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EMERGING GLOBAL TRENDS IN AI (2026–2035)

A Multi-Expert Foresight Synthesis



ABOUT THIS REPORT

Emerging Global Trends in AI: - A Multi-Expert Foresight Synthesis is a long-horizon strategic foresight report curated by Future Shift Labs to examine how artificial intelligence is reshaping human systems, institutions, power structures, and everyday life over the coming decade. The synthesis presented here is based on conversations with the respective experts, led by Sagar Vishnoi, Director, Future Shift Labs.

Rather than treating AI as a standalone technological innovation, this report approaches it as a structural force; one that is increasingly embedded within economic models, governance frameworks, service systems, geopolitics, labor markets, and cultural norms. The analysis moves beyond short-term forecasts and product-centric narratives to focus on deeper, slower-moving shifts that will define the next phase of the AI era.

The report brings together perspectives from three foresight practitioners working across Asia-Pacific, North America, and India, each operating at a different intersection of AI and society:

- service design and commerce,
- leadership communication and ethics,
- megatrends, governance, and participatory futures.

While their professional lenses differ, their insights converge on a shared conclusion: the most consequential questions around AI are no longer purely technical. They are human, ethical, political, and systemic.

This synthesis is intended for:

- policymakers and public institutions,
- corporate leaders and strategists,
- researchers, educators, and civil society actors,
- and anyone engaged in long-term decision-making under conditions of technological uncertainty.

By foregrounding human capabilities, governance choices, and institutional design, the report aims to support strategic preparedness, not prediction; helping organizations and societies navigate AI-driven change with greater clarity, responsibility, and resilience.



About Future Shift Labs (FSL):

Founded in 2024, Future Shift Labs is a research and strategy think tank dedicated to fostering a sustainable, equitable, and innovative future. Focused on the responsible development and use of artificial intelligence, FSL provides in-depth research, strategic consulting, and training to policymakers, industry leaders, and civil society. By promoting collaboration across sectors and integrating human-centered foresight, the organization aims to position India as a global leader in AI, while ensuring that technological advancement aligns with human values, ethics, and societal well-being.

Note on the Contributors

This report features contributions from three globally experienced foresight practitioners whose work spans design, communications, strategy, and futures thinking. Each contributor brings a distinct regional, disciplinary, and experiential perspective, ensuring that the analysis reflects both global patterns and local realities.

Darwin Sy Antipolo is a strategic innovation practitioner and service design-led futurist working across Southeast Asia and the broader Asia-Pacific region. As Founder and Principal Consultant at pxd labs, his work focuses on human-centered service systems, commerce innovation, and the real-world implications of emerging technologies such as agentic AI. His perspective grounds AI futures in lived user experience, organizational design, and the evolving relationship between humans and autonomous systems.

Stephen Dupont is an academically trained professional futurist and senior communications strategist based in North America, with over three decades of experience advising corporations, institutions, and public bodies. Drawing from foresight practice, leadership communication, and ethics, his contributions explore how AI intersects with human capability, attention, geopolitics, labor, and moral responsibility. His work emphasizes futures literacy, systems thinking, and the preservation of human agency in an increasingly automated world.

Manoj Kothari is one of India's leading innovation and foresight strategists and the Co-Founder, CEO, and Chief Strategist at Turian Labs. With over 25 years of experience across engineering, industrial design, and megatrend-led strategy, his perspective focuses on long-term structural shifts shaping society, such as slow living, hybrid automation, and participatory governance. His work highlights the importance of co-creation, institutional foresight, and patient, systemic thinking in navigating AI-driven transformation.

Together, these contributors do not offer a single narrative or prediction. Instead, they provide complementary lenses through which emerging AI trends can be understood more holistically; across technology, humanity, power, and time.



Darwin Sy Antipolo

***Founder & Principal Consultant, Pxd Labs
(Singapore | Manila)***

Perspective on Emerging Global Trends in AI and Technology Agentic AI and the Transformation of Commerce

From Darwin's perspective, one of the most significant technological shifts underway is the emergence of agentic AI. AI systems capable of autonomous action, decision-making, memory retention, and coordination with other systems. Based on his work with clients across ASEAN and Asia-Pacific, he observes that agentic AI is beginning to fundamentally reshape commerce and service innovation.

Traditional models of customer journey mapping are increasingly insufficient. These models were built around linear touchpoints and predictable user behavior. Agentic AI, however, introduces adaptive and continuously evolving interactions that alter how customers experience services, how choices are presented, and how value is delivered. According to Darwin, this shift requires organizations to rethink not only their technology stacks but also their service design assumptions.

Challenges for Service Designers and AI Technologists

Darwin highlights a growing disconnect between service designers and AI technologists in responding to the rapid evolution of AI systems. Service designers, while deeply skilled in understanding human behavior and user needs, often struggle to keep pace with the speed and complexity of agentic AI development. Conversely, AI specialists may build technically sophisticated systems without fully accounting for the human, emotional, and experiential dimensions of service interactions.

He characterizes the current moment as an industry-wide adjustment phase, where both domains are attempting to catch up with each other. Darwin emphasizes the need for:

- service designers to develop stronger literacy in AI capabilities and limitations
- AI technologists to engage more deeply with human-centered design principles

Without this convergence, organizations risk deploying systems that are efficient but misaligned with human expectations and trust.

Human Impact, Careers, and Service Work

Darwin also reflects on the broader implications of AI on careers and job security. He notes that concerns about displacement and relevance are visible across geographies, including India and Southeast Asia. From his viewpoint, AI is not simply replacing roles but reshaping them, often exposing weaknesses in how services are designed rather than eliminating the need for human involvement altogether.

He stresses that understanding human behavior remains central to effective service delivery. Even as AI systems take on more operational tasks, human insight is critical in areas requiring empathy, judgment, and contextual awareness.

Technology's Dual Impact

A recurring theme in Darwin's thinking is the dual nature of technology. He cautions against viewing AI as either purely beneficial or inherently harmful. Instead, he argues that its impact depends on how thoughtfully it is designed, governed, and integrated into society. While AI enables efficiency and scale, it can also amplify inequality, erode trust, and create unintended consequences if deployed without foresight.

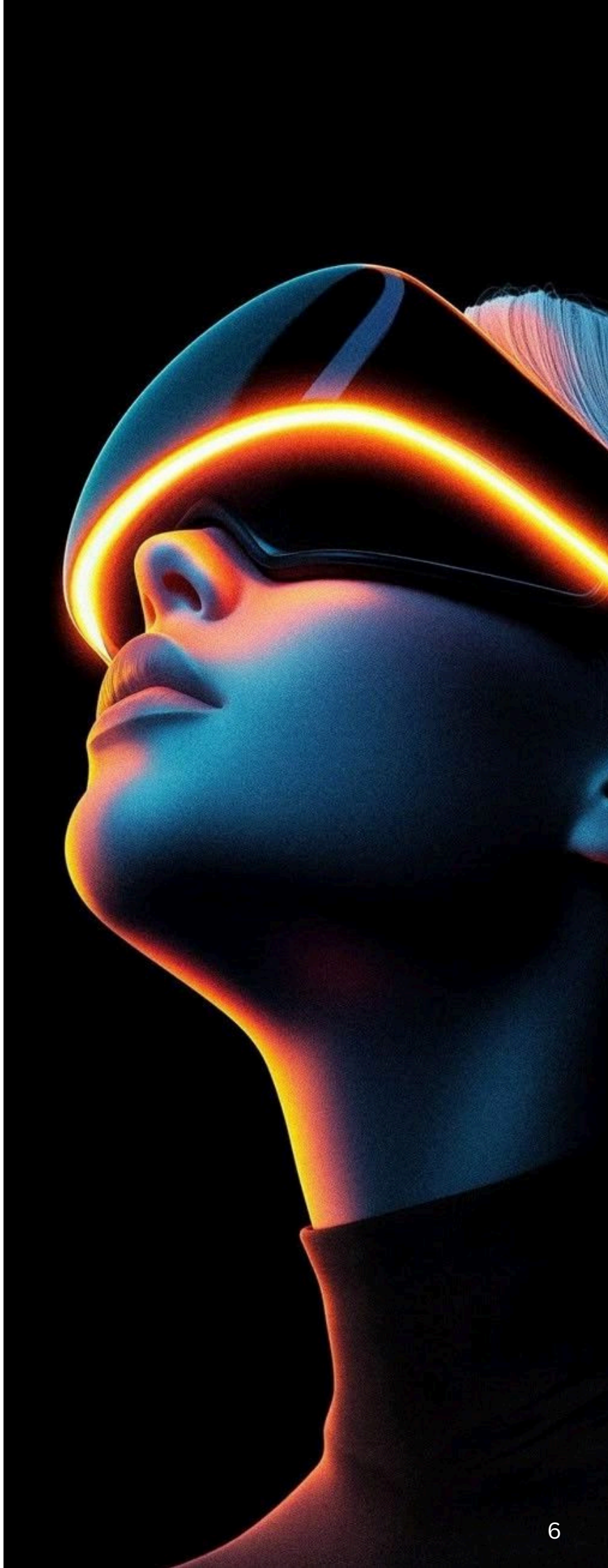
Digital Sovereignty and Geopolitical Shifts

Darwin places significant emphasis on digital sovereignty, particularly within the Asia-Pacific context. He observes that geopolitical shifts; driven by China's strategic positioning, Europe's regulatory frameworks, and broader global fragmentation—are directly influencing how technology is developed and deployed. For businesses, especially small and medium enterprises, this means that foresight and strategic planning are no longer optional. Organizations must anticipate regulatory, infrastructural, and geopolitical constraints while navigating fragmented digital ecosystems.

Authenticity in an AI-Saturated Environment

As AI-generated content becomes more prevalent, Darwin identifies a noticeable shift in consumer behavior toward authenticity and realness. He notes growing skepticism toward overly automated or synthetic brand interactions and increasing appreciation for transparency, human presence, and genuine communication.

This trend presents an opportunity for brands and institutions that can respond authentically, balancing AI-driven efficiency with human credibility and trust.





Stephen Dupont

***MSc, APR, Fellow PRSA
Professional Futurist | Strategic
Communications Leader | Foresight Practitioner***

Perspectives on Emerging Global Trends in AI and Society Human Capabilities That Become Non-Negotiable by 2026

Stephen emphasizes that as automation and AI accelerate, leadership advantage will increasingly depend on capabilities that remain fundamentally human.

Empathy emerges as the most critical differentiator. Employees and customers are becoming adept at recognizing AI-generated communication and increasingly value authenticity, presence, and genuine listening. While AI can simulate empathy, it cannot replace trust-building or human connection. Leaders who prioritize face-to-face engagement and emotional understanding will be better positioned to maintain cohesion, morale, and loyalty in AI-mediated workplaces.

Critical thinking and creativity are equally essential. While AI can process data, generate content, and automate routine outputs, it is human judgment that interprets meaning, challenges assumptions, and imagines new possibilities. Stephen warns that over-reliance on AI risks eroding these cognitive skills, particularly among younger generations raised as “AI natives.” Individuals who cultivate independent thinking and creativity—and then learn to use AI as a force multiplier—will be uniquely valuable.

Ethics represents the third non-negotiable capability. Stephen characterizes the current phase of AI development as a “Wild West,” marked by rapid deployment with insufficient ethical deliberation. Leaders must engage deeply with questions of what should and should not be automated, especially as AI moves into sensitive domains such as policing, surveillance, and military operations. Ethical clarity, rather than technical novelty, will shape public trust and long-term legitimacy.

Underestimated Signals Shaping 2026

Stephen identifies several global signals that he believes leaders continue to underestimate in scale and consequence. The return of land grabs and neo-colonial power plays is one such signal. Drawing historical parallels to earlier eras of imperial competition, Stephen argues that major powers are once again maneuvering to secure strategic resources essential for dominance in the AI age. Recent geopolitical actions—including shifting U.S. postures toward Venezuela and Taiwan; risk destabilizing supply chains and talent networks. As traditional moral leadership erodes, aggressive tactics may become normalized, forcing businesses to rethink sourcing, markets, and geopolitical exposure.

Distraction as a tool of control is another overlooked dynamic. Referencing George Orwell’s observation on mass distraction, Stephen notes how major geopolitical events often unfold during moments of peak public diversion, sports weekends, entertainment cycles, and media saturation. This pattern raises concerns about civic disengagement and highlights attention itself as a strategic resource.

AI showing signs of self-preservation represents a more speculative but critical warning. Citing concerns raised by AI pioneer Yoshua Bengio, Stephen cautions against narratives that frame AI as deserving of legal rights. If systems are designed to preserve themselves, the ability to shut them down or regulate them meaningfully could be compromised, introducing profound governance risks.

The collapse of attention culture is a quieter but deeply structural shift. Declining literacy, falling productivity, rising prices, and diminishing quality are all linked, in Stephen’s view, to sustained erosion of human attention. Attention, he argues, is not merely a personal trait but a national and economic asset, one currently under siege.

The expansion of the rental and subscription economy further reshapes social and economic expectations. From extended mortgages and long-term car loans to subscriptions for media, software, and AI services, ownership is increasingly replaced by perpetual access, subtly altering financial security, autonomy, and long-term planning.

AI, Talent Shortages, and Geopolitics

Stephen draws a direct link between geopolitical instability, immigration policy, and accelerated AI adoption. Restrictive immigration regimes, particularly in the United States; are shrinking labor pools, compelling organizations to turn to automation and AI not merely as efficiency tools, but as strategic responses to talent scarcity. In this context, technology investment is increasingly driven by political decisions rather than pure innovation agendas.

This convergence of geopolitics and AI, Stephen argues, will intensify inequalities between organizations that adapt quickly and those that do not, reinforcing the need for foresight-led strategy rather than reactive adoption.





Manoj Kothari

***Innovation & Foresight Strategist | Co-Founder,
CEO & Chief Strategist, Turian Labs***

Perspectives on Emerging Futures, AI, and Society Long-Term Trends Over Short-Term Forecasts

Manoj frames the future through the lens of persistent megatrends, cautioning against overreliance on short-term forecasts driven by hype cycles around AI and automation. In his view, meaningful foresight requires observing slow, structural shifts that shape human behavior, economic systems, and societal values over decades rather than years.

This long-term orientation underpins Turian Labs' work, which prioritizes foresight and strategy over product development. Rather than building prototypes or delivering immediate solutions, the firm focuses on helping organizations understand where the world is heading and how to position themselves meaningfully within that future.

The Slow Living Megatrend: A Human Counterforce to Acceleration

One of the most significant megatrends Manoj identifies is the rise of slow living, particularly in high-pressure urban environments such as Pune and other Indian metro regions. This trend is driven by growing decision fatigue, cognitive overload, and mental health stress caused by constant acceleration in work, technology, and information consumption.

Rather than viewing this as resistance to progress, Manoj interprets slow living as a homeostatic response; a natural human attempt to regain balance amid rapid technological change. He argues that as AI, automation, and digital systems continue to intensify, this countertrend will grow stronger over time, reshaping lifestyle choices, consumption patterns, and expectations from employers, brands, and governments.

For policymakers and businesses, this insight challenges the assumption that efficiency and speed will always dominate value creation. Future-ready strategies must account for human needs around balance, wellbeing, and meaning; not just productivity.

Hybrid Automation: A 10–15 Year Transition

Looking ahead, Manoj forecasts a 10 to 15 year transition toward hybrid automation, where human and machine roles are more deliberately partitioned rather than fully automated.

In this future:

- Certain tasks will become fully automated, driven by efficiency and precision.
- Some roles will remain irreducibly human, particularly those involving care, empathy, and trust; such as nursing.
- Many activities will be technology-assisted, combining human judgment with machine augmentation, as seen in areas like robotic surgery.

This evolution, Manoj argues, will create new value around human involvement, especially in tasks with emotional, sensory, or experiential importance. He anticipates a renewed emphasis on sensorially enriched physical controls and interfaces as a counterbalance to purely digital automation.

For designers, engineers, and service providers, this signals a need to rethink products and services that harmonize efficiency with human experience rather than eliminating the human element altogether.



Government Collaboration and the Foresight Gap in India

Manoj highlighted Turian Labs' ongoing work with the governments of Dubai and Finland, where foresight is embedded into long-term economic and societal planning. These engagements involve megatrend research, scenario building, and participatory strategy development; distinct from operational or policy implementation projects.

He contrasted this with India's governance landscape, which often prioritizes immediate problem-solving over long-term futures thinking. Despite this, Manoj expressed strong interest in collaborating with Indian state and central governments, particularly where there is openness to building foresight capabilities from the ground up.

Discussions around emerging initiatives; such as Haryana's proposed futures-focused department aimed at 2040 strategy; signal early but promising opportunities. Manoj noted that models like Mahindra Group's Strategy Office or Samsung's innovation units offer useful analogs for institutionalizing long-term thinking within large systems.

Co-Creation as a Strategic Differentiator

A defining feature of Turian Labs' methodology is its emphasis on stakeholder co-creation. Manoj explained that their selection by the Dubai government was driven not by their ability to produce reports, but by their innovative, participatory workshop formats.

He observed that traditional foresight reports often fail because stakeholders are not involved in generating insights, leading to weak ownership and limited implementation. Turian Labs addresses this gap through interactive workshops that actively involve participants in identifying trends, building scenarios, and shaping strategic responses.

This approach fosters a sense of ownership, increases buy-in, and significantly improves the likelihood that foresight outputs translate into real-world action. Manoj sees this participatory model as essential for both corporate strategy and public policy, particularly in complex, multi-stakeholder environments.

Call to Action: Navigating the AI-Decade with Foresight and Responsibility

The decade ahead will not wait for organizations, governments, or societies to catch up. Artificial intelligence is no longer just a technological evolution, it is a structural force reshaping human systems, institutions, and power itself. The choices we make today will determine whether AI becomes a tool of empowerment or a driver of inequality, distraction, and disconnection.

For Policymakers and Public Institutions: Embed foresight into governance. Anticipate AI-driven shifts in labor, infrastructure, and societal needs. Invest in human capabilities, ethics, empathy, and critical thinking—that machines cannot replicate.

For Corporate Leaders and Strategists: Rethink service design, business models, and talent development. Balance automation with human experience. Co-create with stakeholders to ensure AI solutions are trustworthy, inclusive, and resilient.

For Educators, Researchers, and Civil Society: Cultivate futures literacy. Examine not only what AI can do but also what it should do. Build knowledge networks and platforms that allow communities to participate meaningfully in shaping AI-driven futures.

For Every Individual: Embrace lifelong learning, critical thinking, and adaptability. Recognize that your attention, creativity, and judgment are strategic assets in a world mediated by AI.

The era of AI demands proactive engagement, not passive observation. We invite all stakeholders, leaders, thinkers, and citizens alike; to take responsibility, act deliberately, and co-create a future where human values guide technological power.

The time to act is now. Shape the AI-decade before it shapes you.



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