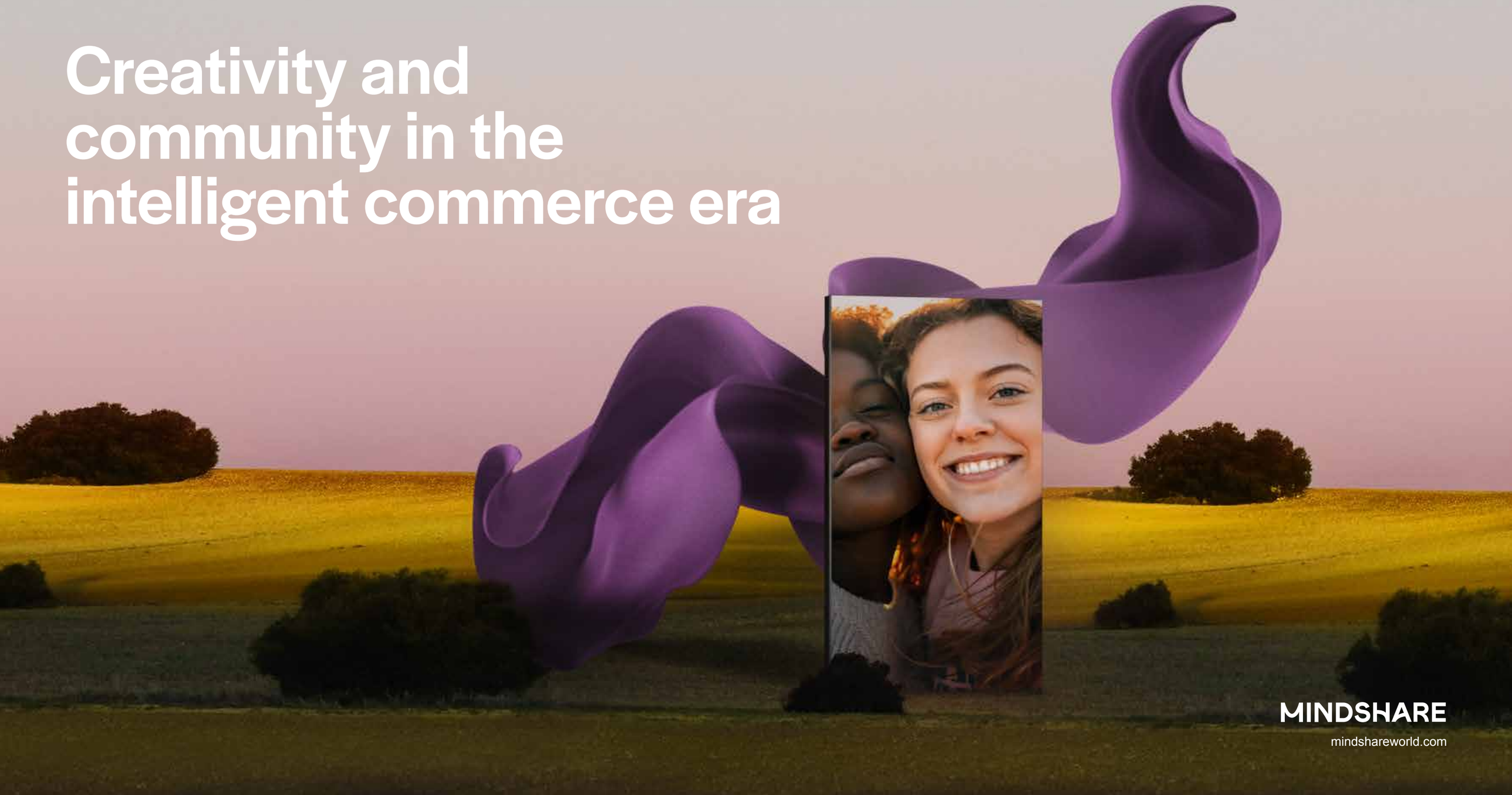
Creativity and community in the intelligent commerce era



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Introduction

Commerce is changing.

We're moving from a commerce world characterised by simple transactions to one that is truly connected, AI-enabled, and more human than ever. This world is being built on intelligent insights that provide new levels of understanding into the motivations, mindsets and emotions that drive purchase decisions across platforms.

These insights are redefining how creativity in commerce can build long-term brand connections and drive outcomes – not just with individuals but with entire communities. As WARC Media's 2023 Global Ad Trends report details, **the second biggest driver of marketing effectiveness (behind brand size) is creativity, delivering 12x greater return on investment (ROI).**

Whether it's transforming commerce into entertainment or creating interactive and immersive consumer experiences, this new wave of commerce requires strategies that drive consumer decision making at every stage of the purchase journey, across all touchpoints.

This report explores the evolution of commerce. In each chapter, we'll look at the present and future of commerce. We'll see the shift from brands focused on individual consumer needs to a recognition of the decision-making power of communities. We'll investigate how the use of new AI technologies and data-driven tools are empowering brands to develop intelligent insights around consumers and the different worlds they inhabit.

We'll join the dots between ever-evolving platforms and investigate how creativity is being used in commerce to create enhanced tailored consumer experiences and seamless consumer journeys that deliver growth.

The relationship between brands and consumers is shifting. Welcome to the era of intelligent, creative and community-driven commerce.

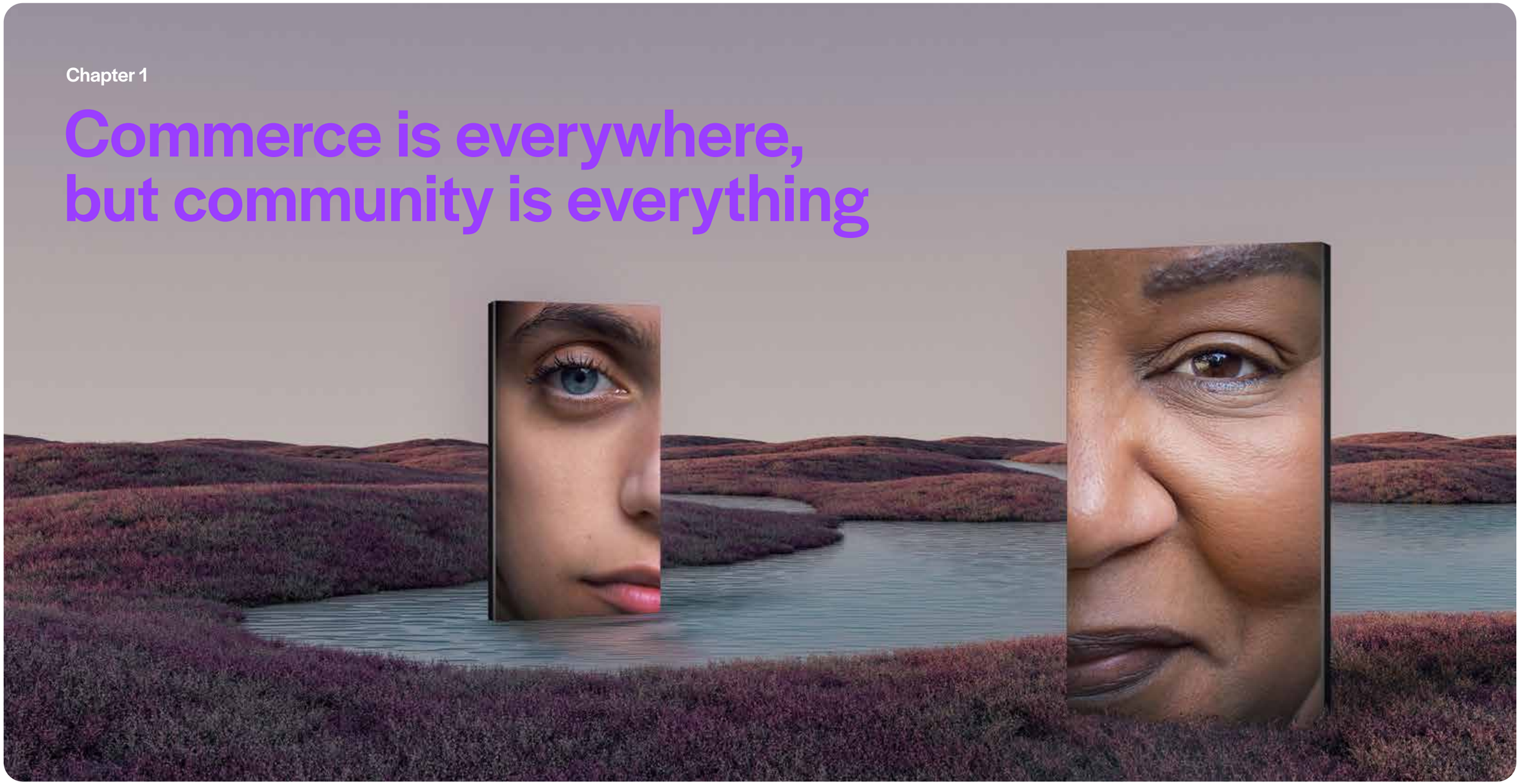
Adam Gerhart, Global CEO, Mindshare

Contributors

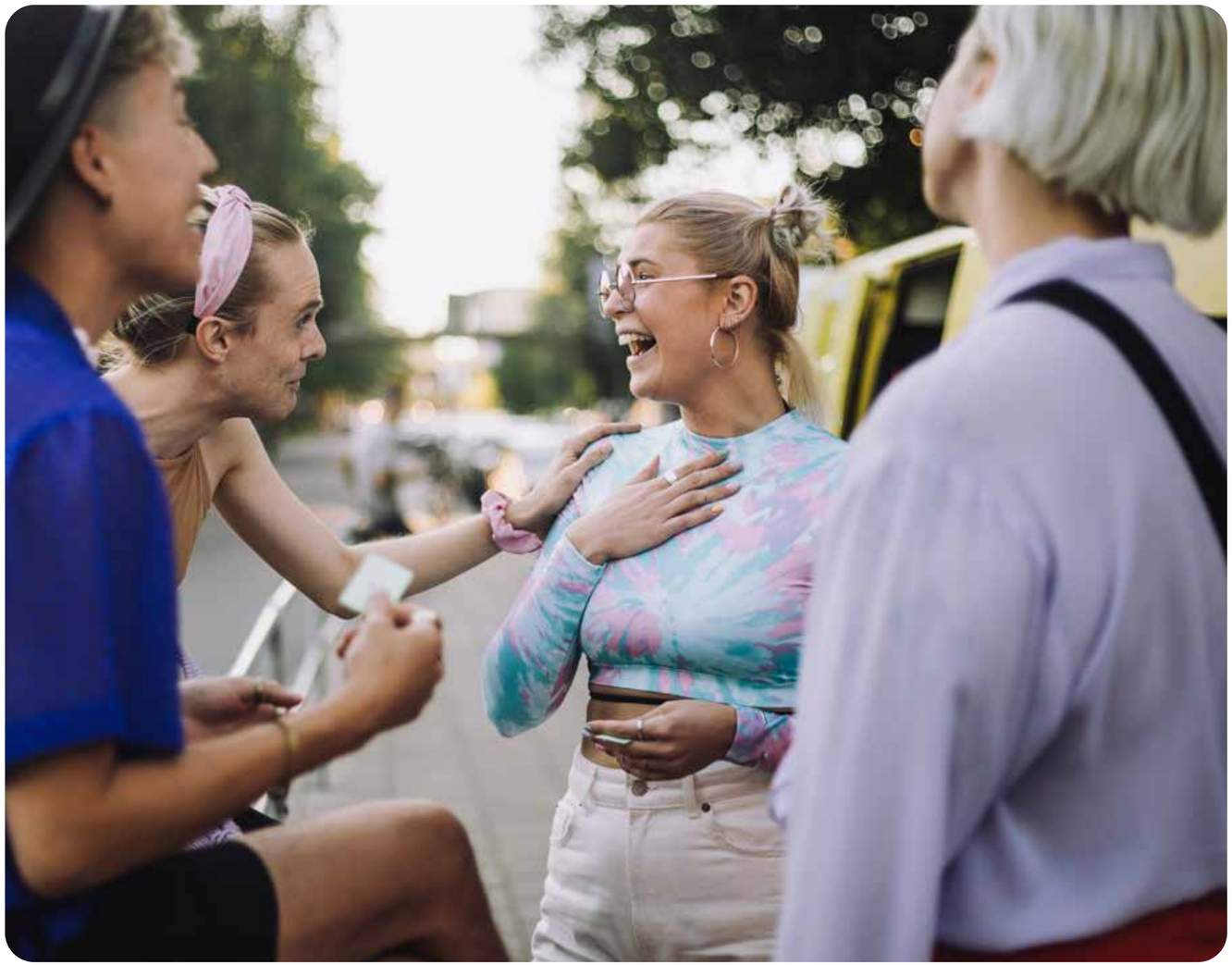
Amin Lakhani, CEO, South Asia, Mindshare, **Daniel Hulme**, CEO, Satalia, **Debbie Ellison**, Global Chief Digital Officer, VML Commerce, **Elisabeth Menze**, Partner, Global Performance and Digital Commerce, Mindshare, **Harry Hugo, Co-Founder**, The Goat Agency, **Jeff Malmad**, Global Head of Commerce, Mindshare, **Rob Reilly**, Chief Creative Officer, WPP, **Tom diSapia**, Global Chief Strategy Officer, Mindshare

Chapter 1

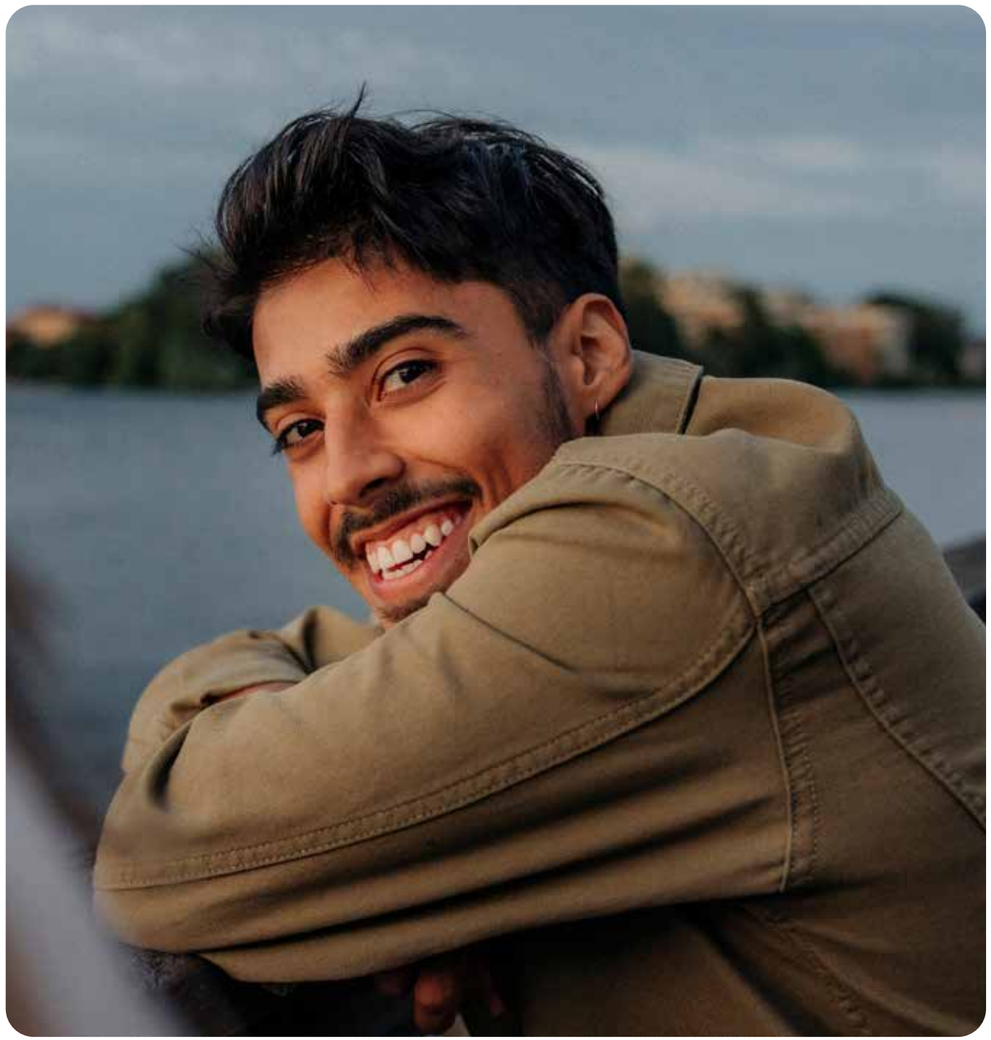
Commerce is everywhere, but community is everything



Commerce is no longer an individual activity. It's increasingly community-led.



- We might not be conscious of it, but in one way or another we're all part of different communities – through the shows we love, the teams we follow, the memes we share, or the way we vote.
- There are new opportunities for brands to tap into the worlds, fandoms or subcultures communities inhabit, across platforms and within channels.
- Brands will need to create dedicated spaces for communities to thrive, and find authentic ways to offer value specific to those communities.
- According to data from Sprout Social, 76% of consumers are more likely to buy from brands that they feel connected to over competitors.
- By recognising consumers' social identities and offering meaningful commerce experiences that reinforce their community values and interests, brands can establish authentic, lasting relationships and create greater opportunities for long-term sustainable growth.



How communities can drive sales by over 100%

Communities are an important part of our social identities. From the music we love to the products we buy, they shape our perception of ourselves and others, and influence what we buy and how.

According to our #ID Culture: The Power of Communities report **almost half (46%) of consumers say their community influences their decisions and behaviours.** With commerce increasingly becoming a form of cultural expression and a community signifier, brands can unlock the influence and collective spending power of these groups.

But building connections that can entice communities goes beyond just social commerce. It requires authenticity and a deep understanding of group values and interests. This is at the heart of community commerce.

Brands have shown the potential of engaging audiences around particular interests, trending hashtags or creative stories. When influential content creator Emily Mariko kickstarted the #salmonricebowl TikTok trend, sushi restaurant Itsu capitalised on the cultural moment with its own creative posts, resulting in +108% sales of its seaweed thins.

Similarly, in Southeast Asia, WPP capitalised on the powerful influence of K-pop megastars BLACKPINK's Gen Z fanbase to create a multi-touchpoint strategy for Oreo. By launching a brand collaboration that tapped into the cultural impact of BLACKPINK, WPP converted this community of fans into consumers.

Sales of the Oreo cookies skyrocketed by 29.7%, with the limited edition black and pink Oreos achieving a 7x increase in resale value.

But where do we find communities? Everywhere

Whether these communities are offline or online, self-organised or influencer-led, brands need to recognise this shift from an individual to a collective mindset.

The visibility of communities across both physical and digital worlds presents an opportunity for brands to deliver tailored experiences across every touchpoint.

However, by creating dedicated community spaces, brands can foster a sense of belonging and commerce opportunities.

According to our #ID Culture: The Power of Communities report, **46% of people are using more exclusive and specialised platforms to interact with their communities.**

AXE capitalised on this insight during the launch of its new premium line of fragrances targeted towards Gen Z males. The brand identified the intersection between anime and rap fans as inspiration for a distinct omnichannel experience for this community.

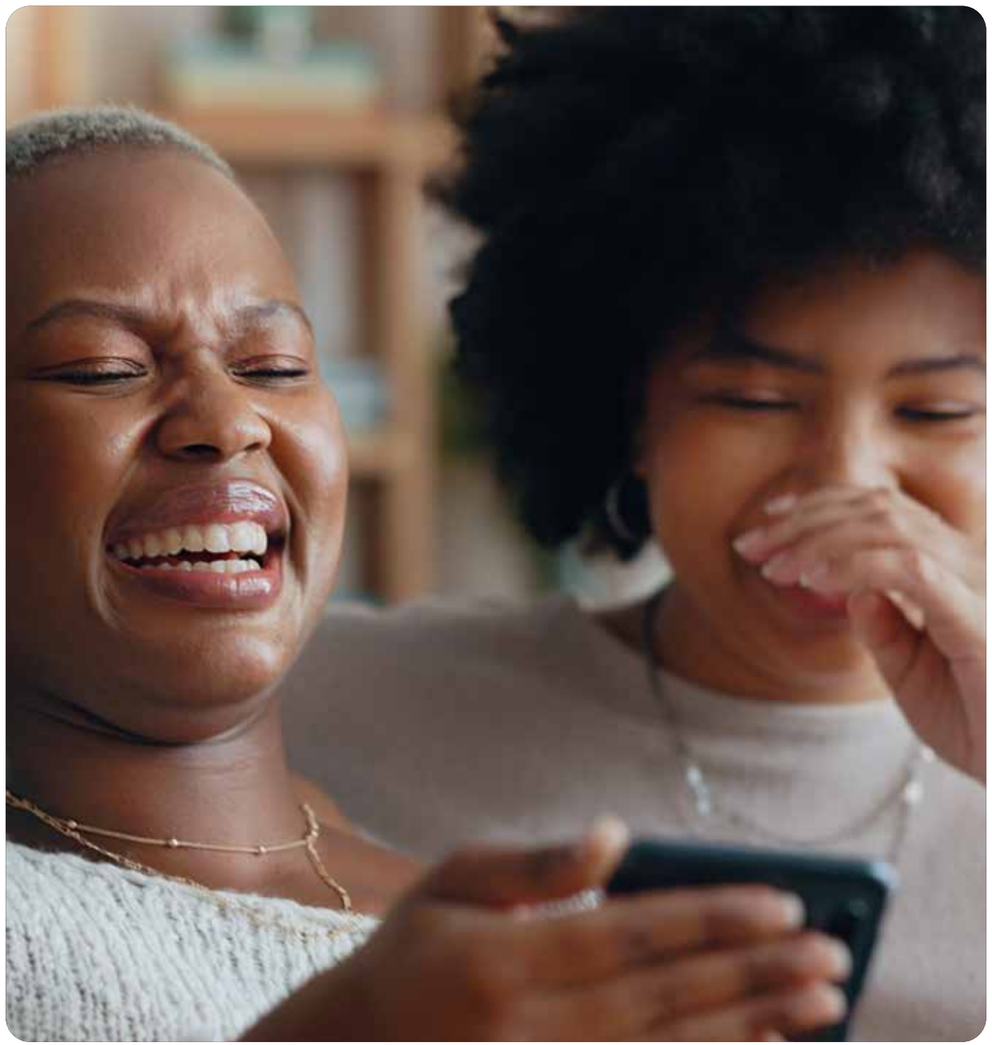
AXE partnered with rapper and anime fan Lil Baby to co-create an interactive digital manga of himself titled ‘Shonen Baby’ which would exclusively drop online at a launch party on a bespoke virtual platform.

VIP access to the party was granted for those who had purchased the new AXE collection from Walmart. By understanding its target audience’s key passion points and creating a dedicated virtual space in which they could interact, AXE achieved **8.1% more sales year-on-year** and a 34% new buyer rate for the brand.

How putting data into action could grow sales by 50%

Future community commerce success will be built on real audience intelligence that builds more connections across worlds than ever before. Here’s where AI comes into play.

By connecting consumer data from disparate data points, brands can form intelligent insights and a deeper understanding of communities values, interests and needs, offering new avenues for growth.



More than ever before, these insights can also inspire creativity in brands’ thinking and develop personalised content that truly resonates with groups and individuals. According to McKinsey, fashion companies that have harnessed the power of data to **personalise ecommerce experiences have seen their digital sales grow by between 30-50%.**

46%

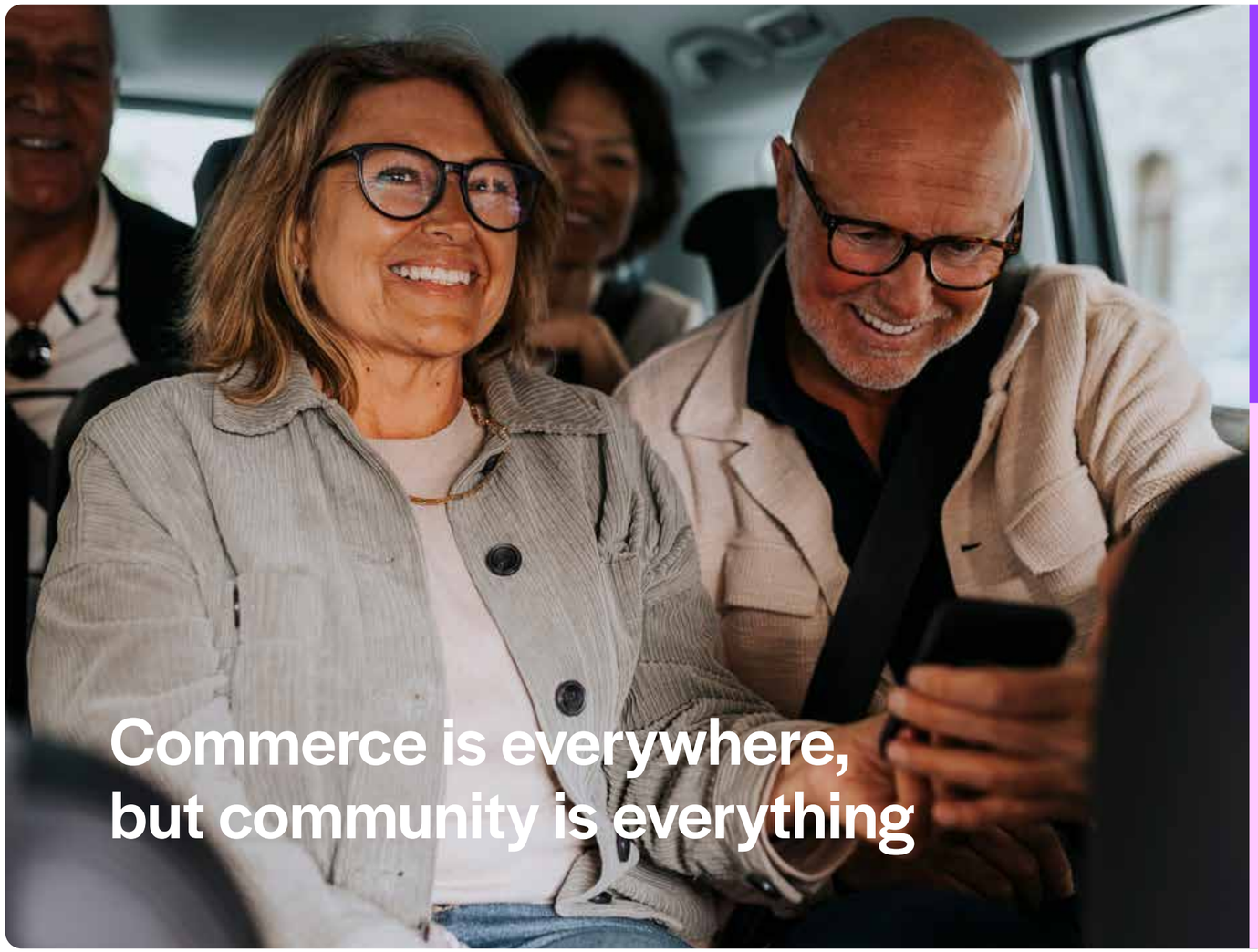
of people are using more exclusive and specialised platforms to interact with their communities.



“ By democratising access to retail and transactional data, we can start to really use it as a creative springboard and create more connected strategies that blend commerce with community and culture. This will drive not just high conversion rates and high visibility but will enable us to create more loyalty too because we’re ultimately much more relevant to consumers ”

Elisabeth Menze

Partner, Global Performance and Digital Commerce, Mindshare



From

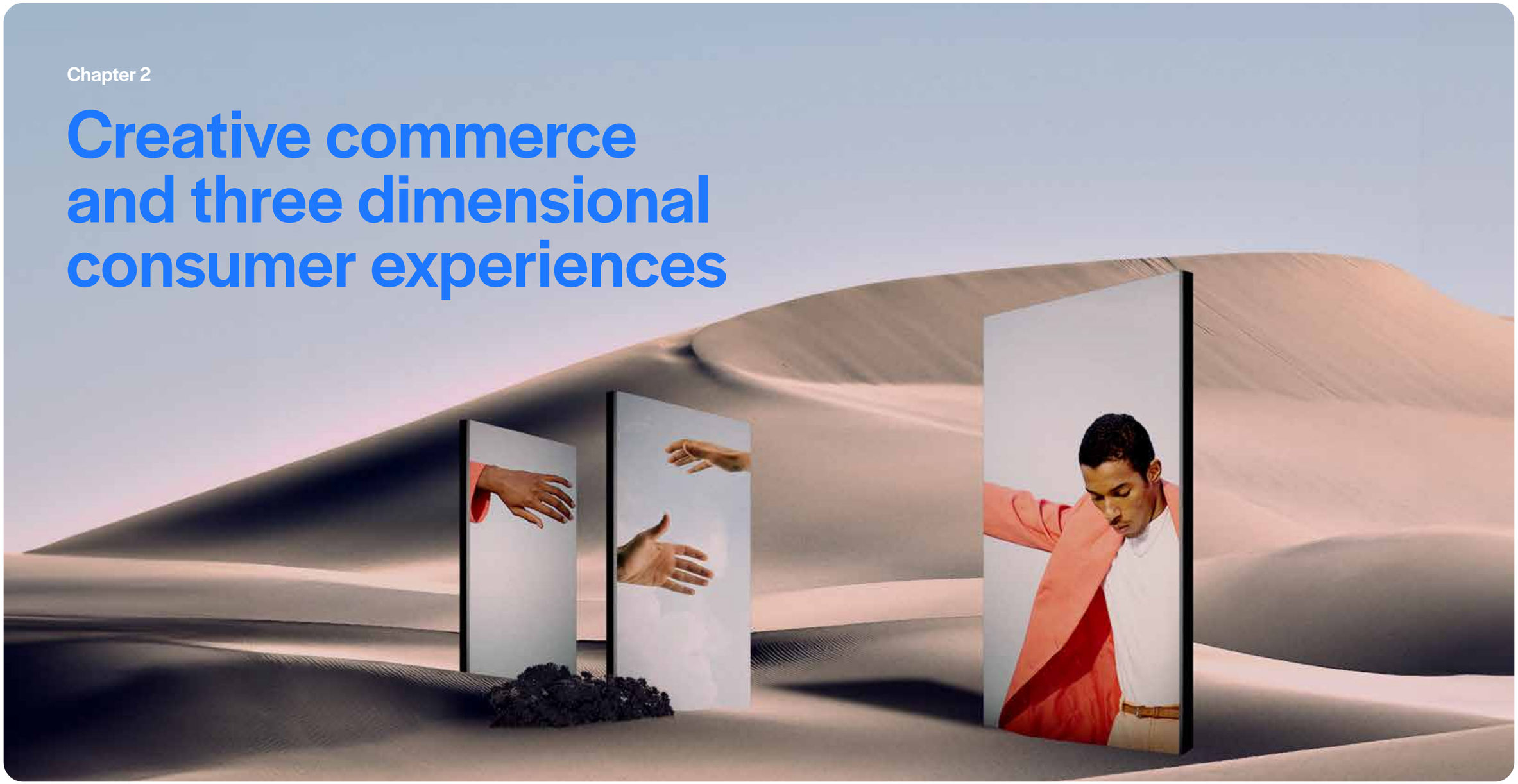
Commerce based around an **understanding of an individual consumer's needs and values**.

To

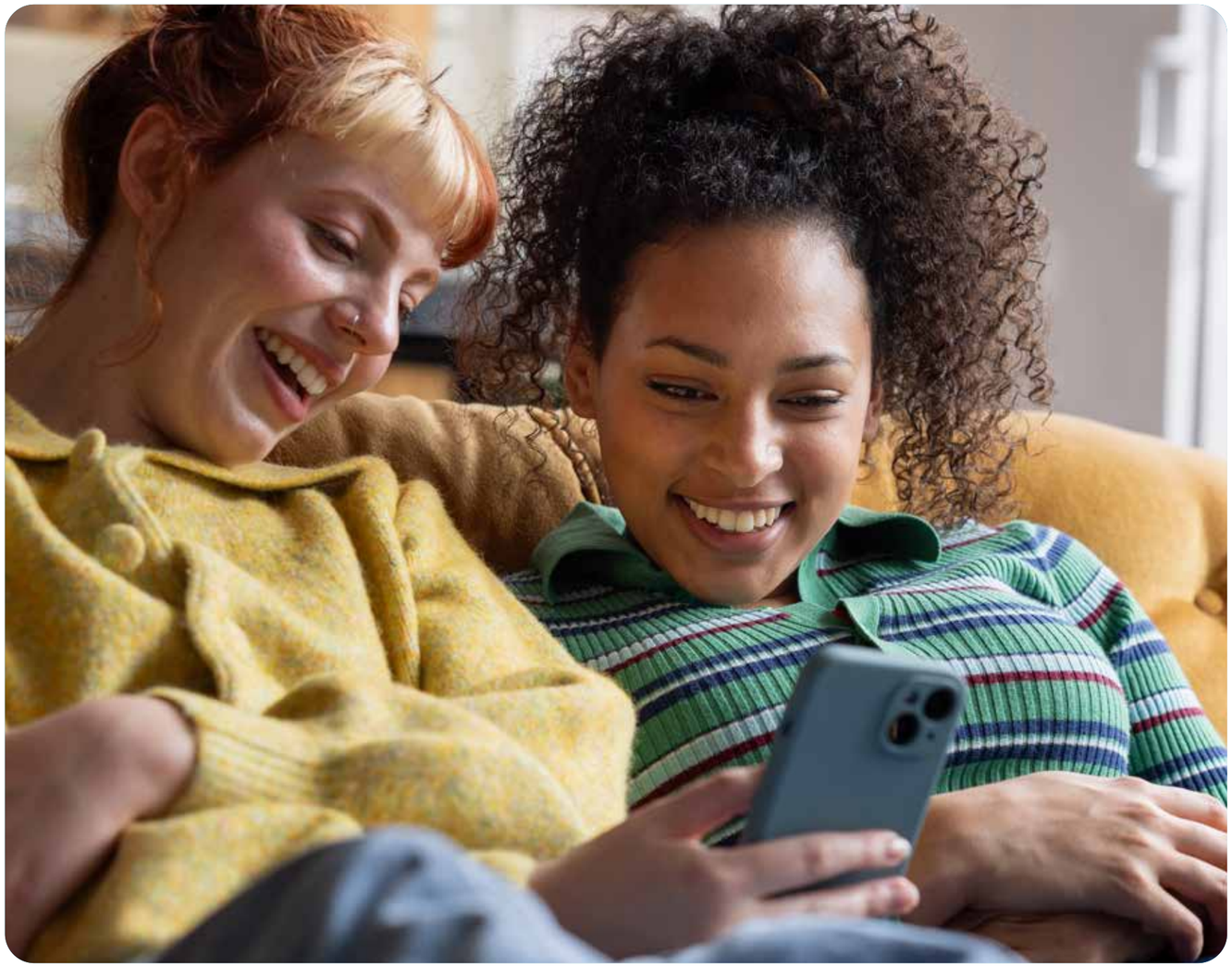
Commerce based on **AI-powered data** that provides **intelligent insights** on **communities' needs and values**, resulting in creative, tailored commerce experiences that encourage growth and brand loyalty.

Chapter 2

Creative commerce and three dimensional consumer experiences



We’re entering a world in which anything can be an ad and anywhere can be a point of purchase.



- From TikTok Shop to QR codes enabling augmented reality (AR) commerce experiences, the lines are blurring between retail and entertainment.
- As commerce channels continue to evolve, brands should think consumer-experience first and create seamless consumer journeys across all touchpoints.
- Brands can forge gateways to communities through new creative thinking within commerce strategies that unlock value across the entire funnel.



Are you not entertained?

From gamification to entertainment, media to AR, commerce will be much more than retail in the coming years. Both online and offline, consumers will expect more from their shopping experiences. This is redefining how brands engage with consumers across every platform, channel and community world.

As technology advances and the line between physical and virtual worlds fades, brands will need to use new forms of creativity to capture consumer attention and create seamless, connected experiences to deliver growth.

According to VML's Future Shopper survey, **60% of consumers want brands and retailers to make both the online and offline experience more entertaining.**

Whilst **more than 70% of consumers expect personalised experiences**, reveals Barrows "Beyond" Retail report from 2024. This has ushered in a new era of creative commerce.

Are you offering experience?

Coca-Cola looked to meet this consumer demand for experiential moments and entertainment in its recent Food Marks campaign. It created real-world experiences based on iconic photographs of celebrities enjoying a Coke with dinner at global locations.

The drinks brand invited consumers to visit these landmarks for a unique immersive meal. By combining an understanding of their consumer's interests with a creative experience, Coca-Cola created a cultural moment that resonated on an emotional level and delivered ROI, with the campaign achieving **over 2 billion impressions online and 99% positive sentiment**.

The success of this kind of campaign shows how brands can go beyond creating a path to purchase. Whether it's an immersive offline or virtual retail experience, brands are exploring the opportunities available across different channels to engage communities at every stage of the consumer journey.

"Creativity now is coming across all different platforms in all different parts of a consumer journey, but the only metric that matters is a bold idea that leads to wildly successful business results"

Rob Reilly, Chief Creative Officer, WPP

This makes it all the more important to incorporate fresh creative ideas into commerce strategies.

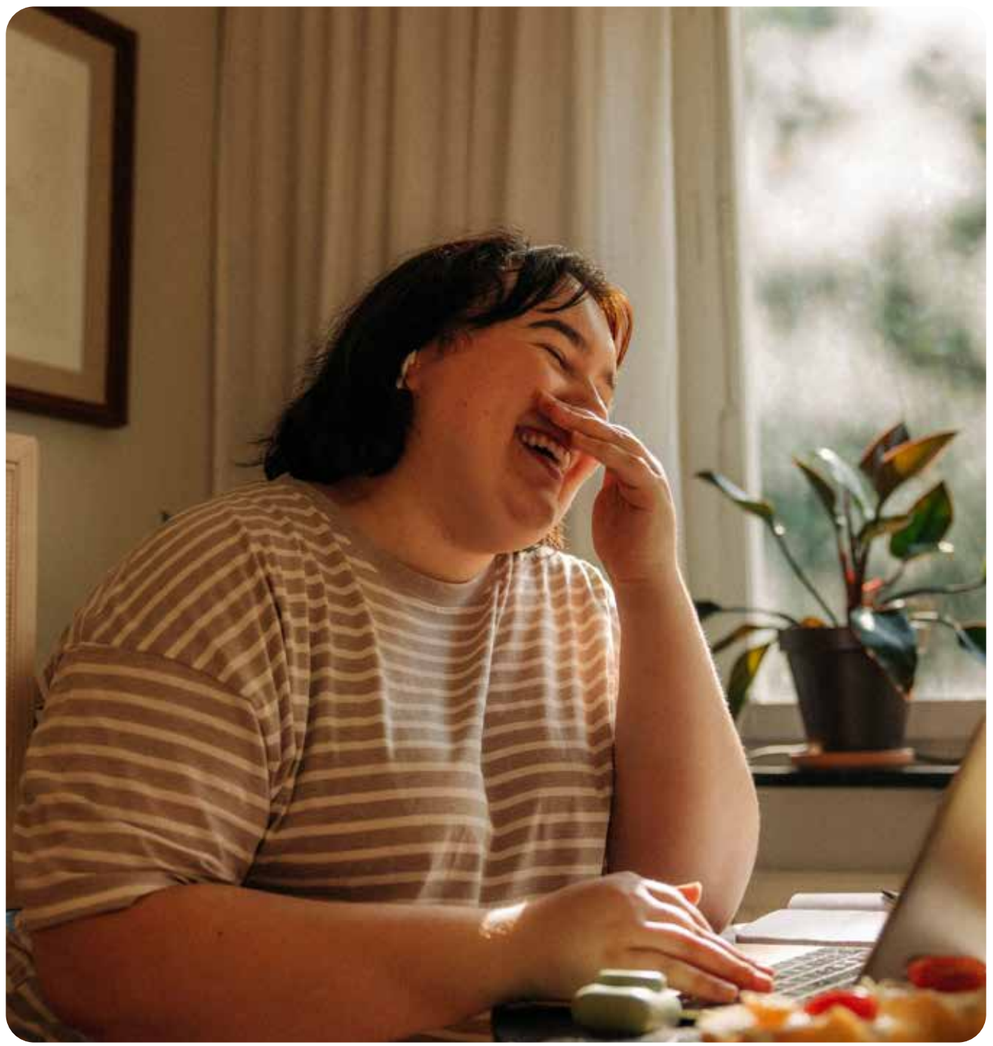
Bigger than TV: seizing new engagement opportunities

Channels such as gaming platforms and voice assistants are reshaping digital existences and redefining how brands connect with consumers.

It's important for brands to not only incorporate these channels into their commerce strategies, but understand how to use them creatively to engage consumers at the point of purchase and deliver ROI.

Retail media is at the front of point-of-purchase engagement. WARC Media analysis found **retail media spending globally reached $128 billion in 2023**, and is poised to overtake linear TV as the third biggest channel by spend.

During Amazon Prime Day in 2019, Mindshare capitalised on this and took advantage of the growth in voice assistants as a path to conversion in a campaign for Honey Nut Cheerios. By identifying how consumers use Alexa, Amazon's voice assistant, Mindshare helped Honey Nut Cheerios to get ahead of the curve through the use of voice platforms.



This was achieved through a Prime Day promotion giving away a free family-size box of the popular cereal to everyone who spent over $40 on Amazon. This deal leveraged the marketplace's recommendation algorithm, resulting in the search results for Honey Nut Cheerios peaking and becoming the number one grocery item in the USA.

The campaign achieved a 64% sales rise for Honey Nut Cheerios compared to the week prior, and what may have seemed like a traditional media promotion allowed Honey Nut Cheerios to get ahead of the curve through the use of voice platforms.

$128 billion

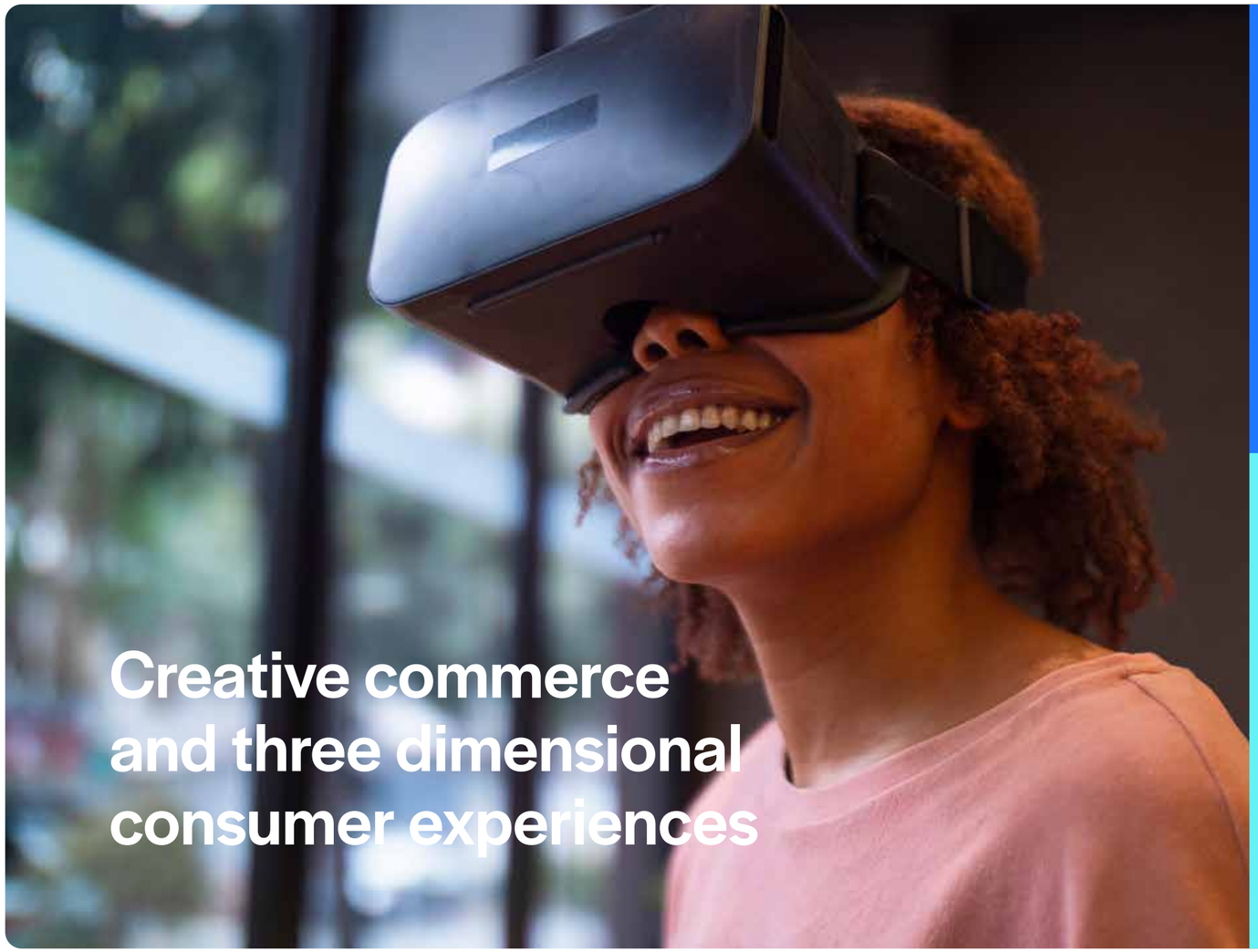
was spent on retail media in 2023, according to WARC Media analysis.



“ We are seeing platforms really adding entertainment into their content, so people are now shopping in a way which was unheard of maybe a few years back. This is making the entire space extremely rich and very interesting ”

Amin Lakhani

CEO, South Asia, Mindshare



Creative commerce and three dimensional consumer experiences

From

Brands creating **disconnected consumer journeys** across platforms based on data providing a **partial understanding of how audiences exist** across channels.

To

Brands creating **seamless consumer journeys** across platforms based on a **deep understanding of how communities exist** across channels and how to use **creativity to engage** and deliver growth.

Chapter 3

Maximising social ROI through community commerce



Social media is still a massive driving force of discovery in commerce.



- Even as generations split between platforms and new channels cater to niche communities, social media remains a crucial discovery tool.
- But the power of social conversion lies in transforming brand love into brand buy. Brands need to map out the social commerce purchase journey to dissolve the gap between desire and delivery.
- Influential content creators offer brands another way into community worlds on social platforms.
- As social commerce evolves, the power these creators yield over consumers will grow exponentially, offering a way for brands to forge deeper relationships with community audiences and generate greater value.



Brands won't want to miss out on a slice of the $8.5 trillion social commerce pie

Social media channels are the lifeblood of communities. Consumers use social channels to find out what products their communities are buying, what trends they should be following, and what platforms have the best rewards and deals.

But social media's rapidly evolving from a place of discovery to a point of purchase, meaning brands need to map out a seamless social commerce purchase journey. According to Statista data, the **global value of social commerce sales is set to reach around $8.5 trillion by 2030**, making it more important than ever for brands to capitalise on this growing revenue stream.

In VML's Tomorrow's Commerce survey, **29% of business leaders picked out social commerce as offering the biggest growth opportunity in the next five years**, though 42% said they still don't know what 'good' looks like in social commerce.

Chinese platforms are five years ahead in social commerce

China offers a vision of what this 'good' social commerce may look like. The VML report found that **90% of Chinese consumers shop directly via social media**, taking advantage of the one-stop-shop ecosystem offered on the region's social platforms, such as WeChat and Pinduoduo.

These platforms are dominated by mega-popular influencers who host highly entertaining live streams to encourage immediate purchases.

The $480 billion creator economy will be brand driven

Creators can help build brand love across channels. Goldman Sachs forecasts that the total creator economy could roughly add up to $480 billion by 2027, with 70% coming through brand deals.

Creators offer a way in for brands to participate in communities through authentic relationships built on cultural relevance and shared values. Creators have the ability to turn cultural conversations into retail trends, determine which brands are in the spotlight, and what products go viral.

Think of the TikTokers who sent audiences scrambling for Stanley Quenchers. It shows how products that cater to communities' needs (in this case hydration enthusiasts) can make a 100-year-old brand the hot purchase of today.

This level of connection between creators and their followers can empower brands to deliver new commerce experiences that drive conversations, enable conversion directly on the platform, and deliver growth.

> "The points between inspiration or creating desire and purchase have converged, driven through social and social commerce. This phenomenon is hugely shifting the commerce landscape and how people discover and buy products"

Debbie Ellison, Global Chief Digital Officer, VML Commerce



90%

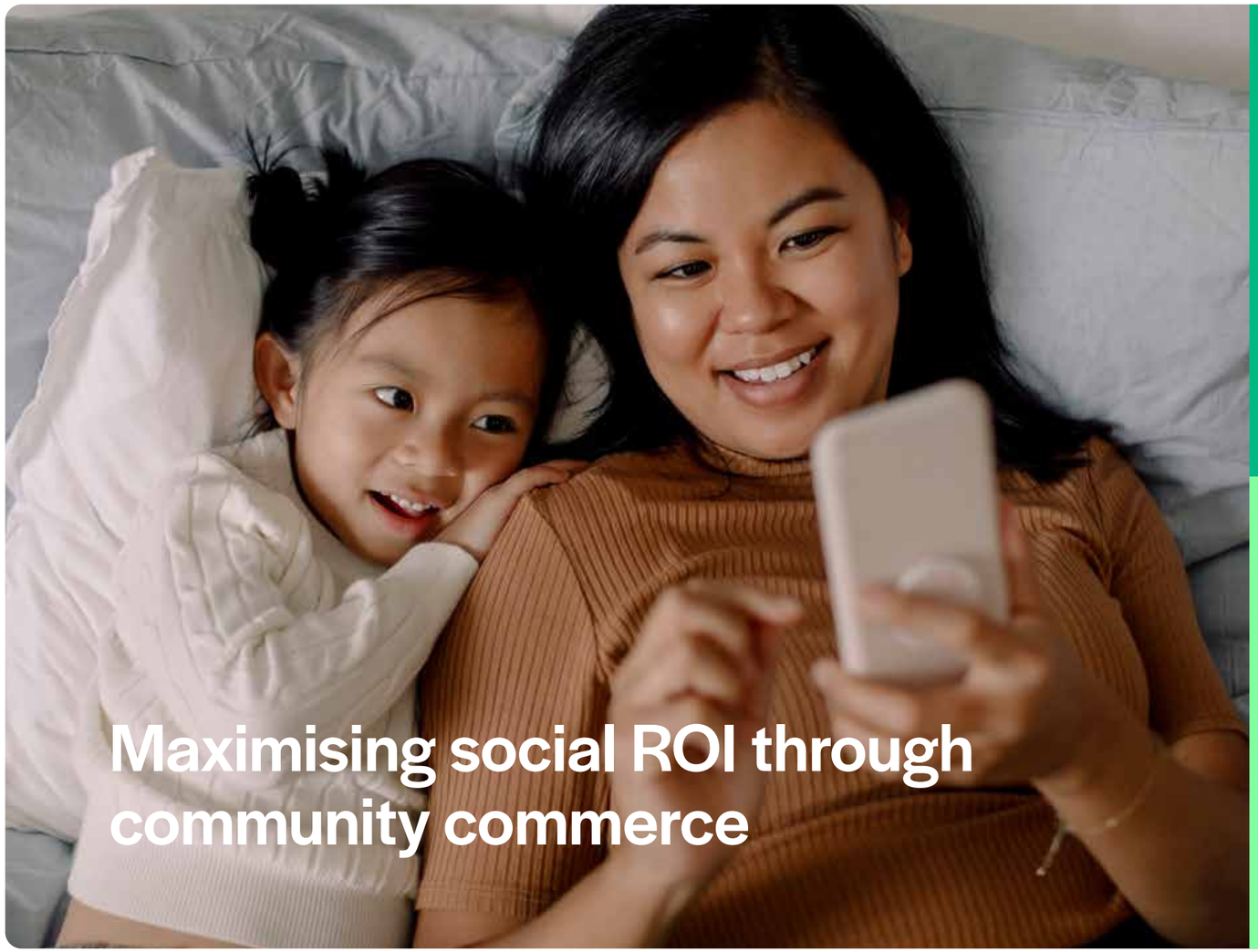
of Chinese consumers shop directly via social media.



“ I think creators are absolutely imperative for brands to be able to get the most out of micro communities. There are just so many different niche communities that have blossomed because of the accessibility of social media so it’s become more and more important to focus advertising towards them ”

Harry Hugo

Co-Founder, The Goat Agency



Maximising social ROI through community commerce

From

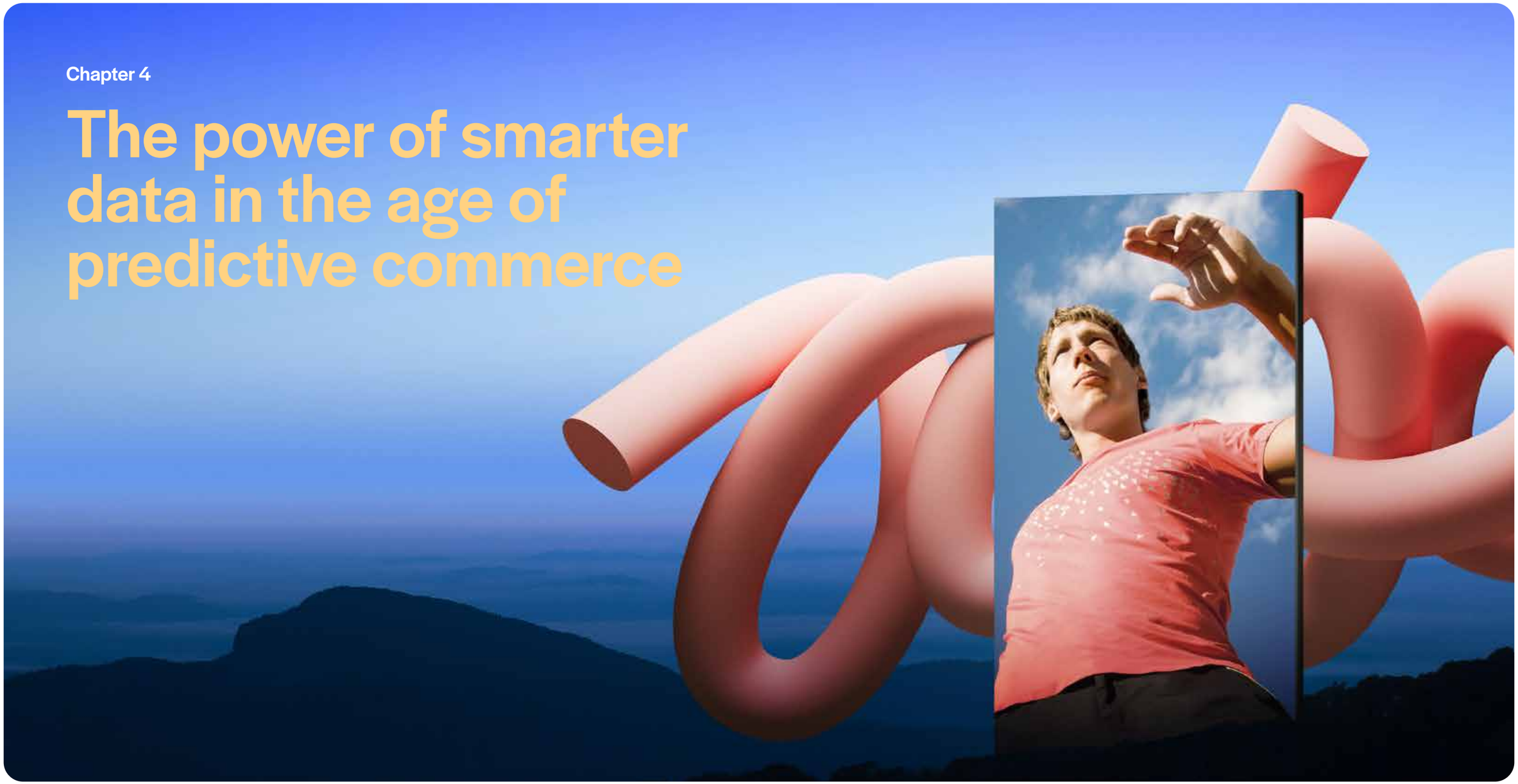
Brands using **social media as a tool for discovery** for individuals, without creating the opportunity for a seamless transition to conversion.

To

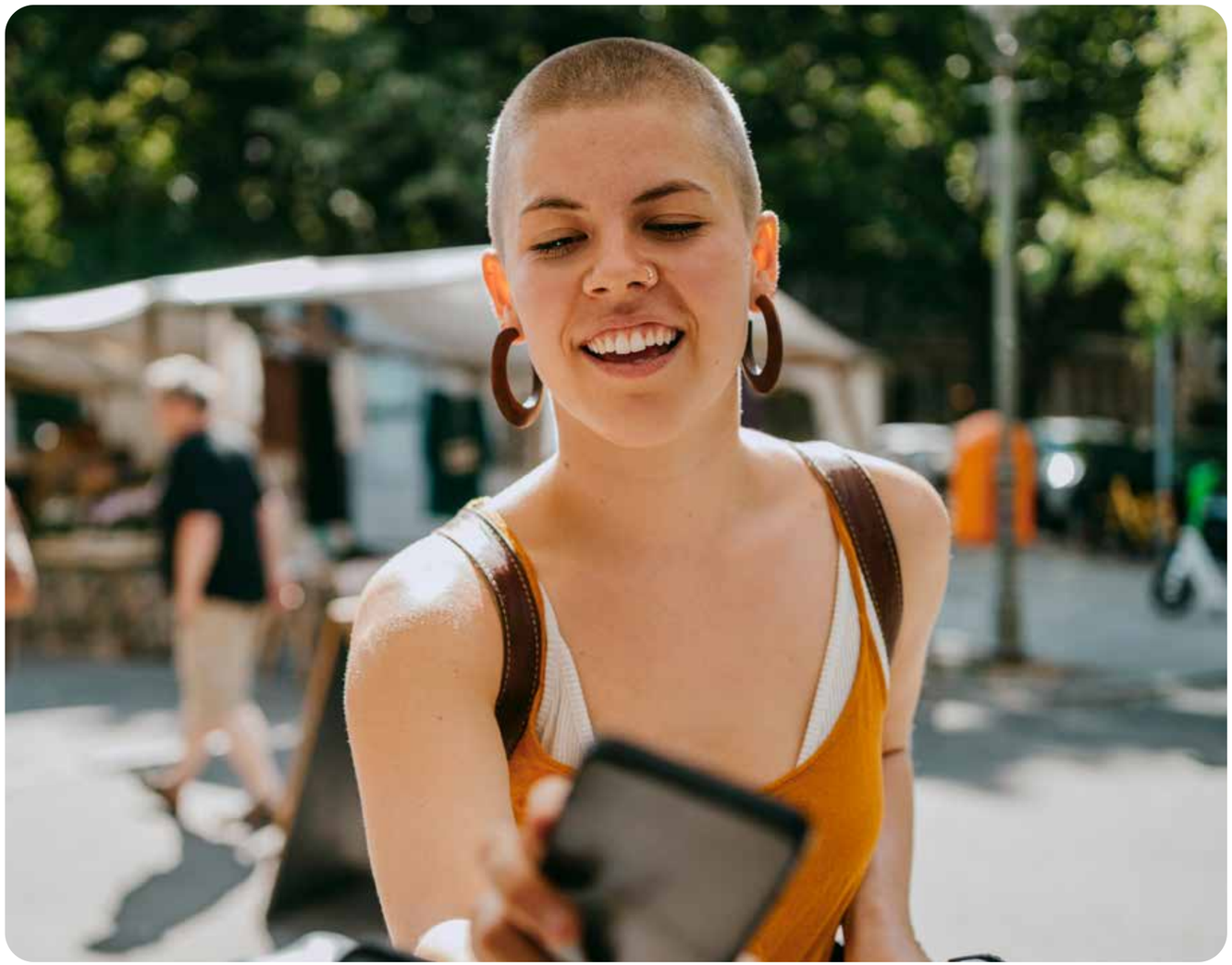
Brands harnessing the power of **social media as a driver for conversion by leveraging creators to deliver value to community audiences** through creative experiences and meaningful consumer engagement.

Chapter 4

The power of smarter data in the age of predictive commerce



There’s more data available than ever before, but knowing how to use it is what sets winning brands apart.



- Transparency of data is vital to leverage AI to generate understandable and actionable insights from previously disparate data domains – helping unlock the power of predictive commerce.
- AI can offer efficiencies across the marketing funnel. By pulling together to paint a fuller picture of the end-to-end consumer journey it can predict what content will hit the right metric on which platforms.
- These AI technologies can not only predict behaviours but also help brands decide where to allocate media spend and why, optimising the full funnel strategy.
- But AI isn’t just about efficiencies. AI will also serve as a powerful driver of new creativity. Experimentation, exploration and new insights will enable personalised, eye-opening consumer experiences like never before.



How AI can generate at least 20% additional revenue

In the world of commerce, people's purchases, browsing habits, and use of social platforms all translate to a set of highly measurable data points. The differentiator for brands however, is not in just being able to access it, but being able to bring together mountains of unorganised data and use it to generate truly intelligent insights that translate into real growth.

VML's Brands Don't Fail… E-Retail 2023 survey found that while 74% of business leaders agree that having customer-driven data and insights improves their ROI, however **49% said that they find it hard to understand and utilise their data efficiently.**

AI-powered data analysis can help solve this challenge.

AI technologies are already being used in commerce – from chatbots and virtual assistants to machine learning. The technology can not only optimise operations and improve the customer experience, but can also use existing data to create prediction models for future behaviours. This is what we call predictive commerce.

Technology is increasingly enabling brands to get better at predicting what consumers will buy from which retailers and when.

Ultimately, it could enable brands to target consumers before they even realise that they want or need a particular product. According to research from McKinsey, **organisations already using AI generated at least 20% additional revenue in 2022**, with business leaders who invest in the technology seeing a 10-20% ROI uplift.

French delivery service Chronopost has already seen the benefits of adopting an AI-first commerce strategy. The company's AI-driven holiday campaigns in 2022 resulted in an 85% sales revenue growth.

A crucial factor in this data-heavy commerce world is transparency. As retail continues to evolve and the landscape is inundated with more and more data sources, brands will need true visibility of audience reaction and content performance.

49%

of business leaders said they find it hard to understand and utilise their data efficiently.

By leveraging high levels of transparency over their own data, brands will be able to build deeper community insights and predict the kinds of bespoke, meaningful consumer experiences that can drive growth.

Meet the AI-powered creative

AI can also be used to enhance human creativity. Imagine creating thousands of pieces of brand-specific content in minutes and simulating how audiences will perceive that content – in order to improve it. AI opens up possibilities for experimentation with different types of content, platforms, and influencers, and simulates how different communities will respond.

For example, during the festive season of Durga Puja in India, soap brand Lifebuoy used AI-generated QR codes camouflaged within religious idols in a campaign to increase hand hygiene.

The real-time contextual AR experience featured a virtual avatar of the goddess Maa, encouraging visitors to use the soap-brand's handwashing stations dotted around the festival. **The experience caught the public's imagination and generated 6.3 million organic views.**



At WPP, different AI technologies have been developed to optimise the marketing journey for brands. WPP calls these Brains.

These technologies include:

Creativity Brain	That uses generative AI to work as a co-creator of content by brainstorming ideas and generating innovative campaigns that capture attention and resonate deeply with audiences.
Brand Brain	Made up of large language models (LLMs) used to create brand-specific, production-grade, differentiated content from sources such as brand guidelines, tone of voice, and brand assets.
Audience Brain	That uses LLMs to simulate how people perceive work and generate learnings, which brands can use to create better-performing content.
Channel Brain	That uses large-scale decision making technology to push thousands of pieces of content across huge numbers of channels.
Performance Brain	That uses machine learning algorithms, to make predictions on activations (likes, clicks and sales) based on performance data coupled with the learnings from how audiences perceive content.

These Brains, when combined, help transform the end-to end marketing funnel through AI.

AI's development over the next five years is expected to infiltrate all parts of life and business unlike any technology before. It has the potential to be truly transformational.

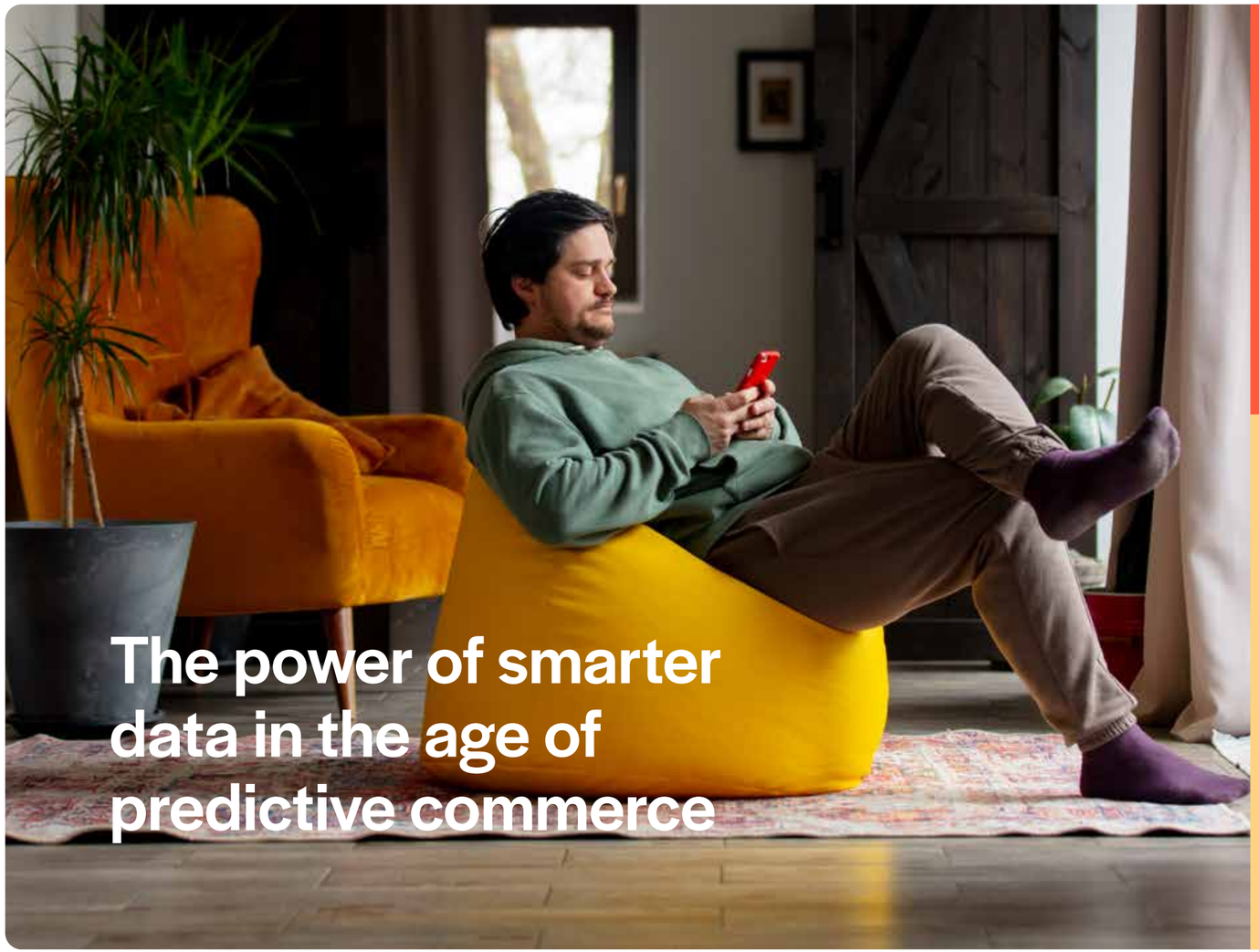
AI will help brands create better content quicker, at scale, and in the form of more engaging, personalised, creative experiences for audience communities.



“ For the next five years we’ve got a lot of work to do to optimise that end-to-end marketing process, so beyond five years, what I’m excited about is unlocking and enhancing the creative potential of AI ”

Daniel Hulme

CEO, Satalia



The power of smarter data in the age of predictive commerce

From

A world in which **everyone has the same data and AI** is used by brands purely for automation.

To

A world in which AI connects data to form a more intelligent understanding of **consumers and their communities**. And where AI creates actionable insights that exceed consumer expectations by **enabling truly personalised creative commerce experiences**.

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Contact: **Jeff Malmad**
Global Head of Commerce, Mindshare
Jeff.Malmad@mindshareworld.com