

The brands leading, challenging and exploring in 2019

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Coca-Cola dividing their products into three categories - leaders, challengers and explorers - is a good way of defining the future of any brand. Those who're successful need to be at least one of these, preferably two, ideally all three.



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Here are five ways we see brands (and a continent) leading, challenging and exploring in 2019.

1. Uber-agile

“The only way to remain in business is creating brands. The moment we stop creating brands then the e-retailers are going to rule.” Javier Meza, CMO of Sparkling at Coca-Cola

In an interview with [Marketing Week](#), CMO of Sparkling at Coca-Cola, Javier Meza, shared how the brand remains current by aiming to be extraordinarily agile. He said in Japan, for example, the business was launching two new products a week. Each product is tracked for six weeks and then a decision is made whether to keep or cull.

There's now a separate entity for Coca-Cola called Global Ventures which scales new products as the business diversifies away from fizzy drinks. Rodolfo Echeverria, Coca-Cola's global vice-president of creative, says explorer brands require “[a typical West Coast, California attitude](#)” which means looking towards healthier products.

In China, for example, they have recently launched a tea brand for the eighth time as well as having Coca-Cola Clear with lemon. In Japan, the brand has Coke Plus Fibre, which lowers the body's fat absorption and is targeted at over-40-year-olds.

Other big players we can expect to see being uber-agile in 2019 are Samsung (who spent around \$15.3 billion on research and development in 2018), Volkswagen and Apple. But will they be swift enough to match Amazon's meteoric innovation? Bearing in mind Amazon's R&D spend in 2018 was a cool \$22.6 billion.



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2. On-site robotic personalisation

“There are new possibilities for self-assembly, replication, repair in our physical structures, our buildings, machines.”
Skylar Tibbits, founder of the Self-Assembly Lab

The Ministry of Supply in collaboration with MIT's Self-Assembly Lab in the US is rolling out a service which introduces the next level of on-site robotic personalisation. Now robots will resize a jersey (or sweater) to fit you while you wait.

Skylar Tibbits, founder of the Self-Assembly Lab [speaks of the innovation](#), saying there's something psychologically rewarding about watching a garment transform before your eyes, “You want to see that it's actually active, that it's alive and transforming with you and around you.”

This is the future of customisable products – not just fashion – robotics sprinkling electronic fairy dust and personalising your product while you wait.

3. I'm still standing: bricks and mortar

“We've found that interacting with the brand in-store makes a customer more loyal.” Paul Hedrick, CEO of direct-to-consumer cowboy boot startup Tecovas

Retailers housed in bricks and mortar will still be around but not necessarily in a way we're used to. Some of the new stores going up are to support their online sales offering, designed to complement the customer's digital experience. Digital retailers Everlane, for instance, created technology in a bricks and mortar setting, with the checkout using online customer profiles and their saved credit card details. As VendHQ writes, “Technology will fuel – not curb – the rise of brick and mortar retail.”

We are also seeing some retailers launch stores which stay open all hours. For example, BookXcess in Malaysia has just opened its doors to the country's biggest-ever bookstore and it will stay open twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week.

Within the shop of 3,437m² they stock half a million books. The space (more like a mall) also has individual reading areas and a cafe to entice readers to stay for longer. We may see more stores like these in the Asia Pacific region as their middle class is [predicted to rise](#) to 65% of the continent's population by 2030, and physical 24/7 is a way of shopping which suits their lifestyle.



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4. More specialised: less spend

“2019 will be the year of conspicuous conservation.” Elizabeth Segran, *FastCompany*

While brands are working overtime to meet customer needs there are real benefits in store (and app!) for the person who wants to streamline their consumer spend. The recent reveal at CES 2019 of L’Oreal’s My Skin Track pH is an example of this. It’s touted as the first “wearable sensor and companion app to easily measure personal skin pH levels and create customised product regimens.”

If it works as well as promised, the reality will be ways of really knowing what our skin needs and less experimenting with products, therefore less wastage.

The My Skin Track opens intriguing doors to the future of beauty, health and technology, but brands need to hold on to the human touch. I recently read a list of ways the [BBC World Service](#) engages younger audiences which can be applied to what customers want. They are: update me, give me perspective, educate me, keep me on trend, amuse me and inspire me.

5. Brand Africa and the wisdom of emerging markets

“90% of the media’s 24/7 coverage is concerned with the West, whereas 90% of the opportunity is in emerging markets.” Stephen Jennings, CEO, Renaissance Capital

According to [Africa Business Communities](#), the World Bank estimates economic growth in the sub-Saharan regions to be at a positive 6% average in 2019-20 and [McKinsey says](#) Africa is the world’s next “big growth market”. *CBNC Africa* also reports there’s a trillion-dollar opportunity to industrialise Africa, “meeting rising domestic demand and create a bridge-head in global export markets.”



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But it’s not only in the business facts and figures that position the continent of Africa to become a powerful challenging and

exploring brand – it is the people. We'll be seeing more ideas and products being created by Africans to meet our most pressing needs. For example, Nigerian college student, Segun Oyeyiola, recently [upcycled a Volkswagen Beetle](#) and turned it into a wind and solar-powered car, made up of scrap parts, for less than \$6,000, paving the way for more local innovation in this field.

With consumer spending in Africa expected to hit \$25 trillion by 2025, our emerging markets are amazing opportunities for international trade and growth, but it will be our spirit of Ubuntu (a quality representing compassion and humanity) which will keep Africa creating innovative products to improve quality of life.

ABOUT JAINITA KHATRI

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