

CMO FORUM MIDDLE EAST

Marketing Leadership Under Pressure

Closed-door. Peer-level.
April 29, 2026



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CONFIDENTIALITY

THE CHATHAM HOUSE RULE

Participants are free to use the information shared, but **neither the identity nor the affiliation** of the speaker(s) or any other participant may be revealed.

In Practice:

To enable **open, honest, and respectful exchange** of ideas while ensuring a **safe and confidential environment** for all participants.

- Share insights, **not identities**.
- No recording, quoting, or attribution.
- Maintain **confidentiality** of materials and discussions.
- Respect all viewpoints shared during the session.

This rule allows for **constructive collaboration** and **trust-based decision-making** within the group.

ABG IN A NUTSHELL

01

INDUSTRY-FIRST

02

BRAND-CENTRIC

03

INDEPENDENT



VOLATILITY IS THE BASELINE

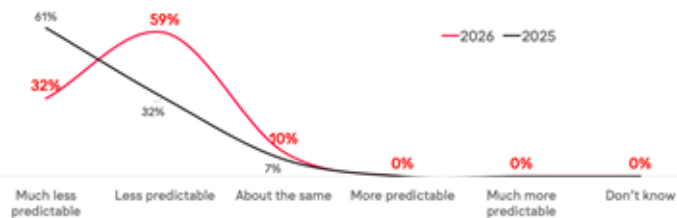
9 in 10 senior marketing and policy professionals say **the environment is less predictable** (91%) and **riskier** (92%) than 12 months ago (similar response rates to 2025*)



Geopolitics remains the primary source of risk. Tech (incl. AI) has risen to third place

9 in 10 say the environment is less predictable than 12 months ago

Q: How would you characterise today's business environment compared to 12 months ago?



WHAT THIS MEANS FOR CMOs

- **Signals vs Noise**
- **Speed vs Accuracy**
- **AI vs Trust: AI is the Engine. Trust is the Fuel**
- **Short-Term vs Brand Equity**
- **Transparency vs Control**

AI IS THE ENGINE – TRUST IS THE FUEL

Some insights on AI from **Global Marketer Week**

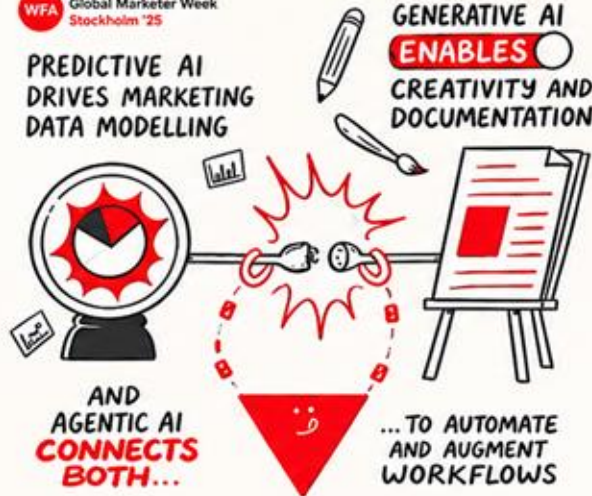
WFA Global Marketer Week
Stockholm '25

AI IS A **CAPABILITY**,
NOT AN **AUTHORITY**



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PREDICTIVE AI DRIVES MARKETING DATA MODELLING



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Where brands are really competitive is when they **RESHAPE CRITICAL WORKFLOWS & FUNCTIONS**



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THERE IS A NEED TO BRING **HUMANITY & CREATIVITY** INTO MARKETING



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STAYING **CURIOUS** in the BEGINNING of the JOURNEY...



THE CMO REALITY CHECK

1 **Uncertainty hardened into action**

The wait-and-see window is closed. "Too early to assess" has collapsed into budget cuts, launch delays, hiring pauses.

2 **Budget cuts are larger than expected**

A third of respondents report >20% cuts; several report >30%. This is the single starkest shift in the data.

3 **Consumer sentiment: tone to wallet**

March: sensitivity to brand messaging. April: consumers are more cautious and value-driven. That's a pricing, promo, and proposition fix.

4 **The CMO's job moved upstairs**

"Internal alignment with CEO/CFO" now tops the list. The CMO is becoming a translator between commercial pressure and brand patience.

5 **Morale is a first-order CMO responsibility**

April adds an emotional layer: morale, wellbeing, managing disrupted teams. One respondent wrote: Missiles. Another: Psychological safety.

6 **Speed + Agility replaced Clarity**

Top priorities: speed of decision-making, campaign agility, risk management, real-time data. Decide faster. Pivot faster. Govern tighter.

7 **Rebalancing to performance is near-universal**

Budget is shifting away from brand to measurable performance - even though marketers know it's wrong. CFO pressure wins in the short term.

WHY THIS ROOM EXISTS

Marketing leaders across the region are operating in a more complex environment

- Decisions are happening faster | Plans are being adjusted in real time | The margin for error is smaller
- This forum exists to step out of execution and compare how these decisions are being made in practice



3

forces reshaping marketing leadership

- Faster decision cycles
- Higher accountability
- Less room for error

This is the context shaping the ABG CMO Forum



The environment has shifted.

Marketing leaders are operating differently: Faster, under more pressure, with less margin.



Budgets are moving.
Campaigns are being reshaped.
Messaging is being reconsidered.

60%

of organizations have already adjusted their approach.



GROWTH UNDER UNCERTAINTY

78%

of CMOs say driving growth under uncertainty is their biggest challenge.

78% of respondents

Growth is still the priority. Delivering it has become harder.

THIS ROOM MATTERS

THREE QUESTIONS TO TAKE INTO THE CONVERSATION

01

What are you optimizing for right now—**efficiency** or **trust**?



02

What have you changed in the last **six weeks** that you wouldn't have changed before?



03

Are your decisions driven by **data**... or **pressure**?



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BETTER QUESTIONS. BETTER CONVERSATIONS. BETTER DECISIONS.

CMO Forum Middle East

April 2026



**Thank you for being part of
ABG's CMO Forum.**

We'd love to hear your thoughts
and ideas. **Scan the QR code** to
share your feedback.





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