

The Future of Marketing in MENA

Talent, Transformation & Trust

Date

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Property of

Ipsos

Advertising Business Group, (ABG)



Survey Scope



Respondents: 60 B2B interviews across marketing professionals in the **United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and Morocco**

Gender: 53% Female, 47% Male

83%

C-Level & Executive Roles

Decision-makers, shaping strategy

What's Covered

01.

Market & Context Landscape

- Introduction & Context
- Regional Marketing Landscape

02.

Transformation & Performance Drivers

- Digital & AI Transformation
- Talent & Skills Evolution
- Metrics That Matter

03.

Strategic Direction & What's Next

- Strategic Priorities Ahead
- Future Outlook
- Key Takeaways & Recommendations

Building Future-Ready Capabilities: AI & Analytics Still Hard to Scale

Critical Insight: While marketing capability is strengthening regionally (41% strong), many teams remain in the middle ground of partial readiness. AI and data-related skills continue to be the hardest to build. Practical integration and upskilling will be essential to convert “occasional users” into consistent, value-generating practitioners.

Weak

24%

Neutral

35%

Strong

41%

Customer Engagement and CRM Lead as Core Strengths

01

**Customer
engagement &
CRM**

02

**Strategic
leadership**

03

**Digital marketing &
social media**

04

**Data
analytics**

05

**ROI/performance
marketing**

06

**Product
innovation**

07

**Brand
building**

08

AI & tech

Critical Insight: While Marketing teams across the region show strongest capabilities in customer engagement and strategic leadership, AI and creative storytelling remain underdeveloped, with only 15% citing them as key strengths. This reflects a continued gap between strategic ambition and the creative-tech capabilities needed to sustain growth.

While Some Believe Brand Building & Data Analytics are the Hardest Capabilities to Build

01

Brand building

02

Digital marketing & social media

03

Data analytics

04

ROI/performance marketing

05

Customer engagement & CRM

06

Product innovation

07

Strategic leadership

08

AI & tech

Critical Insight: Nearly half of marketers identify brand building and creative storytelling as their toughest skill gap, followed closely by data analytics and digital marketing. This underscores a widening capability divide while operational and CRM skills are stabilizing, creative and analytical excellence remain the most indefinable areas to recruit and retain, especially in fast-maturing markets like the UAE and KSA.

Talent Attraction is considered Strong, but Retention Remains a Regional Challenge

Critical Insight: Nearly half of organizations rate themselves as effective at attracting and retaining top marketing talent. The data points to a growing talent divide: mature markets succeed in recruitment but struggle with long-term retention, signaling an urgent need for clear career pathways, upskilling, and culture-driven retention strategies to sustain competitiveness.

Ineffective

25%

Neutral

28%

Effective

47%

Digital Transformation Accelerates, One in Three Organizations Fully Transformed



23%

Minimal changes



20%

Incremental Improvements



23%

Significantly reshaped key processes

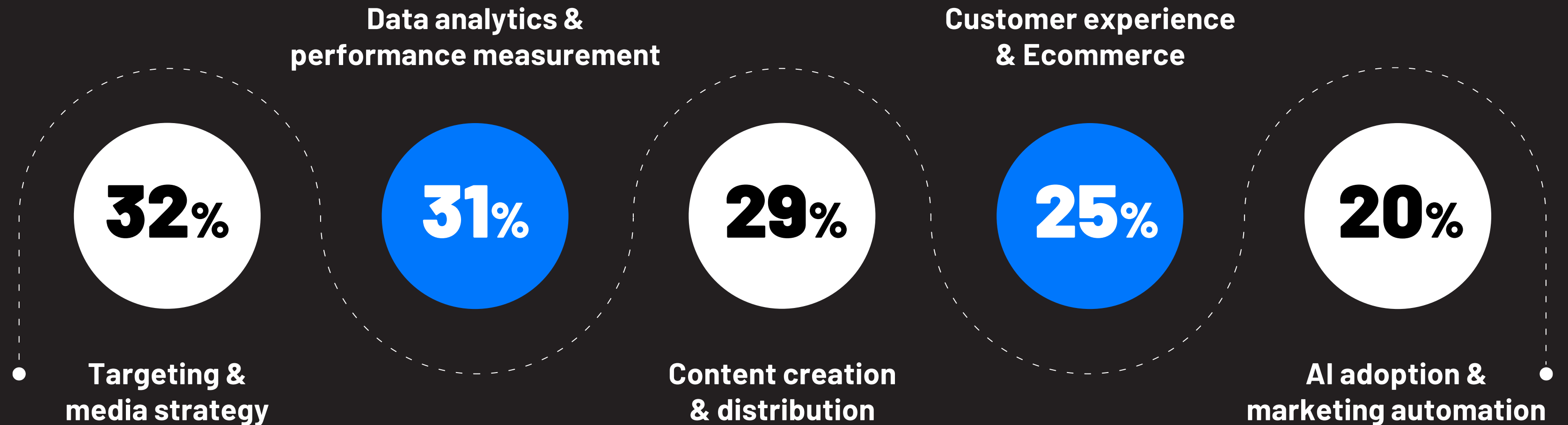


33%

Completely transformed the function

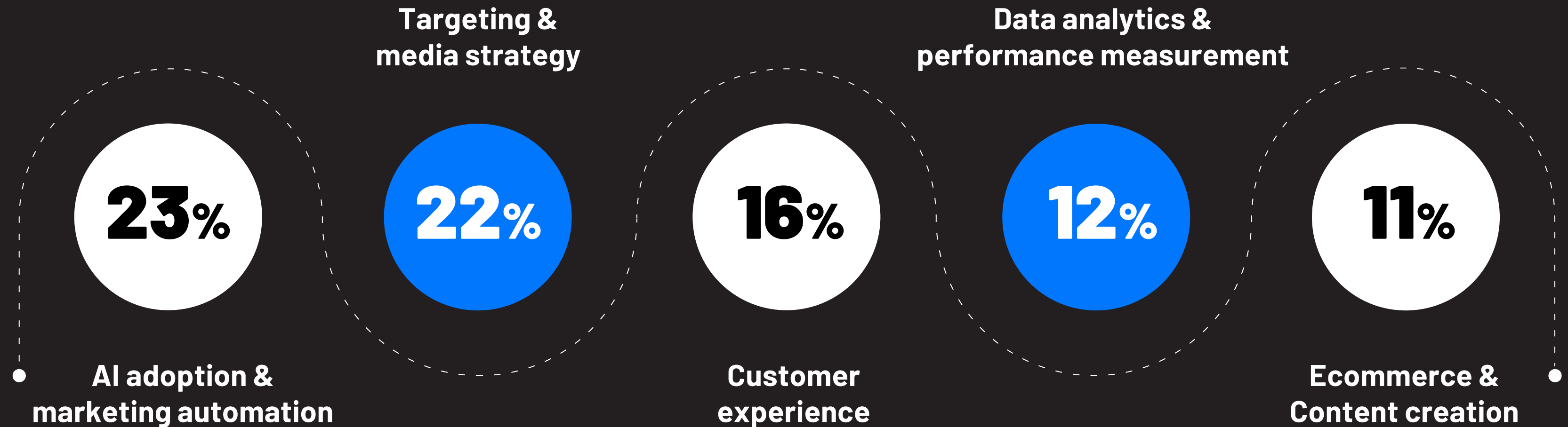
Critical Insight: Digital transformation is reshaping marketing at pace, with one third of organizations reporting complete transformation and another 23% significantly reshaping key processes.

Targeting & Data Analytics Lead Digital Transformation, AI Adoption Still Emerging



Critical Insight: Digital tools have most transformed targeting & media strategy (32%) and data analytics (31%), confirming that performance measurement and precision marketing are now central to regional marketing operations.

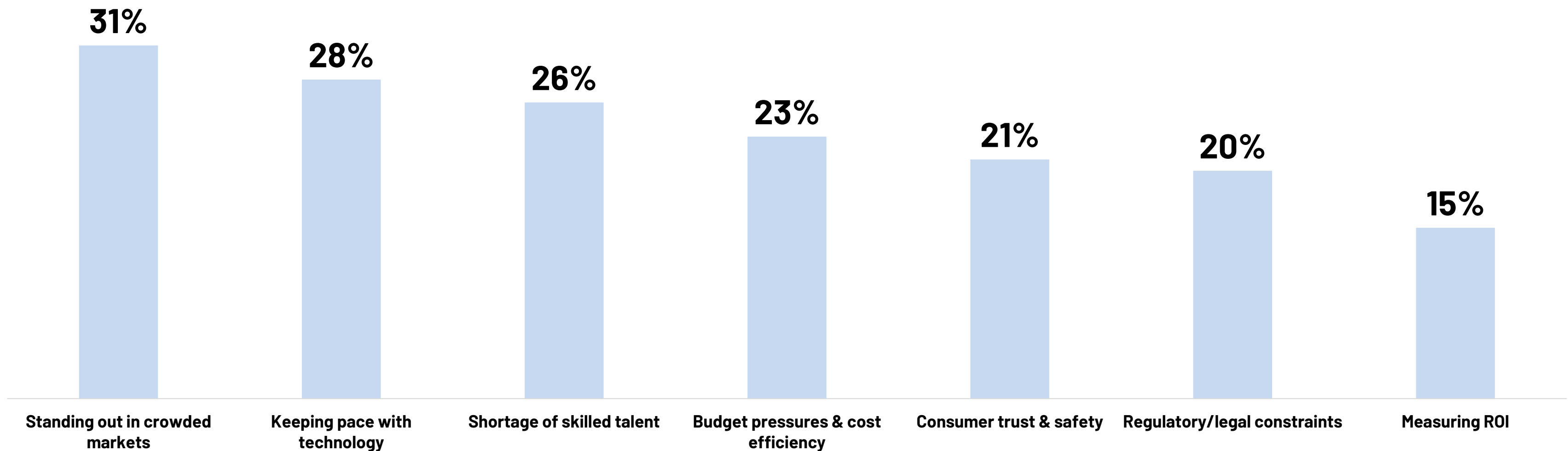
AI Adoption and Targeting Capabilities Emerge as the Biggest Gaps in Digital Marketing



Critical Insight: Marketers cite AI adoption and automation and targeting & media strategy as their top digital pain points, signaling that while foundational digital practices are in place, scaling advanced, data-driven marketing remains difficult.

Standing Out and Keeping Pace with Technology Top Today's Marketing Challenges

Critical Insight: Marketers cite market saturation and rapid technological change as their biggest obstacles. Talent shortages (26%) and budget constraints (23%) further strain teams, while ROI measurement remains a persistent but less urgent issue. The data signals a shift from resource-based challenges to strategic differentiation and digital adaptation as the core tension facing marketers today.



Half of Marketers Feel Confident About Overcoming Current Challenges

Critical Insight: Just over half express confidence in their ability to overcome key marketing challenges within the next year, driven largely by the GCC's strong optimism.

Ineffective

23%

Neutral

26%

Effective

51%

Purpose, Trust, and AI Rise as the Defining Priorities for the Next 3–5 Years



35%

Purpose-driven/
sustainability marketing



27%

Strengthening consumer
trust & credibility



27%

Delivering
personalization at scale



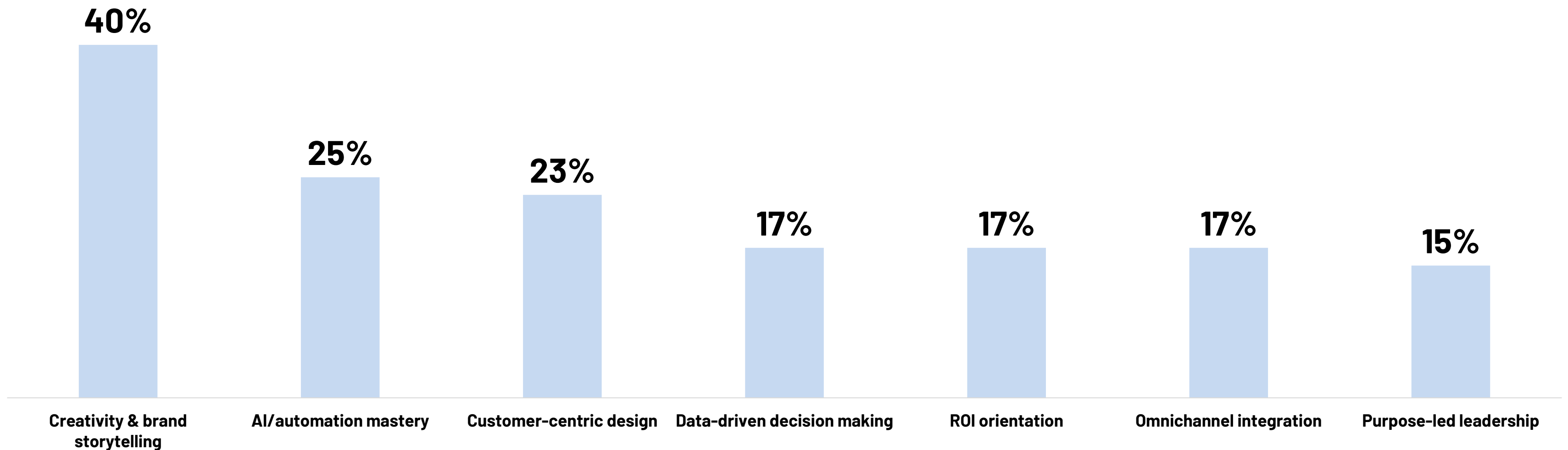
27%

Integrating AI
& automation

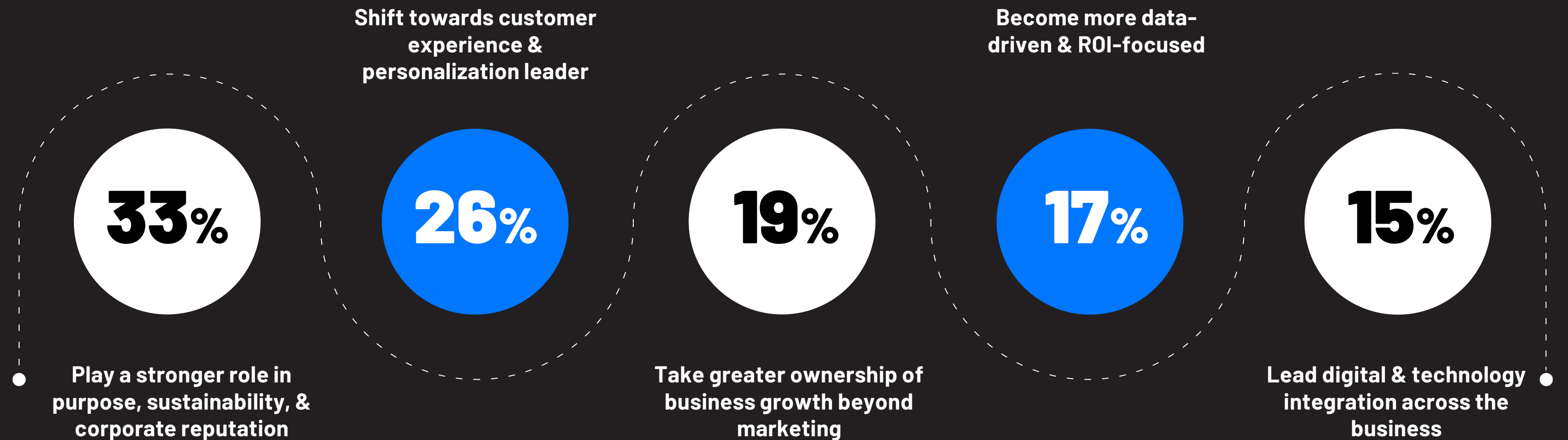
Critical Insight: Marketers are shifting focus from short-term performance to long-term impact with purpose-driven and sustainability marketing (35%) topping future priorities. Personalization (27%), trust-building (27%), and AI integration (27%) follow closely, highlighting a dual focus on human connection and technological advancement.

Creativity and AI Mastery Emerge as Cornerstones of Future Marketing Leadership

Critical Insight: The marketers of tomorrow will blend creativity (40%) with AI fluency (25%) to drive meaningful brand growth. The findings reveal a leadership evolution, from purely analytical or operational strengths to a balanced model of creative intuition, technological literacy, and empathy-driven strategy.



CMOs Are Evolving from Brand Guardians to Purpose and Experience Leaders



Critical Insight: The CMO role is undergoing a major transformation, one in three marketers (33%) expect it to center on purpose, sustainability, and corporate reputation, while 26% foresee a pivot toward customer experience and personalization leadership.

AI Integration Gains Momentum, But Most Are Still in Pilot or Early Stages



30%

Core and
fully integrated



31%

Limited,
exploratory only



30%

Pilots underway,
scaling gradually

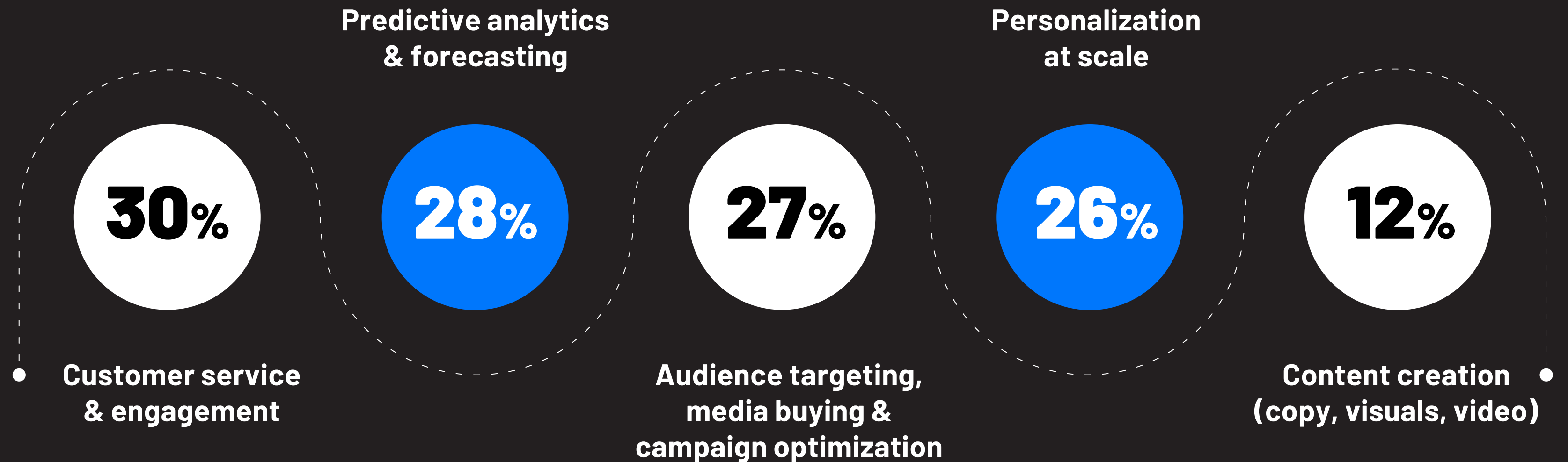


9%

Not used yet

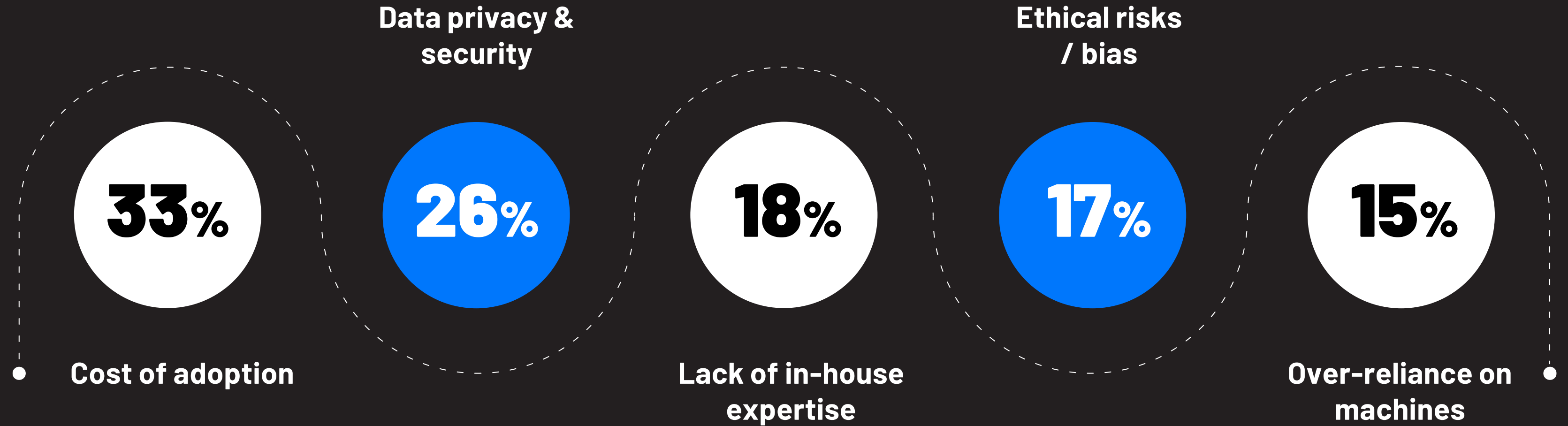
Critical Insight: AI adoption is taking hold across the region, with 30% of marketers reporting full integration and another 30% running pilots, signaling a clear acceleration in adoption. However, 31% remain in the exploratory phase.

AI's Greatest Potential Lies in Customer Engagement and Predictive Intelligence



Critical Insight: Marketers see the strongest AI opportunities in customer service and engagement and predictive analytics, reflecting a shift from experimentation toward performance-driven applications. Major markets in the GCC lead in using AI to elevate customer interactions, with KSA standing out for its focus on predictive forecasting.

High Costs and Data Concerns Remain the Biggest Barriers to AI Adoption



Critical Insight: Despite growing enthusiasm for AI, cost and data privacy top marketers' concerns. Lack of in-house expertise and ethical risks further limit momentum, particularly in developing markets. These findings reveal that while intent is strong, AI's growth is constrained more by capability and trust than by interest.

AI Deepens the Trust Divide, Transparency Will Define Future Brand Credibility



34%

Significantly increase trust through personalization



29%

Create a greater divide between transparent & non-transparent brands



20%

Have a neutral impact as consumers become more accustomed to data use



17%

Erode trust due to privacy concerns & perceived lack of humanity

Critical Insight: Marketers are split on AI's impact on consumer trust: while believe it will boost trust through personalization, nearly as many expect it to widen the gap between transparent and opaque brands. The findings underline a critical truth; AI won't automatically build trust; openness about data use and human oversight will.

Purpose and Sustainability Are Moving from Differentiators to Core Strategy Pillars

Critical Insight: A clear majority of marketers view brand purpose as a long-term growth driver; 33% say it will become a core pillar of strategy, and 43% see it as a key differentiator.

Very important, it will be a core pillar of our strategy

33%

Somewhat important, it will be a key differentiator

43%

Neutral it will be a factor, but not a primary focus

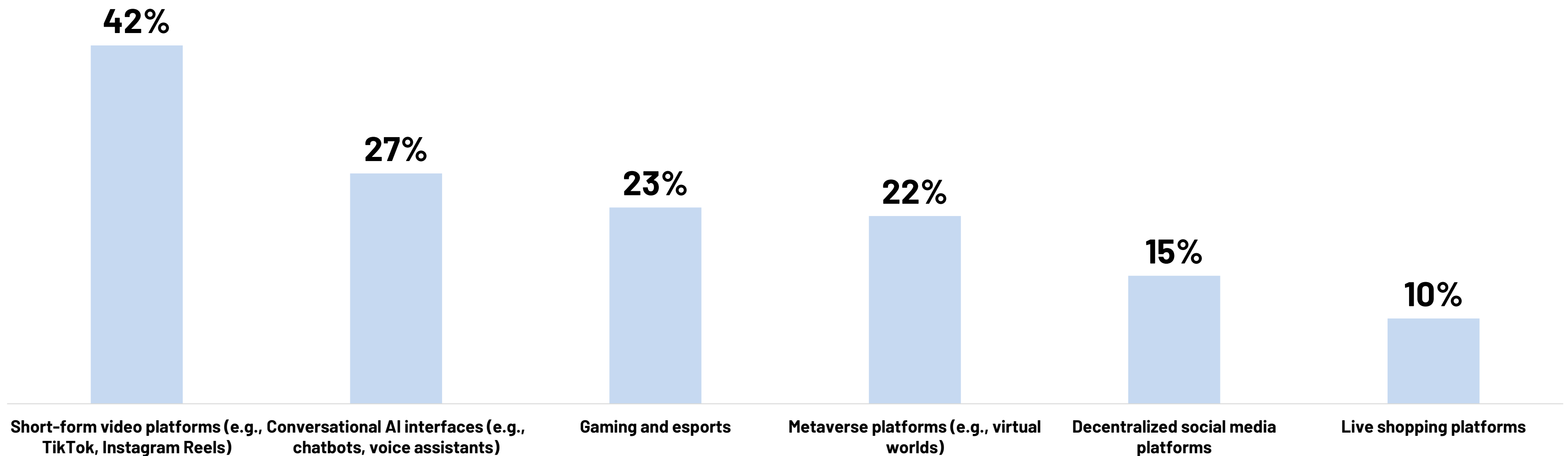
18%

Not important, focus will remain on product/service benefits

5%

Short-Form Video and AI Interfaces Lead the Next Wave of Marketing Channels

Critical Insight: Marketers see the strongest emerging potential in short-form video platforms (42%), led by TikTok and Instagram Reels, which dominate engagement across the GCC. Conversational AI (27%) is rapidly gaining traction as a new frontier for personalized engagement, meanwhile, gaming (23%) and metaverse platforms (22%) remain promising yet underdeveloped spaces.



Marketers Are Moving Beyond the Funnel But Full Journey Integration is a Work in Progress



38%

Actively implementing an *omnichannel strategy* to connect all touchpoints



20%

Focus on better measurement & attribution across channels



22%

Prioritize content that serves multiple stages of the journey



20%

Still primarily focused on traditional funnel metrics

Critical Insight: Over a third of marketers say they are actively implementing omnichannel strategies to connect all touchpoints. However, only 20% have advanced into cross-channel measurement and attribution, while another 20% remain tied to traditional funnel metrics.

Marketing Is Becoming a Core Growth Engine, Yet Accountability Still Differs by Market

Critical Insight: Nearly 4 in 10 marketers now see themselves as completely responsible for driving business outcomes, marking a growing recognition of marketing's role beyond awareness.

Limited
Responsibility

25%

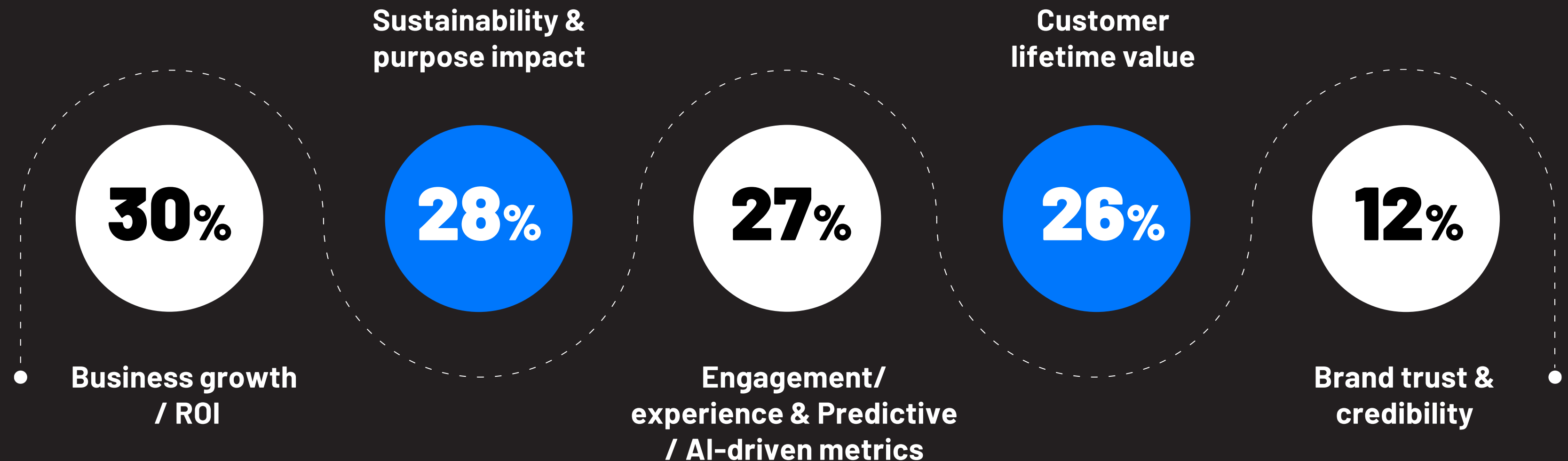
Partially
Responsible

36%

Completely
Responsible

39%

ROI & Purpose Are Emerging as the Dual North Stars for Future Marketing Success



Critical Insight: The next era of marketing measurement will hinge on balancing performance with purpose. Business growth and ROI remain the leading success metric. At the same time, sustainability and purpose impact are gaining strategic weight, signaling a more holistic definition of success that blends profit with positive contribution.

Thank you

Contact us for more information



Eleni Kitra
Executive Director
eleni@abg-me.com



Athanas Jamo
Chief Client Director
athanas.jamo@ipsos.com
