

The next edition of TheCMOCircle will take place in Bengaluru, built on the same principles: a closed-door setting, a carefully selected cohort, and a focus on the leadership challenges that matter most.

Senior marketing leaders interested in participating, collaborating, or learning more can reach out to us at: TheCMOCircle@verbinden.ai

Event Hosts



Shubhii Agarawal
Co-Founder & COO,
Locobuzz



Vinay Kumar Jagadeesh
Co-Founder & CEO,
Verbinden



Vishal Agarawal
Co-Founder,
Locobuzz



Divya Mishra
Manager - Growth & Partnerships,
Verbinden



Saakshi Jaswani
Product & Digital Marketer,
Locobuzz

The
CMOcircle
A Global Room of Distinct Voices

Don't miss what's next

Upcoming Events | Latest Updates | Announcements

Scan the QR Code or Visit:



www.thecmocircle.org

 **Locobuzz**

VERBINDEN