



**THE TRUTH ABOUT
GLOBAL BRANDS**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

WHAT MAKES A BRAND GLOBAL TODAY?

Global brands are entering a new era. For decades, scale, visibility, and consistency defined global brand strength, but today, the environment brands operate in has fundamentally changed. Trust in institutions is declining, economic pressure is reshaping consumer behaviour, cultural influence is becoming increasingly decentralized, and AI is transforming how people discover, evaluate, and interact with brands.

In this fragmented and fast-moving landscape, the traditional rules of global brand building are no longer enough. This third wave of McCann's Truth About Global Brands study — developed in partnership with Economist Enterprise — reveals the new playbook for modern global brand building.

Based on research across 20,713 people in 20 markets*, alongside interviews with 15+ leading global CMOs and brand leaders, the study identifies the emergence of a new environment we describe as multimodal globality: a world where culture and influence no longer move in linear or top-down ways but flow dynamically across platforms, communities, creators, and networks.

As a result, brands are facing three major headwinds reshaping growth:

- Declining trust
- Economic pressure
- Increasing global fragmentation

Together, they reveal a fundamental shift in the rules of global brand building. In a fragmented, AI-shaped world, growth depends on a brand's ability to create belief at scale across culture, community, and context. The next era of global brand building will be defined not simply by scale or visibility but by a new playbook for growth.

1. ERADICATE DOUBT

2. FIND FUTURE AUDIENCES

3. HARNESS CULTURAL FLOWS

*Data collected by McCann Truth Central
November 2025 – January 2026 across 20
Markets [n=20,713]

Markets included: USA, UK, Australia, Brazil,
Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy,
India, Japan, Mexico, Spain, UAE, Saudi
Arabia, Philippines, Singapore, South Korea,
Thailand, New Zealand.

THE NEW PLAYBOOK FOR MODERN BRAND BUILDING

McCANN

1. ERADICATE DOUBT

“Trust is harder to earn, easier to lose, and more expensive than ever.” – B2C Marketing Executive, Retail

In a world overwhelmed by information, consumers increasingly navigate a “truth maze” of reviews, creators, algorithms, and competing signals.

Trust is now one of the most commercially important drivers of growth, with 80% of people globally saying they actively choose brands they trust, even if they cost more, while 69% have stopped using a brand because they no longer trusted it.

The brands that succeed will be those that go beyond building trust to systematically eradicate doubt.

2. FIND FUTURE AUDIENCES

“How do we break through all the clutter of everything happening, and what can brands do to connect with customers in a better, more meaningful way?” – B2C Marketing Executive, Manufacturing

Future growth will increasingly come from audiences that are moving economically, culturally, and aspirationally.

The rise of the global middle class — projected by the World Economic Forum to reach 5 billion people representing \$62 trillion in annual spending power by 2030 — is reshaping how people express identity, status, and ambition. But within this broader middle-class expansion sits an even more important opportunity for brands: the “Upward Class.” These are people who have moved beyond the social class they were born into and who

increasingly see brands not just as products but as symbols of progress.”

With its 1.02 billion members, the Upward Class represents over \$29.5 trillion in annual spending.

In this context, brands must move beyond traditional segmentation models toward a deeper understanding of the motivations, behaviours, and cultural signals shaping future demand.

3. HARNESS CULTURAL FLOWS

“Culture is going through these massive shifts and how do brands maintain an ongoing relationship with people? And what’s the right way?” – Global Brand Leader, Technology

Culture no longer moves from a single dominant center. It is fast, fragmented, and increasingly multidirectional. Today, 20 countries are seen as influentially shaping global culture, up from 12 in 2018, while 69% of people globally believe we are evolving toward a global culture. Traditional global systems built around top-down distribution or bottom-up adaptation are becoming less effective. Instead, brands must build ideas designed for circulation across shared values, communities, and cultural networks.

Ultimately, the future of global brand building will not be defined simply by scale or visibility but by a brand’s ability to create belief, relevance, and meaning across increasingly complex systems of influence.

In the age of multimodal globality, the brands that grow will be those that eradicate doubt, understand future audiences, and harness cultural flows.

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THE B2B PERSPECTIVE

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B2B brands are navigating a fundamental tension: the world is more connected than ever, yet more fractured in its loyalties, institutions and sense of shared truth.

To understand what this means for how brands earn the confidence of business leaders, Economist Enterprise extended McCann's Truth About Global Brands research — drawing on a global sample of 20,713 respondents, with a dedicated analysis of 1,798 senior decision-makers across 20 markets and in-depth conversations with chief marketing and communications officers at some of the world's largest companies.

Three guiding principles emerged from our B2B analysis:

- Lean into transparency and truth to rebuild trust
- Strike the balance between legacy and innovation
- Decode new signals of influence

1. LEAN INTO TRANSPARENCY AND TRUTH TO BUILD TRUST

Trust has eroded globally since 2018. 56% of the general public say brands are less truthful than 20 years ago — a dramatic reversal from 2018. Yet, B2B decision-makers are markedly more optimistic: 45% say brands are more truthful, a 20-percentage-point improvement over the general population. This confidence extends to AI: 85% of B2B decision-makers trust brands that use AI and they are 20 points more likely than the general public to trust AI-generated content.

That trust is conditional, however. Over half (54%) of B2B decision-makers say transparency around AI use is the most important factor in brand trustworthiness, while 44% said helping audiences understand what is true and what is not is important.

Notably, just 11% say avoiding AI altogether would help — compared with 24% of the general public. The direction of travel is unambiguous: AI adoption is expected, but accountability for how it is used is non-negotiable for B2B decision-makers.

"I think the brands that prioritise transparency and ethical governance are expecting or experiencing some kind of a valuation and higher customer loyalty..." — Senior Vice President at a Global Information Services Company

2. STRIKE THE BALANCE BETWEEN LEGACY AND INNOVATION

For all the disruption reshaping B2B markets, one expectation has remained constant: business leaders want to work with brands that make complexity more manageable. Almost universally (92%), B2B decision-makers say it is important for global brands to act as reliable, trustworthy guides and 79% of B2B leaders have discontinued a brand relationship due to a loss of trust. B2B decision-makers are signalling a clear expectation for brands to demonstrate credibility, consistency and integrity over time.

Heritage still carries weight — 72% of all respondents say a long-standing brand is more meaningful than a new one — yet

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B2B decision-makers are more receptive to novelty than the wider public (37% vs. 28%). The opportunity lies in pairing operational excellence and credibility with dynamism and forward-momentum.

"A strong brand acts as a trust signal..."
– CMO at a Global Financial Services Company

3. DECODE NEW SIGNALS OF INFLUENCE

B2B growth is less about audience expansion and more about understanding how decisions are actually made. Procurement is increasingly a distributed decision-making process, with networks of stakeholders, each with different priorities and levels of influence, shaping decisions.

Reaching the right buyer is no longer enough; brands must map who shapes decisions and how confidence travels across organisations. In this context, brand values have become a direct commercial input: 85% of B2B decision-makers say brand values outweigh price.

Alongside this internal complexity, the cultural operating environment has shifted. Almost nine in ten B2B decision-makers (86%) see culture converging globally, yet most organisations are still structured around regions and hierarchies that often impede agile response. B2B leaders are increasingly shaped by the speed and fluidity they experience as consumers — and they hold the brands they engage with professionally to the same standard.

"You need a clear framework. Vision and purpose come from senior management. Culture and brand need input from local teams. This framework sets boundaries, like a highway. Within those boundaries, teams can adapt to local regulations, language, and culture. That flexibility is essential."
– CMO at a Global Financial Services Company

The research points to four imperatives for B2B brands seeking to compete in a volatile, multi-stakeholder world:

- Build credibility at scale, across multiple stakeholders and markets
- Provide clarity in complexity, helping buyers navigate uncertainty and risk
- Signal innovation and progress — not just stability
- Operate with the cultural awareness and speed needed to stay relevant

In a world defined by fragmentation and distrust, the decisive advantage is not just what a brand sells — it is what a brand stands for. The B2B organisations that pull ahead will be those that earn conviction across entire buying networks, hold a consistent identity from boardroom to market, and move with enough speed and cultural fluency to stay credible as the ground keeps shifting.

To learn more, reach out to truthcentral@mccann.com

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