

— GROWTH CARTOGRAPHY · FIELD GUIDE 001

# A \$1.3 trillion industry. 2.5 seconds of attention.

Introducing The CMO's Field Guide to System & Cohort Dynamics: a map of the machine that now decides who sees you, and what it costs when it stops looking.

— THE PARADOX FUNDING MODERN MARKETING

\$1.3T

what the world will spend on  
advertising in 2026

2.5s

active attention the average digital  
ad actually earns

— PART ONE

# The signal flood

Why reach stopped working, and why buying more of it makes the problem worse.



— DAILY AD EXPOSURE, THEN AND NOW

~500

ads a day in the 1970s

10,000

ads a day now. Exposure grew 20x;  
human attention did not

— THE FLOOD HAS A SECOND-ORDER EFFECT

# Disillusionomics

/ dɪs·ɪˌluː·ʒənˈɒm·ɪks / noun

When the machinery of persuasion becomes visible, consumers **price it in**. Every tactic they can see is a tactic they discount, and baseline trust in marketing resets lower.

— COMPOUNDING COHORT DECAY EATS UNBALANCED BUDGETS

44%

of companies focus mainly on acquisition

16%

focus mainly on retention, while every acquired cohort starts decaying on day one

— RECALIBRATE THE INSTRUMENT

# The old map vs the new terrain

## THE OLD MAP

Campaigns that end

Reach and impressions

Last-click credit

Microscopic targeting

A rebrand per trend

## THE NEW TERRAIN

→ Cohorts that compound, or decay

→ Active attention, measured in seconds

→ Shapley-value attribution

→ Market thickness

→ One persistent identity

— PART TWO

# The turn

If attention is scarce and trust is discounted,  
what's left to build on?



“

Identity has thus become **the ultimate infrastructure** — not identity in the narrow sense of brand guidelines and logo placement, but a persistent, coherent, recognizable self that people can form a durable relationship with across channels, contexts, and time. Because belief lives in culture and trust lives in experience, persistent identity is **the connective tissue** required to bridge the two.

— HUMANS HAVE ORGANIZED AROUND SHARED BELIEF FOR ~70,000 YEARS\*

# The platforms changed. The physics didn't.

## BELIEF

### lives in culture

People adopt what their cohort already believes.  
No ad unit outruns the group.

## TRUST

### lives in experience

Every touchpoint, from chatbot to checkout, either compounds trust or spends it.

## IDENTITY

### bridges the two

One persistent, recognizable self is the only asset that works on both sides.

# Six imperatives for 2026

01

## Rebalance toward retention

Acquisition-only budgets refill a leaking map. Fund structural retention before the cohort is gone.

02

## Adopt Shapley-value attribution

Last-click is structurally gameable. Credit the whole journey with game-theoretic attribution.

03

## Set rational constraints

Impossible ROAS targets don't push algorithms harder. They trigger clipping and throttle delivery.

04

## Make AI use visibly ethical

Transparency is now brand equity. Private, provable data handling beats clever targeting.

05

## Preserve market thickness

Hyper-granular targeting collapses reach and distorts price floors. Target culture, not microdots.

06

## Treat identity as infrastructure

No reactive pivots. One coherent self across every touchpoint, platform, and year.

— EVERY FIGURE, ONE PLACE TO CHECK

# Sources & methodology

## 01 WARC · Global Ad Forecasts, Dec 2025

\$1.3 trillion global ad spend in 2026

[warc.com](http://warc.com) ↗

## 02 Dentsu · The Attention Economy

~2.5 seconds of active attention per digital ad

[dentsu.com](http://dentsu.com) ↗

## 03 Lumen Research · Eye-Tracking Benchmarks

Attention measured, not modelled. Display range ~1.5–2.5s

[lumen-research.com](http://lumen-research.com) ↗

## 04 CBS News / Yankelovich · Cutting Through Advertising Clutter

~500 ads a day in the 1970s, rising toward 10,000 today

[cbsnews.com](http://cbsnews.com) ↗

## 05 Fortune, Jan 2026 · Disillusionomics (Alice Lassman)

The term for consumers pricing in visible persuasion

[fortune.com](http://fortune.com) ↗

## 06 Econsultancy · Cross-Channel Marketing Report

44% focus on acquisition vs 16% on retention

[econsultancy.com](http://econsultancy.com) ↗

BORROWED FRAMEWORKS · CREDITED IN FULL

A The ~70,000-year "shared belief" framing is Yuval Noah Harari's Cognitive Revolution thesis from **Sapiens**, paraphrased here and credited to Harari.

B "Disillusionomics" is a term coined by economist Alice Lassman, popularized via **Fortune, Jan 2026**.



# The map keeps unfolding.

Three more field guides are on the way: Aggregated, Decentralized, Autonomous. Here is how to get them, and how to put them to work.

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EVERY FIELD GUIDE, THE DAY IT DROPS

Test & model the outcomes → [github.com/jratlee/FDI](https://github.com/jratlee/FDI)

BUILT ON THE FDI SLIDE SYSTEM

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