

# impact

ISSUE 46 JULY 2024

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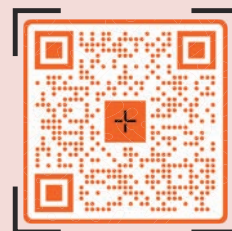
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# Telling the insight story



**B**y the time this issue of *Impact* – the last ever – is published, we will have a new government in the UK. I’m writing this a week before the election – and tempting as it is to make predictions, I’ll leave that to the experts. What I will say is: I hope whoever ends up in 10 Downing Street pays attention to data and insight. Not just what they want to hear. I live in hope...

I write this at the end of an unusual tenure as editor of the magazine. I took up the role in April 2020, shortly after the first Covid-19 lockdown was announced by then Prime Minister Boris Johnson. Remembering that time, it feels like a different world. While governments and organisations grappled with the pandemic, we navigated a challenging time in our working lives.

Practical adjustments to putting together a magazine remotely were handled remarkably by our brilliant partners at CPL One, but it was trickier to line up people willing to speak to us about the work they were doing at a time when a lot of that work was experimental and felt on shaky ground.

Still, we worked hard to bring research stories to the forefront, writing about how businesses and brands were using insight to navigate such uncertain times.

Later, as a health crisis became an economic one, the magazine covered how brands were adapting to shifts in consumer behaviour, how companies were responding to flexible working, and how the industry continued to innovate. We saw that those who listened to insight survived and thrived.

MRS launched *Impact* in 2013 to shine a spotlight on the impact of research – and it’s been fascinating to edit the magazine at a time of such societal flux, with the strapline ‘using insight and evidence to make a difference’ never more appropriate.

In the final issue, it would be remiss not to acknowledge the impact of *Impact*, so, on page 32, I invited MRS colleagues and former editors to share their memories and highlights from over the years.

It was also a pleasure to profile MRS chief executive Jane Frost, who shared her thoughts on the importance of looking outwards, in order to learn and grow as businesses and as people (page 18).

That curiosity will be essential to navigating change – an omnipresent theme. In the October 2023 issue, a report on the rise of foresight began with an observation made by philosopher Derek Parfit in 2011: “We live during the hinge of history. The world has never changed as fast.”

Today, the insight industry is arguably at another hinge of history within its own story. Market and social researchers, data analysts and other insight professionals are some of the few able to harness change to their advantage and shape their own future.

It’s why we got a cross-section of the sector to reimagine the future by asking ‘what if?’. The report (page 22), which inspired the cover art, explores questions about representation, sustainability, flexible working, inclusion, artificial intelligence and getting the industry the value it deserves. Within its pages, there’s the beginnings of a manifesto for future growth. If you take anything away from this issue, ask yourself ‘what if’ we could do things differently? How could that shape a different reality? I hope that’s what our new political leaders will be doing.

Although we might be closing a door with the end of *Impact*, insight is more important to the world than ever. We will continue to tell the story of insight, in a new way, as we look ahead to the relaunch of the Research Live website.

Thank you for your support and readership over the years.





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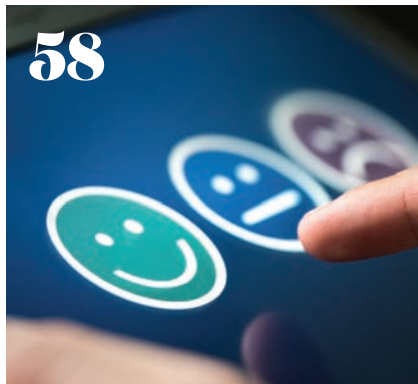
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# B2B & HC

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# Less is more



**T**here is a superb podcast episode you can find online in which the host, Greg McKeown, interviews behavioural scientist Leidy Klotz. In it, Klotz points to an extraordinary psychological bias that I think besets us all: when faced with a problem, we are wildly predisposed to seek solutions through addition rather than subtraction.

In a wonderful experiment that demonstrates this, people are given a bridge made of Lego that is uneven and asked what change needs to be made to level the bridge. Overwhelmingly, more people choose to add a brick to the low pillar of the bridge rather than removing one from the pillar that is too high.

This tendency to over-complication besets much of our decision-making in most areas of business – and it’s now something I try to correct in my own daily actions. It’s dangerously easy to assume that what a problem requires is a new corrective component rather than to ask an equally valid question – whether things might be streamlined and improved by removing something. This bias, after all, is partly how bureaucracies grow.

It’s worth considering to what extent market research may unconsciously be affected by this bias. Do we automatically ask: “What’s missing?” much more often than we ask: “What don’t you need?”

Remember, a great deal of marketing effort is rightly devoted towards attempts to uncover consumers’ ‘unmet needs’. I have no problem with this, obviously. But I’ve never come across any market research that looks to uncover the opposite: what you might call ‘met un-needs’. These are cases where enormous effort is dedicated to the pursuit of some metric that is either irrelevant to the consumer or becomes increasingly irrelevant once a certain basic threshold has been met.

In extreme cases of ‘met un-needs’, I suspect organisations may even dedicate a lot of effort to performing activities that the consumer may find mildly annoying. Over-solicitous service might be one example: the practice of many hotels in taking your luggage from you when you arrive. I don’t know about you, but I find this mildly disturbing. I’ve spent the past eight hours keeping my luggage in my line of sight, and then suddenly a stranger seeks to deprive me of it before I even know which room I have been assigned. OK, so far, my luggage has never actually gone missing in this way, but it creates anxiety, nevertheless. For the most part, I don’t travel with three Louis Vuitton steamer trunks and a vast

entourage, so I’m perfectly happy manoeuvring my own case the last 100 yards of a 500-mile journey.

Technology is particularly beset by this functional bloat, with websites and software continually adding new functions to satisfy a small minority of demanding users only to end up with an interface that is painfully cluttered or completely un navigable for first-time or novice users.

This addition of spurious functionality may also confuse potential customers. In my book *Alchemy*, I mentioned the extraordinary genius of former Sony chairman Akio Morita, the visionary behind the first Walkman. Morita refused requests to add recording functionality, even though such an addition would have cost very little. Why? Because he realised that a device that only did one thing – in this case, playing pre-recorded cassettes for the entertainment of travellers – would be very easy to choose or to reject if its function was self-evident. If the engineers had been given free rein to add recording functionality, people’s understanding of the device would have been muddled; perhaps they would have wondered whether it should be used as a dictaphone?

In this case, I’m fairly confident that less was more. How often do we fail to consider this? Researchers should perhaps remember the lesson of Leidy Klotz and devote time to asking what consumers might need less of. It’s a more subtle line of enquiry, since respondents will at first follow the standard assumption that ‘more is more’. Do we want a microwave also to be a grill? Ostensibly, yes. But are we blurring ‘affordance’ and perceived excellence by turning everything into a Swiss army knife?

Life, after all, is already complicated enough for all of us, and for people over a certain age, life is reaching a point where it is oppressively demanding of our cognition.

In another brilliant podcast, environmental expert Michael Liebreich debunks the idea of versatility as a virtue. “People always cite the fact that hydrogen is the Swiss army knife of energy,” he said. “Yes, it can power combustion engines, it can be used in fuel cells to generate electricity, and it can be used potentially to transport and store energy as well.” But, he points out something that is also true to life: “Lots of people own Swiss army knives, but they never actually use them very much, because for every single function it can perform, there’s usually a single-purpose, stand-alone device that does the same job much better.”





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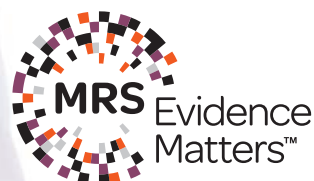
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“Persuadables are the majority, yet their **engagement in climate action is hindered**”

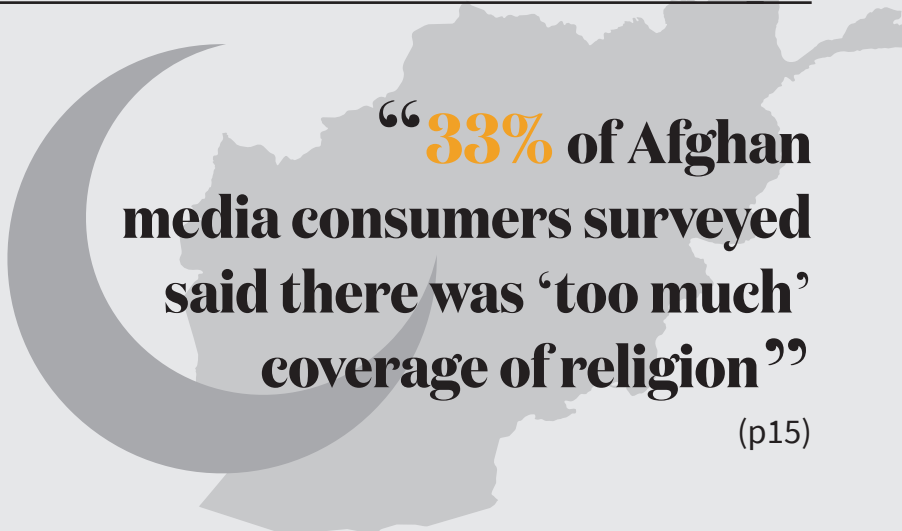
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# Capturing the zeitgeist

**The *Washington Post*'s Power Index gives a sense of how business, policy-makers and consumers are reacting to and prioritising the world's biggest challenges.**  
By Liam Kay-McClean

How do people see the world around them, and how do they respond to the challenges they face? These questions are at the heart of journalism and, since 1877, the *Washington Post* has been one of the most prominent newspapers in the US, chasing the news of the day and dissecting it for its readership.

With a media industry in flux, however, it has never been more important for the *Washington Post* to understand what its readers – businesses, politicians and the public – think about the key issues, and how that information can feed into the content it produces.



The Power Index, a study carried out annually alongside Kantar, is the *Washington Post's* attempt to uncover which issues are pressing most on the minds of consumers and those in power, and how people believe they can affect or even solve the problems in today's world. "The original research was born out of this need to understand powerful audiences," says Amelia Simpson, the newspaper's director of audience insights. "If you think of the *Washington Post* in the marketplace, that is our audience. We are not only speaking to, but being read by, the most powerful people in the world. What keeps them up at night, and why?"

The 2024 Power Index is based on the results of a 2023 survey of approximately 300 business leaders, 300 policymakers and interviews with 500 members of the public in the US, and a survey of 150 of both business leaders and policymakers in UK, alongside interviews with 500 consumers, to evaluate 29 issues affecting the UK and the US through the lens of importance, relevance and their ability to affect the issue. The issues covered five broad areas: economic, social, technological, personal/health, and environmental.

"Importance and relevance have a strong relationship, because if something is relevant to you, personally, it is probably important," says Simpson. "There is a disconnect between those parameters and ability. Seeing where there is that alignment, where things are important and have high ability scores, that is interesting for us to educate our clients about. But more important is understanding where those gaps are, what is really important, and where leaders feel less confident in their ability to solve it – is that an opportunity for a brand; is that an opportunity for an organisation?"

The 2024 Power Index shows the differences in priorities between policy-makers, business leaders and the public. In the UK and the US, business leaders saw job creation and unemployment as the top issue, with inflation and reskilling rounding out the top three. Among policy influencers, human rights was the top issue in the US and third among UK respondents, while educating the next generation was number one in the UK and third in the US. Job

## “What has not been a surprise, but a delight, is the shared understanding that what is good for our readers is going to make us better commercial partners”

creation and unemployment in the US, and diversity, equity and inclusion in the UK, were in second. In contrast, consumers in both countries saw inflation as the top issue, followed by human rights and barriers to healthcare, in the US, and barriers to healthcare and affordable housing in the UK.

From there, the researchers used an 'impact matrix' to determine which issues were 'undervalued', which had 'momentum', which were 'stagnant' and deemed of lower importance, and which were 'vulnerable', in that they were seen as important, but people in power lacked the ability to tackle them. There were some contrasts between how each group of respondents categorised each of the 29 issues; for example, inflation was a 'momentum' issue for consumers, but deemed 'vulnerable' for business leaders and policy influencers.

When compared with the 2021 research, one of the most interesting observations is what has stayed the same across three years of relative turbulence, says Simpson. "There are really significant gaps, across business and policy, between the issues they believe are important and the issues they believe they can take action on," she says. "It is one in three issues that have this significant gap between importance and ability."

For example, technology and innovation regularly crops up as one of the lowest-ranked issues measured in the Power Index. Even when asking about artificial intelligence (AI), which has received extensive media coverage, there was little improvement in its relevance to respondents or in policy-makers' perceived ability to influence it.

That is a "wake-up call" for the tech sector, marketers and brands, says Simpson: "Your innovation message isn't resonating because people are so focused on the here and now – how do I afford milk, my personal and physical safety, and my mental health. Those things are all going to be prioritised above this nebulous idea of technology that we don't

know will make our life better or worse."

Even AI-led breakthroughs in areas such as healthcare are unlikely to improve its standing, according to Simpson. "If you want to tell an innovation story, don't use the word 'innovation'; don't use the word 'technology' – talk about outcomes."

The findings of the Power Index have helped inform editorial priorities, as well as commercial opportunities for the *Washington Post*.

"What has not been a surprise, but a delight, is the shared understanding that what is good for our readers is going to make us better commercial partners. We are all grounded in this idea of what our readers need," says Simpson, who explains that there is a "healthy separation of church and state" between the company's research function and editorial. There is, however, a willingness to share learning.

"It is collaborative, without either side directing the other," she says.

"I view [the Power Index] as one of the tools in my insight toolbox. This study helps us answer the question of what is happening beyond the walls of the *Post*; how we take the signals of what matters – gleaned based on what people are engaging with, reading and watching on the site – and counterbalance externally."

### Consumers felt the following issues were of low importance to policy-makers, but that reforms were achievable:

- **In the US**, consumer privacy protections
- **In the UK**, protecting democratic institutions, prioritising diversity, equity and inclusion, gun safety, and immigration

(Source: The Power Index, the *Washington Post* 2024)

# Identifying insight

**Market and user research can be a powerful combination. Samantha Elliott reflects on how this mix helped in the design of a new digital ID card to help veterans access vital services**

On 3 January 2022, I was starting my first project since coming back from my second maternity leave – a mix of trepidation tinged with excitement of getting my brain back into gear. The project was a discovery for the Office for Veterans' Affairs (OVA), and the aim was to understand how veterans could more quickly, easily and securely prove they had served in the UK armed forces.

In the veterans' strategy action plan (2022-24), the government committed to exploring the secure, digital verification of veterans' status. Service leavers, post-2018, were already receiving a veteran card as part of the discharge process, and the OVA wanted to see if this could be extended to the 1.6 million veterans who left the service before that year.

I oversaw the research element of the project and, although a market researcher for more than 18 years, this was my first 'user researcher' gig. How different could it be? Research is research, right?

I looked at the scope – around 50 in-depth interviews, co-design sessions, an online survey, workshops, technical knowledge transfer sessions, to name but a few. Then I clocked the timeframe – nine weeks for the entire discovery phase. Was this a typo? No, this is fairly standard for digital discoveries, I was informed.

Our approach was based on a human-centred design framework:

- **Heart:** 'understanding the why', including user needs, motivations and pains
- **Head:** 'mapping the what', building a 360-degree view of the dynamics and contexts that influence behaviours and needs, envisioning a thriving service ecosystem
- **Hands:** 'creating the how', using

participatory design to test and learn through real-world scenarios.

We recruited and interviewed around 25 veterans, with varying capabilities across the digital-inclusion scale, and explored their experience – from when they left the armed forces – of applying for eligible services and having to verify their identity. Simultaneously, we conducted around 25 in-depth interviews with stakeholders – including civil servants, veterans' charities and local authorities – a complex landscape because of the number of organisations involved.

Among veterans, we discovered:

1) Not all identified as a veteran. The official definition is someone who has served at least one day in the armed forces. For various reasons – for example, if they were

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“I looked at the scope... then I clocked the timeframe – nine weeks for the entire discovery phase. Was this a typo?”  
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in the reserves – the term 'veteran' didn't always resonate.

2) Awareness of available services (health, housing, employment support, etc) was fairly low, particularly among those who didn't identify as a veteran.

3) Verification was a manual and time-consuming process. Many veterans didn't have any documentation, such as their discharge letter, that proved their service.

Among stakeholders, we discovered inconsistencies in processes, in terms of eligibility criteria and recording status, and



subsequent frustrations and inefficiencies. The need for a flexible service, available through digital, mobile and offline channels, became clear early on. The key was to ensure that all who needed it could access it.

## Envision, design, test, learn and refine

We mapped the current journeys that veterans take when verifying their identity and those of stakeholders. We created eight 'personas' to understand the potential users of the service and where their needs, motivations or capabilities varied.

To validate findings, we ran an online survey among veterans that achieved more than 800 completes – a breakthrough given the lack of data held on veterans in the UK. This allowed us to: validate and rank veterans' needs; quantify the appetite for digitalisation of records; and verify and size the personas (through segmentation analysis).

We ran several co-design sessions with user groups, followed by collaboration workshops with our clients. The combination of user



insights, technical expertise and stakeholder understanding informed the design of a human-centred future experience.

Daily stand-ups with the project team (including clients), sprint planning and weekly 'show and tells' meant everyone was on the same journey. Being part of a team working towards a common goal was essential in pushing the boundaries of what we could achieve in a limited timeframe.

### The impact

On 28 January 2024, the government launched the new HM Armed Forces Veteran Card, and OVA had stayed true to our initial design. It made me so happy that veterans can now access services they need quickly. It also highlighted the importance of our role as researchers in influencing and impacting service design – we are the voice of the user and can make a real difference.

- **Samantha Elliott is principal researcher at Transform**

### Wider reflections

While jargon and ways of working may vary, user and market research complement each other hugely. This combination is exciting and full of potential. Together, we can strengthen the voice of the user, ensuring services are built around their evolving needs.

#### User research brings:

- **Agility.** While you plan activities, there is flexibility to pivot and change scope based on emerging findings. The freedom is liberating
- **Transparency.** You present draft ideas and work-in-progress outputs often, rather than polished end reports, facilitating collaboration and communication. It's an open, evolving narrative
- **Focus.** You usually work full-time on projects. Granted, we don't always have that luxury in traditional research, but being able to focus helps productivity
- **Collaboration.** Projects are often multidisciplinary; you're part of one wider team, including clients
- **Completeness.** You're involved throughout; you see your insights embedded in design as it evolves and the launch of the services or products.

#### Market research methods add:

- **Rigour:** quality standards, tools and processes
- **Regulation:** advancing best practice in informed consent, moderation and limiting bias in the interpretation of findings. Ethics underpin everything and the MRS Code of Conduct is crucial in helping to protect research standards
- **Robustness.** Quantitative research skills bring opportunities for larger-scale testing and validation, from discovery to prototypes – crucial for providing weight of evidence. As Greek philosopher Heraclitus observed, 'change is the only constant in life'. This is so true with research. I wonder if we should remove the 'market' and 'user' prefaces, and refer to ourselves simply as researchers? That's what I'm doing, and I'm enjoying the ride.



# Checking your privilege

**Ethnographic research with middle-class consumers in India led one researcher to reflect on challenging biases and embracing humility.**

By Dinisha Cheroedian

In July 2023, I headed to India for an ethnographic project, spending time with people in their homes, understanding their lives and attitudes, and exploring why they buy the premium version of our client's product.

We didn't have a specific affluence quota, but we anticipated that we would be speaking to those on the more affluent side, able and willing to spend more for a premium product.

I would be moderating, because I don't see myself as British, but as 'tricultural', connected with my Indian, African and British roots. I was born in Malawi, grew up in the UK, and my family are from India. I may only speak one language, English, but I code-shift with my accent, body language and cultural references. I know how to spot and lean into cultural differences and connect with people from many walks of life.

## Unlocking perspectives

Our first ethnography was with Sundharani. We headed to a less affluent part of the city, walked past a slightly battered Maruti Swift car in the car port, and headed upstairs to the second-floor apartment. We were greeted by Sundharani's husband, and welcomed into a very small, tidy front room. All the while, my heart was sinking. I thought: "Oh no, have we got a mis-recruit here?"

Then we began talking and observing. We looked at the photos on the wall, from her work trips to the US and the UK. One of Sundharani's life goals is to live abroad, and she is working hard towards this, hoping to be posted with her company in the US. We



talked about her car. She is the first person in her family to own a car and is proud to be able to drive her family and visitors from her home village around the city when they visit.

Her parents and husband have always supported her and encouraged her to strive for more. She is inspired by her boss, whom she quotes regularly. He tells her that it is important to pay more for premium products because they will be good quality.

## Challenging biases and embracing humility

I was humbled. Sundharani was not a mis-recruit, she was exactly the right customer for the premium product, and I had made some very swift judgements before I had even met her.

Each day, we visited more people like Sundharani, striving to better themselves and their family situation – progressive in their thinking, proud to be able to bring comfort to their parents in their twilight years, and seeing education as the gateway to advancement.

It dawned on me that this is the rising middle-class of India. I've read *The Economist* articles on the topic and worked on global insight briefs that include middle-class India and their growing disposable incomes. Spending my whole life going back and forth to India, and having lived there for a year, I thought I understood what the rising middle-class of India is – but, the reality is, the India I know and the circles I move in are very different. I cannot

fully understand every stratum of Indian society, and I shouldn't, either. My role is to enter projects and people's homes without bias or judgement.

As I boarded my plane back to the UK, I had time to reflect, recognising that, with years of international insight experience, it's important to continue to learn and evolve. I have two very simple takeaways:

1) Check your biases: We all have them. Our upbringing and the cultures and influences that have shaped us all create biases. Even being 'from' a culture is a bias in itself. This is not a bad thing; it's inevitable. It is crucial to acknowledge and set aside preconceived notions that may cloud our understanding of diverse populations. In the corporate boardroom, where our voices represent participants, recognising and mitigating biases is essential for unbiased insights.

2) Stay open: Be open to change, new ideas and truths. Cultural landscapes evolve, and what held true in the past may not align with present realities. Remaining receptive to change and new perspectives allows us to uncover opportunities that can help our clients make an impact.

I encourage everyone to think about and recognise your own biases, because we all have them. Stay open to new possibilities because that's how we get to truly great insight.

● Dinisha Cheroedian is strategy director at BMM

# After the fall

**BBC Media Action research has explored the changed media landscape in Afghanistan. By Liam Kay-McClean**

After 20 years of war, a new era began in Afghanistan in August 2021, with the Taliban returning to power. This has led to significant changes in Afghan society, with personal freedoms curtailed, especially among women.

The media industry in Afghanistan was among the numerous areas of life to change rapidly. BBC Media Action, the BBC's media charity, sought to understand those changes and how media consumption in Afghanistan had changed.

The Taliban has restricted media organisations, detained journalists and imposed harsher restrictions on female reporters. According to Reporters Without Borders, 40% of media outlets have closed, and 60% of Afghanistan's journalists have either left the country or their jobs.

"Since the Taliban took over, we have constantly been doing research," says Mahdi Zaki, country research manager at BBC Media Action and co-author of *A survey of media consumption in Afghanistan*, published in December 2023. "There were media personnel who had left the country; lots of media organisations had just suddenly stopped operating and slowly restarted and resumed their activities. We wanted to understand how many media were still active in Afghanistan.

"The Taliban has restricted the broadcast of entertainment content, for example. We wanted to understand what has changed – what media and content is still accessible to Afghans, and what has been the impact of the Taliban takeover on Afghans' media consumption."

The research involved 2,620 quantitative interviews across 34 provinces, as well as 15 focus groups, five key informant interviews (KII) with media experts, and 20 KIIs with Afghan media content makers and broadcasters inside and outside the country.

Carrying out research in Afghanistan post-Taliban has significant challenges. BBC

Media Action was helped by its existing presence in the country, with local researchers who are trusted by community members. Around one in three Afghans has access to the internet, with fewer than half of mobile phone users owning a smartphone, making the challenge of contacting people more difficult. In the end, 58% of interviews were carried out over the phone, with the rest done in person.

"Our colleagues have tried to build an environment where people could freely speak, but you might see in some cases where the percentage of people who 'don't know' or don't want to answer was a bit higher," explains Zaki. "Considering the

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**"To have 45% of participants being female in Afghanistan was an achievement"**  
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situation in the country, people wanted to be censored or, in some cases, people wanted to share, or felt happy they were being listened to or that their views were being collected."

In many cases, researchers needed to negotiate with a male guardian, such as a husband or brother, and telephone interviews were also used to gain access. "To have 45% of participants being female in Afghanistan was, considering the current situation, an achievement," Zaki adds.

The research found changes in media consumption patterns. "Now, you see more women watching TV or using the internet or social media, because, in the past, more women worked, and now they stay at home and they don't have a lot to do," Zaki says.

"If you compare the hours and timings of media consumption for men and women, you will see a rise in consumption for women

in daylight hours, while more men consume media between 7pm and 10pm."

Among the biggest changes have been restrictions on the ability of local media to produce entertaining content, resulting in a loss of advertising revenue and greater popularity of overseas content. Some content that is less sensitive is still being produced, however.

Afghan media outlets have continued producing and broadcasting content that is less sensitive in areas such as education, health and agriculture, to provide information to viewers.

Some media outlets are also turning to social media as a way to bypass scrutiny of content and reach a younger audience. Increased use of social media, however, is also leading to increased disinformation. The research estimated that around half of Afghans have come across misleading or false information.

What does the future hold? "Media organisations are trying to find some creative ways to continue their operations," says Zaki. "If the overall approach or politics of the Taliban remain the same, there could be more limitations [introduced] on the media."

● The report found that the majority of respondents said there were **not any/enough movies (55%), music (55%) or fashion programming (52%) available** on media in Afghanistan.

● **Around half of respondents felt there was the 'right amount' of religious and news content**, while a third (33%) said there was 'too much' coverage of religion and a quarter 'too much' international (25%) or Afghanistan-related news (25%).

(BBC Media Action, December 2023)

# Climate talks

## Communication about climate change should factor in local and cultural nuances, research from around the UK has highlighted. By Florencia Lujani

Amid the ever-growing urgency of climate change, effective communication is paramount. At ACT Climate Labs, in collaboration with research company Bricolage, we recently shared insights from our research report *Why words matter: how to speak to Brits about climate change*.

It focused on a group coined as 'Persuadables', constituting 69% of the UK population. They typically see campaigning around climate as being for 'others' and 'not people like me'. The research looked to bridge the cultural gap hindering climate-action engagement, with a special emphasis on rural dwellers, and working class and multi-ethnic communities.

Persuadables represent a significant majority of the UK population, yet their engagement in climate action is hindered by a cultural divide.

To try to reverse this, and find out which communication elements are producing the divide, we immersed ourselves in the culture of Persuadables. I travelled to Aberdeen, in Scotland, Pembrokeshire, in Wales, and the North-East and Midlands in England, to interview Persuadables and experts.

The research gave us a lot of insight into the themes and language that resonate with Persuadables. Language recommendations for campaigners crafting climate messages include:

### Adaptability and perseverance

Climate communications can feel very abstract to Persuadables. Effective communication should foster genuine dialogue, actively engage community members, and emphasise united efforts and practical solutions.

It can be brought to life through:

- Illustrations or photographs that depict community members actively participating
- Emphasis on/examples of community strength, knowledge and adaptability
- Warm and community-centric tones that foster open, honest conversations
- Exploring stories and efforts of individuals and communities who have harnessed their adaptability and perseverance to confront the impacts of climate change.

### Rooting and continued tradition

We identified that a 'return to roots' is a powerful call to action, advocating a return

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**“By tailoring language and themes to specific audience segments, climate experts can inspire meaningful action”**  
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to the land and a renewed commitment to nature's preservation. For Persuadable segments, this is a way forward in connecting and rediscovering cultural knowledge. It encourages the adoption of local solutions and re-engagement with traditional practices that empower communities to reclaim local, and maybe neglected, knowledge.

This can be used in:

- Localised communications that use local language and slang to make the message uniquely relatable
- Encouraging pride in the urban community's origins, its place in the city, and how it connects to the future
- Expressing how embracing local environmental initiatives is testament to a commitment to their urban identity.

### What's in it for me?

More so than most, Persuadable cohorts

have a need to prioritise their immediate vicinities. Re-evaluating climate communications through the perspective of our audience – to ensure they can always answer the question 'What's in it for me?' – is key.

This can be done by:

- Underlining profound emotional and practical benefits of taking action
- Linking the challenge of climate change with personal motivations, without using big words such as 'interconnectedness' or 'system-wide change'
- Showing how sustainable choices have the power to enhance overall wellbeing, foster a sense of belonging, and generate contentment, without trying to 'educate' the audience.

By tailoring language and themes to specific audience segments, climate experts can bridge the cultural gap and inspire meaningful action towards a sustainable future.

### Navigating the cultural landscape: speaking to working-class Brits about climate change

The research about the mindset of working-class communities was conducted in Aberdeen, Pembrokeshire and various locations in England.

Aberdeen's economy transformed significantly with the influx of oil and gas investment during the 1970s, but it's still influenced by heavy industries and socio-economic strife.

The research identified several critical themes for climate campaigners to consider to engage effectively with this demographic, including:

1. Industrial decline and fragmentation – people feel protective of traditional industries, and comms should highlight continuity of these in the context of forward-thinking solutions.
2. Mistrust in institutions – use clear, familiar language, collaborate with





community members to build trust, and create narratives that leverage local voices.

3. Focus on immediate priorities – with respect towards current struggles.
4. Not standing out – normalise positive environmental actions, avoid divisive language, and respect the community's hardworking nature without downplaying it.

### Cracking the code: speaking to rural Brits about climate change

Among the Persuadables, the rural and semi-rural segment poses a unique challenge. We focused on the intricacies of rural Pembrokeshire, providing valuable insights into the mindset and narratives that shape the perspectives of this demographic.

Pembrokeshire, in the south-west of Wales, is a sparsely populated and rural part of the UK. Agriculture and tourism are key cornerstones of its economy, and the Welsh language is spoken by 17% of Pembrokeshire's population.

The research identified several critical themes for climate campaigners to consider to engage effectively with this demographic:

### “Use clear, familiar language, collaborate with community members to build trust, and create narratives that leverage local voices”

1. Traditional values – be aware of a level of conservatism and reinforcement of traditional roles in rural communities.
2. Living in the landscape – a different and innate connection to landscape.
3. Removed from urban centres – mistrust and some disconnect with what ‘gets decided’ in urban centres of power.
4. Farmers vs everyone – farmers feeling attacked on all sides.

### Decoding the cultural tapestry: speaking to multi-ethnic Brits about climate change

To better understand the mindset of multi-ethnic communities, we carried out research in Nottingham, particularly focusing on the perspectives of Black British and Southeast Asian populations.

Nottingham serves as a microcosm for studying multi-ethnic communities. With a

growing population, including 13.1% British Asians and 7.3% Black British residents, the research identified six critical themes for climate campaigners to consider to engage effectively with this demographic. These include:

1. Us vs them – listen to diverse social classes and incorporate their voices.
2. Goal achievers – align with their aspirations.
3. Navigating multiple influences – being mindful of the traditional and progressive worlds they inhabit.
4. Pockets of hope – community-led projects.

Understanding the cultural nuances revealed by our research is paramount for effective climate communication. By embracing the findings and tailoring messages, we can foster engagement, build trust, and make climate change a relevant issue for ‘people like me’.

As we navigate the climate crisis, words matter, and understanding cultural nuances is key to unlocking engagement and fostering positive change.

- Florencia Lujani is strategy director at ACT Climate Labs

# Getting the job done

**Market Research Society CEO Jane Frost has made it her mission to champion insight – and looking outwards, listening and staying curious are central to that ambition, writes Katie McQuater**

**T**his is probably the first job anyone has really wanted me to do,” Jane Frost tells me, when we sit down together in March after this year’s MRS annual conference. “I’ve been lucky that people wanted me to do the job.”

This is because, claims Frost, in reference to her marketing career before the Market Research Society: “They never want the brand director. They never want the customer director. They never want somebody to say: ‘That experience was awful, can we please redesign our product?’. But, for the first time ever, I think this is when somebody said: ‘We really need the job doing.’”

She’s almost 13 years into her tenure as MRS chief executive. In that time, the scope of the association has only increased. MRS serves not only as the industry regulator, but represents the sector to government, as well as being a standards bearer and a provider of training, resources and networking opportunities. It has also, increasingly, turned its attention to the issues plaguing market research, from survey fraud and questions about the representativeness of sample, to broader concerns, including diversity, sustainability and flexible working.

Leading it is not necessarily straightforward, then, but Frost feels proud that MRS has found a voice to represent the sector. “It might not be big enough yet, loud enough yet, but MRS is providing that space for people to be heard and to effect change.”

A few years ago, she was accused of championing inclusion in the sector simply because she is a woman. How was it to hear that? “Old is what it was,” says Frost, with the wry awareness of someone who has frequently been one of the few women in predominantly male organisations prior to her current role. “Variants on that include: ‘Well, why should we hire you? Because you’re only going to get pregnant and leave us.’ So there’s been a variety of that throughout my life,” she says.

While the gender comment may have been frustrating, for Frost it serves as a reminder of how far the industry and the Society have come in recent years: “I don’t think, when I joined, we would have done the inclusion pledge or the climate pledge, for example. MRS found a voice and a leadership position that people wanted it to have.

“During that time, people have said to me: ‘We have this good idea – we talked to lots of people and they said it’s a great idea, but you need the MRS on side.’ We found that authority, and that has

enabled us to do the other things I’m proud of, which are those pledges. We’ve moved from a place where I was personally accused of only wanting to ‘do inclusion’ because I was a woman, to a place where people realise that we need to be inclusive as a sector if we’re going to still do our jobs in any way – so I’m very proud of that.”

One moment a couple of years ago was particularly resonant for Frost. “There was a young woman who said: ‘You made me a research hero. Can I have a selfie, please?’. That’s lovely, because putting a spotlight on people who wouldn’t get spotlights otherwise is really important.”

## Raising the profile

As leader of the sector’s trade body, awareness is woven into almost everything Frost has done to date, from spearheading the Fair Data accreditation in 2013 to spotlight the industry’s data prowess, to efforts to champion its people. She is committed to creating routes to

bolster the visibility and value of a sector that can often be overlooked, whether because of its own humility or practical constraints.

A marketer who cut her teeth at Unilever, Frost is the first chief executive to be appointed at MRS. Before 2011, it had a director general, with David Barr holding that position for the previous 14 years. At the time, MRS said Frost’s appointment was “a signal of intent” to “highlight the bottom-line benefit research brings”.

When I ask how her journey has been, leading the organisation and representing the sector in the years since, she says: “I don’t think I ever expected it to be easy, and it hasn’t been in terms of that objective, partly because you have to value yourself before you can get other people to value you. And I don’t think the sector does very well at valuing itself. So, that is a difficulty because you have to be able to go out and make a noise and be heard.”

Unlike in advertising or marketing, Frost says, “very few people” in research are happy to talk externally. “Of course, it doesn’t help that, very frequently, the stuff we have to talk about is confidential.”

The other problem Frost faced in the beginning was the lack of an outlet for client-side leaders to express their leadership – something that has changed with the establishment of the Senior Client Council. “The people were there, but they just didn’t have a place to be heard, and I do think that is changing.

“Dreadful as Covid was, things like Covid do highlight the value of

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**“We’ve moved to a place where people realise that we need to be inclusive as a sector if we’re still going to be doing our jobs in any way – so I’m very proud of that”**  
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research. Some of our senior client people obviously got closer to the boardroom, while everyone was panicking about not knowing what was going on.”

### Leading by example

Frost doesn't differentiate between her role as leader of the sector's trade body and her position as organisational head. “If you're a leader, you need to lead externally and internally. If you are not consistent, then you're not a very good leader, because it soon becomes clear whether you're smoke screening: because you can do all this external stuff but you're not actually leading by example internally. You don't want MRS to ever put out dodgy research, do you?”

It was during her time leading corporate marketing at the BBC that Frost oversaw the 1997 'Perfect Day' campaign, promoting the broadcaster's services to the licence-fee-paying public. The single released from the promotion also later sold two million copies, raising £2.5m for Children in Need.

“When I made 'Perfect Day', it hit me that the best internal comms is external comms. You can tell with some advertising that they don't look like that internally and, therefore, it just doesn't ring true. Whereas the phone calls I got with 'Perfect Day' were: 'I'm crying because I'm proud of the BBC.' I was selling an advert to the outside world, but we seemed to be selling it inside as well. I've always believed that you can't afford to have different standards.”

Respect for people was the most important asset she took from her marketing career. She learned her trade in the graduate scheme at

Unilever (then Lever Brothers), during which time she was the first female brand manager for Persil. After seven years with the FMCG giant, she went on to marketing roles at Shell, the BBC, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and HMRC – a route that might be known as a 'squiggly career' in modern parlance, but one that has always revolved around the customer.

“You have to respect your consumer if you're going to do a good job delivering value,” says Frost.

One of her first priorities at MRS was to ask whether the organisation

was respecting its membership enough, and delivering the right value for them.

“You should never do things to people.

You should do things with people,” she says.

Though Frost acknowledges that some in the industry felt they had to

“shout” at her in the beginning, she hasn't

received a “shouty email” in a while. She

aims to see anyone who asks her for a

meeting – something that has been made

easier in recent years by Zoom. For someone in her position, there will always be questions and concerns to address, but she also

understands the importance of learning from others. “You should talk to everyone whenever you can. Serendipity is the most underrated thing in this world,” she says. “There is a 'why' question in everything.”

### Looking outwards

Frost thinks her background as a brand marketer – and user of research – enables her to be “externally focused rather than internally focused”. She is “slightly tired” by old debates about the validity of one methodology over another. “Is qualitative still important? Yes, it

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**“You should talk to everyone whenever you can. Serendipity is the most underrated thing in this world”**  
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bloody well is. But we talk about it all the time and that really doesn't interest people with budgets much – people with budgets want the right method to get the insights they need.”

Often, research is delivered to a client and then the communication ends. Frost feels the sector tends to move on from a narrative too quickly and assume that, because something has been said, it has been heard. “We've got to keep going back and saying things time and time and time again, and then we get heard. Most of the agencies I know still forget that people have much better things to do with their time, so don't always hear what's said.”

Despite the best efforts of insight leaders, we still see brands making blunders with their advertising that could have been avoided had they only done a bit of research, and a gulf between company strategy and the needs and wants of customers. Why the continued disconnect? There isn't a simple answer, but Frost thinks there is a “paucity of experience” at chief marketing officer level, with research not regarded as a core skill within the marketing function, alongside a lack of extroverted ‘EN types’ (according to Myers-Briggs) at the top of the research unit, and marketing budgets not being what they were.

She would like to see more research leaders working with other stakeholders parallel to marketing leaders. “It's like, if you're making bread, only having one supplier every week. Take the report you've done for the chief marketing officer and extract a different message.

“You need to find the other person, whether it's the CCO, the CSO, or the CFO – we forget the CFO at our peril. We have lots of stuff we can tell the CFO.”

While the first couple of years at MRS were “long and slow”, Frost counts herself lucky with the people she inherited. “Building a partnership with Debrah [Harding, managing director] has been great. We've got one of the best events teams in the business, and I'm really proud of Research Live and *Impact*. They have helped us have a voice.”

Frost feels fortunate. In addition to her delight at being “wanted” in the role, she “loves” the people. “I've been in sectors where the backstabbing has been prodigious, but I've not felt that in the cultures I've encountered in this sector.”

Outside of the day job, when she's not walking her dogs or spending time in her garden, Frost holds several trustee positions, including with Cats Protection and The Lowry theatre in Salford.

“I like to exercise my brain, but I'm not good at Sudoku or anything like that, so I do it with trusteeships and other things,” she says. “It keeps me learning and keeps my brain fresh. Sometimes I don't particularly want to learn what I'm learning, but it's still always useful.”

She is also a mentor – “a huge privilege” because “it freshens you every time you're talking to somebody and they've done you the honour of listening to you or being open with you. You learn something more about yourself when you do it.”

Skills and lessons in the day job can be reapplied elsewhere, Frost says. “There are two things I've learned over time: you need to have done some finance and audit skill work; and network, network, network – there's never a time when that is not useful. Even if it's not useful to you, it's always useful to somebody else.

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**“If you don't go out and do what look like totally useless things, you don't enlarge yourself”**  
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“If you don't go out and do totally useless things, or what look like totally useless things, you don't enlarge yourself. I think it's really important for MRS that I'm on these boards, because I'm keeping going outwards.”

Frost thinks she'd be a “lousy” retiree – “I don't know what I'd do with myself” – and would like to see more researchers doing trusteeships and non-executive roles. She also feels it's incumbent on those in the industry to keep fostering their curiosity, as well as challenging the status quo.

“We need to have, and develop in ourselves, a sense of joy at challenge and a sense of joy at what curiosity brings. I think your brain lights up with that sort of emotion and I think it can do it more if you let it,” says Frost. “Just because it's the same problem you've seen before doesn't mean there isn't another way at it.

“I don't think the world is closing down, but I do think we have to be vigilant, particularly if you're a woman, because progress is being made, but it ain't permanent yet. I make no apologies that some of my charity work is just for women and children. They have the worst hand played to them in the world.”

Researchers can and should rise to the challenge, thinks Frost. “It is necessary that we are vigilant about our liberties and help other people protect theirs, and that's all of our jobs. But I think researchers, because they see what they see and know what they know, are particularly well placed to be part of that defence – and I think they should be.”





# What if we could reinvent the future?

Much of research is asking ‘why’ – asking the questions that will inform ‘what’ will happen next.

For the final *Impact* report, we’re asking instead: ‘What if?’. What if research could upend our current notions? What could thinking differently bring us?

Over the next few pages, we ask members of the industry to respond to a series of ‘what if’ questions. By asking ‘what if’, we can turn our attention to all sorts of potential futures. By reimagining the future, researchers can reinvent the path of the industry.







## What if policy-makers and the media truly understood people?

**Ben Page, global chief executive, Ipsos**

One of the enduring challenges of the research industry is its own lack of confidence about what it does. We should worry much less about whether we ‘truly’ understand people. We already do – they are just complex! We should be much prouder of the ability to predict human behaviour with high degrees of accuracy in the near term – but also be thoughtful about the fact that no-one can predict the future long term.

Where research can make a difference is being a leader in the conversation about possible futures – along with other domain

‘experts’ – and get better not at ‘telling the time’, but at communicating key messages simply and succinctly for decision-makers: laying out the arguments and trade-offs. This is where much insight simply stops currently.

What if we stopped our clients from collecting vast amounts of data that they want – because it helps them feel secure – but can’t use properly? What if we got them to focus on a broader range of signals and encouraged them to move beyond short-term activities, to proper engagement with the long term, using a fraction of the resources they spend on the here and now?

“Attitudes and emotions around many products remain constant, evolving only slightly to meet the conditions of modern life”



## What if research samples could be more representative?

**Rebecca Cole, managing director, Cobalt Sky, chair, MRS Representation in Research steering group, and MRS main board member**

In a future where research samples are more representative, our sector would be able to fulfil its potential of being at the forefront of making visible the experiences, needs and perspectives of groups that, historically, have been underheard.

Practitioners will have cultivated a more widely representative and inclusive respondent pool that is more engaged with research that they can relate to and see the benefits of. Market research will be seen as something that everyone respects, understands, and is keen to participate in.

The research being designed is better and more inclusive

from the start, and insights derived from it are more relevant and impactful. We will have been able to reduce the inevitable bias that can arise from non-representative studies, by reaching the people on whom current research projects are missing out.

Research buyers will be able to make better policy and brand decisions, and ensure that they are serving all their stakeholders, rather than just majority groups. We could ensure everyone has a voice and that that voice is represented authentically.

We’d see an end to the old adage of ‘hard to reach’ samples. People aren’t hard to reach – they are just not being asked.



## What if we could learn from the past?

**Phyllis Macfarlane, chair, Archive of Market and Social Research (AMSR) contents committee**

Do we ever learn anything from history? This is hotly debated, but I believe that, as researchers, we must. If we think that only the present matters, we may be condemned to repeat ourselves, forever researching the same innovations in the hope of obtaining a different result.

Historical market research, as preserved in the Archive, has much to teach us. In polling research, the trends and repetitions are easily tracked through Mori and NOP collections – essential in election years, such as this, to help make sense of what swings and seat changes might mean for our democracy.

Attitudes and emotions around many products remain constant, evolving only slightly to meet the conditions of modern life. For example, 1970s’ qualitative research on sweets and chocolates has almost as much to tell us about how to innovate in the category as if it were conducted today.

What if, instead of wasting our research budgets on relearning things we already know, there were a vast, searchable, free resource, packed with gems from the past, that could inform, educate and astonish us with how much, and how little, has changed?

## What if researchers could take on a new role in society?



**Kenny Imafidon, co-founder,  
ClearView Research**

Researchers should see ourselves much more as storytellers. We have to give more weight to the influence that we have and understand the importance of engaging with diverse groups. We should also understand that we have a role to play in helping people to see things in a more asset-based way, particularly when talking about communities. I feel that we can do much more to champion the assets in communities and not just see everything from a deficit mindset.

If people, every time they saw themselves as researchers, also saw themselves as storytellers – not storytelling as in creating fiction, but talking about reality – I think things would be totally different.

As researchers, it's important to bring the interdisciplinary into what we're doing – for me, that is the future. Enough people land in research who didn't see it as a career. I don't think that's the issue, but I do think there's something we can do around getting more people from diverse backgrounds to enter.

I'd also like to see researchers asking better questions – not just asking people about things, but to reimagine things. It's also about understanding that knowledge is in communities, not just in some academic article, and about seeing participants much more as partners – that is a change in their status and how we engage with them.

In that future, our research would be much more intersectional, more nuanced, and we would be much more confident, because we're involving people who are experts by experience. By partnering and working with communities, we can get better at understanding what is useful.

Researchers can also expand clients' world views, and be much more intentional about that. Sometimes, the questions clients want to ask are not the right questions.



## What if research can help to solve the climate crisis?



**Lian Mico, delivery development  
director, Human8, and member,  
MRS Sustainability Council**

weight as commerciality in our analysis, insights and client recommendations, and welcoming 'nature' onto our boards to achieve this.

### A. It can...

I recently discovered that, if we can reduce the carbon footprint of Human8's top-five clients by just 0.5%, we'll cut emissions by 19.5 million tonnes per year. That's the equivalent of driving an SUV non-stop for 15,000 years.

Now, imagine that all research agencies take a similar pledge; the potential we possess to affect positive change is astronomical!

To achieve this, we need to first educate ourselves about how we can effect positive climate change, gaining a better understanding of greenhouse gases and the biggest carbon contributors of businesses in the research industry. We must then embrace the 'planet as a stakeholder' concept, giving climate the same

### B. ...and it should.

If research doesn't help to solve the climate crisis – and soon – we can say hello to frequent wildfires, prolonged droughts and increased air pollution. We might choose to ignore this ecological impact, but we can't ignore the impact on our commercial endeavours.

From the European Union's Corporate Sustainability Reporting Directive mandate to stricter environmental, social and governance reporting worldwide, businesses and brands that ignore the climate crisis won't stay afloat for long.



## What if research could attract more school leavers?

LaShanda Seaman, associate director, qualitative research and engagement centre, Ipsos UK, and MRS main board member

'I just fell into research' is a well-worn way of describing research career paths, but the privilege of access that many have benefited from is often overlooked. It's a space that can feel removed from, or inaccessible to, underrepresented groups, including school leavers – mostly because of awareness.

We do not have to look far for inspiration on the merits of diversifying our industry. The technology sector showcases how diversity and non-traditional pathways can enrich an industry, fostering innovation and growth and broadening the perspectives included. Similarly, in market research, widening the employment net could enable us to demonstrate: greater diversity of thought feeding into our research; more representative research being conducted and produced; that we are upholding our industry pledges; more societal impact from our outputs; and greater awareness of our industry.

Early career researchers are a core part of the future of our industry and we must recruit a broad mix of individuals to reflect the work we do. MRS offers high-quality training and an apprenticeship programme, which should be used to help individuals reach their full potential regardless of any previous qualifications. Our industry stands at a crossroads. This is not a call for a revolution, but for a commitment to walk the talk of inclusion and be open to being held accountable to each other on that journey.

**“We must embrace the ‘planet as a stakeholder’ concept, giving climate the same weight as commerciality in our analysis, insights and client recommendations, and welcoming ‘nature’ onto our boards”**





## What if research could better draw on its collective knowledge?

**Adam Phillips, chief executive, Archive of Market and Social Research (AMSR)**

Last night, I dreamed that insights had become a recognised profession, with similar status to medical doctors, engineers or economists. Prestigious universities were offering degrees and PhDs in insights, and combined honours courses in history, economics and insights.

When I thought about it further, I decided that my dream was not as far-fetched as it appeared. Reliable, evidence-based insights are already essential for managing any commercial or governmental organisation. Consider the complaints, from the Bank of England and industry leaders, about problems with the reliability of the Labour Force Survey, making it difficult to decide whether to inflate or deflate the economy; or the enormous value added to our society by the entertainment, communication and advertising industries, all of which are big consumers of research and analytics.

In my dream, our sector had invested much more heavily in promoting the profession of insights in schools and universities, supported by clients creating a senior career path on the client side.

Schools and universities were teaching the next generation of insighters using resources provided by the Archive of Market and Social Research, where much of the collective knowledge of two generations of researchers is being preserved and made freely available online.

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**“I decided my dream was not as far-fetched as it appeared. Reliable, evidence-based insights are essential for managing any commercial or governmental organisation”**  
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## What if data could reshape society responsibly?

**Jake Steadman, global head of marketing research and data, Canva**

Throughout history, data has constantly reshaped society, serving as a tool for connection and persuasion. The future will be no different in that sense.

What will be different is the scale and sophistication of data collection, analysis, and application, especially as artificial intelligence (AI) begins to really hit its stride.

I hold an optimistic view of the future. I see a world where data profoundly improves areas such as healthcare (just picture the possibilities for the NHS), our overall wellbeing, and even environmental challenges, such as combating climate change or cleaning up our seas. However, there's a cautionary aspect to consider.

Data's potential for misinterpretation, manipulation and exploitation worries me, especially when used by relatively new technologies, such as AI. This underscores the importance of regulating AI effectively and governing data usage.

The research industry could play a pivotal role in navigating this balance, embracing change and leveraging innovation for positive societal impact.

## What if people treated their data like their DNA?

**Emily Dickinson, head of Amsterdam, Opinium**



What if people knew the value of their data? What if they viewed taking a survey, voicing their opinions, or revealing their viewing habits in the same way they would if they were asked to share a strand of their DNA? Would response rates fall? Definitely. Would the use of synthetic data increase? Most probably. But would that be a bad thing? I'd argue not.

As an industry, we need to ensure that people recognise the power of their data – what it can achieve, how it is used, and why it matters.

To be clear, I'm not advocating for an even longer consent form that is, at best, skimmed over and, at worst, ignored, but a deeper, more inclusive and accessible way of

involving participants in the end-to-end research process. One that makes people aware that, by giving consent, they are building, creating or improving the communities, businesses and services around them, but also one that allows them to continually question, challenge and input into the process.

This won't be easy to achieve, but ensuring participants have a greater awareness of the value of their contribution can only lead to greater engagement and, therefore, greater insight.

Isn't it time we started to value and reward the contribution of those on whom the market research industry is based?



## What if the industry could be truly flexible?

**Sinead Jefferies, senior vice-president, customer expertise, Zappi, chair of MRS People and Talent programme, and former chair of MRS main board**

I've spent more than 10 years talking about, writing about and championing flexibility within this sector. If you'd told me back then how we'd be working now, I'd probably be delighted and say "we've made it happen"! I'm working a senior role, full-time, mostly from home, and spend a lot of time with my kids. But the more you get, the more you see what the bigger potential possibilities are, because not everyone has this flexibility. Not everyone has what I've got – and not everyone wants it, let's be honest; some people love being in the office several days a week.

That's the crux of it. True flexibility isn't about finding a middle ground; it's about what's right for the individual and for the role they are doing – and that's hard to deliver. If a company has

great people, however, feeling fulfilled and able to give their best, doing a brilliant job, then that hard problem is one worth trying to solve.

So, what more would it help us achieve?

- Significantly better inclusion for people of all backgrounds, ages and differing needs.
- Greater diversity of thought and creativity in the work we do.
- More thoughtful and considered approaches to problem solving and collaboration.
- Stronger retention – both within companies and within the sector overall.
- The ability for people to live well, somewhere they can afford, in surroundings that make them happy.



### What if brands could truly understand people?

Amy Cashman, chief executive, UK insights division, Kantar

The commercial imperative for businesses in understanding people is clear. Brands to which people are strongly predisposed achieve a volume share nine times greater, increase their highest average selling price twice over, and are four times more likely to grow market share. Being able to build this predisposition relies on truly understanding consumers – how they see brands, and what they want and expect from them.

On the basis of that deep human understanding, brands can also identify which growth levers to pull – whether, for example, it's developing new products or services, moving into adjacent categories, or shifting channel strategies. Ultimately, deep human understanding leads to breakthrough growth for brands.



### What if market researchers treat AI as a useful assistant, not a threat?

Phil Sutcliffe, managing partner, Next Intelligence

If you are a market researcher who treats AI as a threat, let me tell you a few of the things you are missing out on.

First, productivity gains at every stage of the research process – so much faster and cheaper. Second, and more importantly, better research – for example, much better insights from survey open-ends by using AI to probe for more detail and then to summarise and theme them verbatim.

Third, as a consequence of the first two points, you will be

empowered to be a better adviser to the businesses with which you work, with less time spent on process and more time thinking how to design great research projects and analyse the findings.

And, you are really important, because you can do what AI can't – you have the human empathy to understand research participants' motivations, and the communication skills to bring insights to life for your stakeholders and craft compelling narratives that inspire them to take action.





## What if research and society could be fully inclusive of neurodiversity?

**Tom Richer, founder, The Bridge Between, inclusive researcher at Open Inclusion and co-chair, MRS Unlimited**

The question made me think: what are we working towards?

I shared some thoughts at the MRS annual conference about disability inclusion being a progressive space to be in right now. It feels like we are all becoming more open-minded to disability and it's not such a taboo subject any more. The disability community is getting more opportunities to talk and make a change, in and out of research, than we have ever had before, which is quite something – but we still face barriers to accessing life like everybody else.

It's lived experiences – and people contributing to make the change, such as MRS Unlimited and other organisations – that will help drive the change we need in society to have the same opportunities as everyone else.

On a personal level, I have the goal of making my hometown, Southampton, more accessible for myself and my autistic brother Jack, which is why I set up The Bridge Between.

With us all contributing, in big or small ways, we are making progress, which is difficult to quantify or even imagine – but I would say we will have reached neuro-inclusivity when we don't need to shout about it any more.



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## What if all procurement teams and budget holders could understand how priceless research is?



**James Endersby, chief executive, Opinium, and chair of MRS main board**

As researchers, we know that great research is (metaphorically) priceless: there is no limit to how valuable market research and insights can be to a business. The trouble is, that research isn't literally priceless – every project has a cost – and procurement teams and budget holders often don't want to pay the price that agencies are asking, and that insights teams have assessed as fair.

Yes, budgets are squeezed at the moment, but in the same way that brands know to double down on advertising spend in hard times, what if they knew to double down on research spend, too?

So, why don't procurement teams and budget holders value research as much as we want them to?

Partly because it's often hard to link the impact of research to specific outcomes – and even when it is possible, those outcomes may not be easily quantifiable, or they may happen a long time after the research has taken place.

If an ad campaign is launched in a specific region for a specific time and sales rise, we attribute the rise to the campaign. But how do we attribute the contribution of the innovation and customer-needs research that helped develop the product, the creative development research that guided the campaign, and the media research that helped place the ads?

If procurement teams and budget holders aren't making that link, we need to make it for them and stop being pushed into dropping our prices, compromising our methodologies, or both. You can buy online respondents by the pound, but great research isn't a commodity. Successful activation of research comes from researchers – client and agency side – building relationships and using their expertise to support decision-making.

In a world where budget holders understand the value of research, we

would be able to ensure that participants are always rewarded appropriately for their valuable contributions; that we collectively push up our sector salaries fairly, towards the rest of the marcoms and professional services worlds; and that we're able to pour more resources into research tech, methodological innovation, and developing our sector, to produce even deeper insights for our clients and the customers they serve.

We know that the management consultants, PR firms and ad agencies don't waste any time worrying about whether procurement teams understand the value of what they do – it's taken as read. So, perhaps I'm not asking the right question. Perhaps the question should be: 'What if researchers had the confidence and conviction to defend and demonstrate the value of research?'

Let's work on building that confidence and conviction, together as an industry. That really would be priceless.



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# Memories with *Impact*

From 3D-printed mastheads to inspiring interviews, current and former editorial staff and MRS colleagues look back at the articles, moments and people that have made an impression on us over the years



## Brian Tarran, former editor, *Research* magazine and *Impact*, now senior research and statistics editor, British Film Institute

Creating *Impact* is easily one of the most memorable moments of my career. On delivery day for Issue 1, I felt elated at seeing this idea, this concept, finally become reality. An actual product, in my hands. What a rush! And then it hit me: the fear, the tick-ticking towards deadline on Issue 2, and the panic that we might have used up all our best stuff!

I needn't have worried so much. As the *Impact* archive demonstrates, there's never

a shortage of fascinating trends, ideas, people and companies to write about in the research and insight space.

Of the five issues I worked on, I have fondest memories of Issue 3, and for an entirely gimmicky reason: the 3D printed magazine logo that features on the cover. Strolling back to the MRS offices one day, I happened to pass a 3D printing shop on Clerkenwell Road. Intrigued, I popped in, asked to interview the

company founder, and he, in turn, offered to print the *Impact* masthead in bright, five-colour plastic.

I still have that piece of plastic to this day. A cherished memento of a magazine I'm proud to have helped create. What a rush it was.

What a privilege!

● The 'making of' video can be found at: [moredetails.uk/impact46video](http://moredetails.uk/impact46video)

## Jane Bainbridge, former editor, *Impact*, now head of content, Pumpkin PR

Editing *Impact* was an absolute joy and I have endless happy memories of working with my MRS colleagues and the CPL One team. I was lucky to work with two amazing deputy editors who made it all very easy for me.

My favourite articles to commission and write were the profiles, and it's the final one I wrote that is my highlight – Frances O'Grady, then TUC general secretary and now a Baroness sitting in the House of Lords. She was smart, warm, funny and deeply insightful – what a wonderful combination. A delight to meet and to write about,

successful in a predominantly male world, she seemed to have stayed true to herself. I was totally charmed by her natural and honest demeanour – she touched up her lippy before the photographs, was generous with her time for our photographer, Will (something that rarely happened), and showed us around the glorious Congress House – Jacob Epstein sculpture and all.

● Read: 'The principled pragmatist' – Issue 28, January 2020

## Christian Walsh, content and digital director, MRS

My choice among the many memorable articles in the *Impact* archives takes us back to Issue 1, spring 2013. The late Jeremy Bullmore, patron of MRS, wrote a piece for our business section titled 'Happy never after'. It listed tried and tested ways to "get the least from an agency" and, in the fairness of balance, included 10 surefire ways of "pissing off your client". In the former list, he suggested: "Change your main contact with the agency at least once a year"; and "Install a highly complex, hierarchical approval system".

To annoy clients, he recommended that agencies should: "Be sure to leave every client meeting at least once to take

another client's call. On returning, do not fail to comment on the other client's courage. You may also find it helpful to mention their generosity in the matter of remuneration."

Funny, pithy and true, he wrote these lists as an antidote to the cosy and smug presentations that are usually made to celebrate the client/agency relationship. I'd love to see the reaction on LinkedIn if he was around today to publish them there. Thank you, Jeremy, and thank you, *Impact* magazine!

● Read: 'Happy never after' – Issue 1, spring 2013







## Debrah Harding, managing director, MRS

*Impact's* professional standards features have always struck me, because of the relevance and forward-looking nature of the MRS Standards team's contributions.

One important topic they have shone a light on has been diversity and inclusion in research. In 2016, 'Gender identity' expanded on MRS's guidance to insights professionals on collecting sex and gender-identity information. This recognised participants' right to express their gender with more flexibility and fluidity than binary options provide. This was a groundbreaking step – MRS was the first research association to codify standards that promote inclusion of a wide and diverse array of gender identities.

*Impact* has revisited this crucial topic regularly, as MRS standards have evolved – for example, in 'How do you identify?' and 'Personal preference'. The

authors' analysis and recommendations have been a crucial part of MRS's equality, diversity and inclusion programmes, particularly for the Representation in Research initiative.

I have to mention the team's work on artificial intelligence (AI), too. It was in 2018 that they first flagged the ethical dimension to AI. Since then, they have continued to lead the way in highlighting the ethical considerations for technological applications, including the 2023 piece 'Understanding biometrics in research'.

- Read: 'Gender identity' – Issue 12, January 2016; 'How do you identify?' – Issue 25, April 2019; 'Personal preference' – Issue 37, April 2022; 'Ethical dimension to AI' – Issue 20, January 2018; 'Understanding biometrics in research' – Issue 40, January 2023

## Liam Kay-McClean, deputy editor, *Impact*

Since joining *Impact's* editorial staff in April 2020, I have been privileged to cover some fantastic research. I'd like to touch on three personal highlights.

Before joining MRS, my journalistic background had led to numerous encounters with evidence-based policy-making. In October 2022, I explored the roots of the shift towards evidence in government and how it could be improved.

The question of who is (and is not) included in research has been a perennial topic over the past four years. In January 2022, I examined nationally representative surveys, and questioned how 'representative' they truly are.

Finally, cricket is, for many, the quintessential English sport and – like the rest of the country – has its problems with inequality and diversity. In October 2023, I spoke to Marie-Claude Gervais about her report for the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket, and considered what it showed about the state of the national game.

- Read: 'A question of evidence' – Issue 39, October 2022; 'Reflecting reality' – Issue 36, January 2022; 'Hit for six' – Issue 43, October 2023





## Jane Frost, chief executive, MRS

One of the things that makes a great insight professional, whether in an agency or a client, is curiosity. When I was a commissioner of research in a multitude of client-side roles, one of the things that always struck me was that the professionals I enjoyed talking to most were those with an eclectic breadth of knowledge, who could draw on information from diverse communities and around the

world to enrich our insight development. The World View section of *Impact* always feeds my insatiable curiosity. The April issue this year exemplified this perfectly, covering everything from the ballot box to B2B and from machismo to mushrooms. The variety of the contributions and the serendipity to be found in these pages has always illustrated how universal our profession is and the nature of the human

problems we research. On a purely practical level, of course, there has always been something I can use for speeches.

I never forget the fact that this section, and indeed, the whole magazine, feeds my need to browse. I'm certainly going to miss my *Impact* fix.

● Read: The 'World View' section – Issue 45, April 2024

## Bronwen Morgan, former deputy editor, *Impact*, now associate content director, StudioID

One of the greatest privileges of working at *Impact* was the opportunity it gave me to learn and write about an incredible variety of fascinating topics. From unpacking the drivers of seemingly irrational human behaviour, to exploring the building blocks of brand loyalty, the world of market research is multifaceted, constantly evolving, and endlessly interesting – but there is one topic I covered that particularly inspired me.

In 2016, I wrote about a team of bioinformaticians who were

struggling – physically and financially – to store the exponentially growing volumes of genomic data that its field was producing, when they realised that DNA itself could be used to store that data efficiently. I eventually lost track of whether data was the new oil, soil or electricity, but I'll never forget when I learned that data might be the new DNA.

● Read: 'The DNA disk' – Issue 12, January 2016

## Katie McQuater, head of editorial, *Impact*

It's hard to pinpoint just one moment from the many experiences that have characterised my time working on *Impact*, both as deputy editor and, later, as editor. From the bizarre (writing about 'biohacking' among Silicon Valley executives for my very first issue in January 2018) – to the slightly painful (hobbling to Henley, by way of several trains and a taxi, for an interview on a sprained ankle) – there has rarely been a dull moment.

For me, the personal highlight of the role has always been the opportunity to meet people, and one individual stands out in particular. In March 2023, I interviewed historian David Olusoga for a profile in the magazine, backstage at the first in-person MRS annual conference in three years. We also conducted a photoshoot in a very short space of time, ahead of his keynote session, and I found him utterly gracious, smart and compelling. He answered questions thoughtfully without obfuscation and with care, not talking for talking's sake.

Of course, much of editing involves curating the best of others' voices. For that reason, I must highlight our wonderful columnists: Rory Sutherland, for shrewd

observations on marketing and life in general; Lorna Tilbain for her thoughtful views from the City; Crawford Hollingworth, for distilling the best of behavioural science; and Bethan Blakeley, for a data analytics column that always feels distinctly relevant to all in our sector beyond those in analytical roles.

● Read: 'Telling the truth' – Issue 42, July 2023

● You can read all content from previous issues via the *Impact* archive at [research-live.com/impact\\_archive](https://research-live.com/impact_archive)



# Scrolling up

**Reddit is one of the world's most popular social media platforms, and its 'deep' communities are a rich source of insight for its advertising strategy. By Liam Kay-McClean**

**T**he idea of social media as a 'village square', where ideas and news can be discussed communally, is not a new one. Most platforms reference 'communities' in some form or other, with social media acting as a conduit for people to express themselves, showcase their lives, keep in touch with friends and family, and follow their interests.

Arguably, one social media platform has embraced that idea of being a virtual 'community' more than any other. Reddit was founded in 2005 by Steve Huffman and Alexis Ohanian – then roommates at the University of Virginia – and Aaron Swartz, and has grown from being a small platform for niche discussion into a cultural behemoth. Today, Reddit is one of the world's biggest social media sites, offering its 73.1 million daily active users – who remain anonymous – the chance to ask questions, find answers, challenge one another, and join like-minded people in discussing anything from the news of the day and social issues to recipes or DIY.

Advertising is the primary source of revenue for Reddit, at more than 95% of income. The company has a long-standing team working on the insights behind its advertising strategy and helping advertisers make the most of the

opportunities Reddit offers.

"I have spent my career looking at how to make advertising valuable to consumers," says Ryan Brendle, global head of marketing science at Reddit. "People come to Reddit to find belonging, interests, and to plug into our deep communities, and advertising can be valuable there. We have seen examples of where people are looking for solutions and advice, and advertising can add to that."

## Going deeper

Running a platform based around different groups discussing topics on 'subreddits' means the company has a rich array of data to draw upon when plotting its development and strategy. "It is one of the advantages of having such a deep platform – there are a lot of interesting insights and information," Brendle says. His team, while primarily focused on the platform's advertising, also uses that data to feed into Reddit's product development, including new features.

Brendle's team focuses on three broad areas. The first is helping advertisers to understand the value of the Reddit platform and improving outcomes. The second focus is on data analysis, which means getting in place the right first- and third-party data tools. "We're only as good as the data tools that we have, so we spend a lot of time making sure we are building those and have the right relationships," Brendle adds. Finally, the team looks to use data from its research to benefit other areas of the business, such as marketing and sales.

As well as a broader analytics



department, there are separate teams working on qualitative research. "We are focused on making sure we have the right creative, the right campaign setups," Brendle explains. "We are then at the tail-end of the process – when the campaign runs, we're the ones judging the effectiveness and then recycling those learnings back into the ecosystem, so we can continue to improve."

Research plays a key role in examining the effectiveness of the company's advertising products. When doing alpha and beta testing, the team will often replicate measurement used by advertisers and feed the information back to the product team, to highlight what works and what doesn't before it is released to the public. A second role is working directly with advertisers to help





Reddit launching its initial public offering (IPO) in New York on 21 March 2024

them improve their outcomes, understanding their goals, risks and opportunities, then building a strategic plan with them to make sure they see the benefits of advertising on Reddit and engage audiences effectively.

“Wherever we start, we want to make sure we are continuing to drive better outcomes for advertisers,” says Brendle.

“Reddit is, compared with its peers, quite small in terms of head size. We want to make sure we are maximising our resources, doing a good job of providing as many advertisers with value as possible. We are really thoughtful about how we do that in a cost-efficient way.”

The company recently partnered with Samsung for the launch of its Galaxy Z Fold phones. Aiming to drive interest

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**“We want to make sure we continue to drive better outcomes for advertisers”**  
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among ‘fence sitters’ – people deliberating whether to buy the product – Samsung and Reddit developed a campaign based on Reddit’s community and behavioural insights, and influenced by conversations and behaviours observed on Reddit.

The result was the ‘Switchers Anonymous’ campaign, written, directed, produced, edited and launched by Reddit’s in-house creative agency,

KarmaLab. It included Reddit ‘Easter eggs’ in videos, free-form posts (adverts on the platform that combine text, images or videos) that complemented the video adverts, and conversation posts that aimed to drive people to the free-form posts. The campaign resulted in a seven-point rise in ad awareness, as well as improvements in purchase intent and brand favourability, according to data from Reddit.

### **A new challenge**

Reddit, being an anonymous platform where people can exchange very frank comments, ideas and experiences, has not always appeared an obvious place for brands to engage with customers and potential customers in the same way they do on other social media sites.



However, the company has released a tool that allows advertisers to create profiles and interact with users directly on the platform, in the same way that others signed up to Reddit would. In addition, there is a dashboard available to businesses to understand the reaction and sentiment towards their posts on the platform. “Now they can have more real discourse,” Brendle suggests. “I think that is how you can change consumers’ hearts and minds, by engaging and

helping them understand the [advertiser’s] value, and understanding where the [consumers’] pain points are.”

The platform also complements Reddit’s work to understand its users. “We want to make sure we are using qualitative data to understand how individuals are showing up on the platform – how are cat lovers interested in cat food, and those types of things,” Brendle adds. “From that, we can generate very powerful, relevant

advertising hypotheses that we can take to advertisers.”

Brendle’s team also works with marketing to make sure “the strengths of the platform are understood – where we have competitive advantage”, as well as benchmarking with competitors.

Social media is a fast-changing industry. From the rise of TikTok to the dramatic changes at X, formerly known as Twitter, Brendle works to keep on top of the latest trends in the sector.

“The measurement space, especially in the past couple of years, and probably in the coming years, is evolving pretty rapidly,” he explains. “We have to look at the information we have on the platform and understand how our advertisers are viewing that data, and how they are making decisions.

“The platforms themselves and consumer tastes change pretty rapidly, so you always want to check in and see how we are doing compared with others. It doesn’t drive everything we do – we know we are distinctly different from others in the market, and our contextual advertising platform is valuable, especially in a more privacy-centric world. But we do want to understand where we sit in the ecosystem.”

Brand sentiment measurement is carried out with Kantar, covering issues such as how to drive awareness, favourability, and action and intent.

There are other challenges, one being the end of third-party cookies.

“I do worry about that a little,” says Brendle.

“We have advertisers that are very sophisticated and ready, we have some that are still not clear what a cookie is – there’s a whole spectrum. I want to make sure we are doing a really good job in bringing everyone along, and doing our part to educate people and help them understand how they can connect to Reddit.”

Reddit, through its use of forums and its encouragement of deep discussion and interaction on the platform, has a large amount of rich first-party data to draw upon. “We are a strong contextual platform, which makes us a little more

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**“Platforms change rapidly, so you always want to see how we are doing compared with others”**



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signals-resilient than other places,” says Brendle. “We are not as dependent on individual identity. I think that will be really valuable. As a key challenge, we want to make sure we are helping the industry understand that you can have really great performance without needing the same signals you maybe have in the past.”

Then, like everyone in the world, there is how to grapple with the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI). Brendle is optimistic about its impact on his team and on Reddit more broadly. “Research and data can be such an intensive process. Anything that accelerates that, and allows analysts to spend more time doing the analytics portion [of their work] will continue to be very powerful. AI holds a lot of gains in terms of productivity.

“I am very excited about the pace we can do analysis – that, in my world, will be one of the bigger benefits. We are seeing some great gains in speeding up the development process, and having impact and learnings more quickly.” Whatever happens, Reddit’s role in connecting people and building communities will probably see it through.

## Right on time

**Reddit worked with online food-delivery service Just Eat Takeaway to improve its brand presence in Germany through a campaign prominently featuring pop stars Latto and Christina Aguilera.**

Just Eat wanted to reach and engage its key audience on Reddit, while increasing brand awareness and reshaping brand perception. The strategy was to reach Reddit’s extensive user base in Germany, integrating advertising tactics tailored to Reddit.

Just Eat worked with Reddit’s KarmaLab creative team on custom headlines, launching Reddit ‘takeovers’ and promoted posts, and using videos and static images, along with a locked comments poll.

The team also encouraged user interaction by inviting people to vote for their favourite meals. Alongside, a Reddit brand-lift study measured the success of Just Eat’s campaign and impact across segments.

The research led to significant improvements across key metrics, and Reddit said that the result was an 18-point rise in advertising awareness for the overall audience, with a 23-point increase for the Reddit takeover.

# Risk and reward

**Axa's Patrick Alcantara is focused on insight that intersects different business lines, to be consistent, stay competitive and reap rewards. By Katie McQuater**

In an uncertain world, the escalating frequency of global risks is intensifying the focus on the insurance industry's readiness to act as a 'financial safety net' for society. That's according to a paper published by Deloitte, which also reported that this shift is resulting in a drive by firms to become more consumer-centric.

"This may be the formerly elusive game-changing moment that elevates the role and understanding of the insurer in the lives of their clients and communities," the *2024 global insurance outlook* report concluded.

The UK may, officially, be out of a recession, but uncertainty continues, with businesses and individuals still under pressure and facing greater levels of volatility. It was this changing environment for financial services firms that Patrick Alcantara entered when he joined Axa, one of the largest global insurers, as strategic customer insight lead for UK and Ireland in December 2022.

Alcantara, who previously led insight for insurance at the Co-op, was appointed to look after Axa's insight for the UK and Ireland across a broad 'transversal' team, which works with the embedded insight units across various

businesses – including Axa Health, Axa Retail, and a commercial team covering business insurance.

"We sit side by side with those business units in the UK and Ireland, and my role is about looking into what we call transversal tools and methods that make it easier for us to gather insight, but also make sense of it," says Alcantara. "When we talk about transversal insight, we tend to talk about insight that cuts across the different business units."

Having a central team specifically for overarching insight focuses on the 'sum of the parts' – the expansive issues affecting Axa's customers that resonate across the business, such as the cost of living and climate change. Alcantara's team works to create research standards and efficiencies, and to inform strategy.

It also seeks to complement the work of the research units within the business, which collect insight that is more specific to their area: proposition-related insight that is more specific to their individual business area, such as car insurance, for example.

## Doing your duty

On 31 July 2023, the Financial Conduct Authority's consumer duty came into force. The new rules set a higher standard of protection for consumers and place more responsibility on financial services firms to communicate their products and services clearly.

With such a wide-ranging regulation, there was a need for a central approach to testing that could be applied across Axa's various business units.

"In a nutshell, the consumer duty is about having a higher standard of care for our customers and linking what we do to specific customer outcomes," says Alcantara. Those outcomes could relate to the way in which the company communicates with its customers,





or designs products and services; the way in which it supports customers; or its pricing.

Crucial to building those outcomes is Axa's ability to speak directly with customers to test its products, services and communications with them.

Part of Alcantara's remit is to look at the best way of complying with the regulation and putting in place a consistent way of testing ideas with customers – or testing, in general – across the various parts of Axa.

“We wanted to be able to show the regulator that we have a consistent way of doing that, but, at the same time, show internal stakeholders that there is a more consistent way of doing things and that it's more cost-effective. It reduces duplication. It also helps us log what we are doing in a central place and then use that as evidence for the regulator to show that we are complying with the regulation.”

With those outcomes in mind, the solution the team landed on was a customer panel, working with agency partner Redblue. As well as allowing Axa to test ideas and comms directly, and ask customers about their experience, the panel functions as a “transversal resource across different business units”, says Alcantara.

By offering a readily available pool of customers for research, the panel has made research more cost-effective and more operationally efficient, he says.

This is because, when testing comms, two different parts of the business could be asking the same questions, because they are talking to a similar group of customers. Alcantara adds: “You get to talk to your customers much quicker than if you did separate, disparate

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**“You get to talk to your customers much quicker than if you did separate research”**  
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pieces of research on your own, but you also have that opportunity to put research all in one place, under the UK and Ireland umbrella.”

As part of this work, the team is logging all its research, including how much has been spent and what goals or outcomes have been met. It's helping Axa to provide a body of evidence of its “consistent regime of customer testing” to stakeholders and the regulator, says Alcantara.

### **Cost-of-living crisis**

Transversal insights are not only those affecting consumers or customers, but also those that cut across the market at large.

For example, Axa's customer lifestyle report has a core question set about the cost of living. The report surveys customers about their financial outlook, spending habits, and challenges they are facing with their personal finances, including areas on which they are potentially cutting back.

The individual business units can also ask their own, more specific, questions within the survey. In the second wave, released just before Christmas last year, the Axa Health team asked questions about mental health and the impact of cost-of-living pressures.

The project highlights what a transversal insight team can do, according to Alcantara. “We see the sum of all parts, and we are able to also call on the different embedded insight teams to contribute to this big piece of research.



© AXA brand hub

“It gives us an opportunity to get closer to our customers and be really, shamelessly, customer-focused, because we are talking about them. We’re not talking about insurance products here; it’s: ‘What are your challenges? What are you are concerned about?’”

Data from the lifestyle report is used to inform decision-making within the different businesses, with one example being ongoing work on inclusive products, Alcantara says.

“One of our priorities at the moment is inclusive insurance. One of the things we’re trying to do is to show that we can provide more inclusive products as well. But the question is: what does that look like and how are you able to create those products?”

“You need to really lean on a piece of research, such as the customer lifestyle report – lean into customer needs and

the things that they are concerned about, to start answering that question.”

### Accurate journeys

Like many other large businesses, regardless of sector, customer-journey mapping is an important element of Axa’s insight work. Alcantara’s team is responsible for validating the journeys – across the different businesses – to ensure that the maps accurately reflect what Axa customers actually experience.

Alcantara says: “The ability to come up with a recommended consistent approach to validation testing helps us compare apples with apples, so we are comparing journeys like for like – but, also, we are making it more efficient, so it’s easy to industrialise and it’s much more cost-effective.”

That consistency isn’t restricted to processes. Alcantara adds: “It also helps

us to show up as ‘one Axa’ to our customers, because we have a consistent way of talking to them and a consistent way of doing research.”

Redblue is involved in the project to validate what Axa is finding in terms of customer journeys. Tom Scrimgour, managing director, says: “When you buy an insurance product, you are not thinking about anything aside from ‘how quickly and cost-effectively can I get this car insurance?’ We are taking all of [Axa’s] work and speaking to some consumers to round it out and validate what they are seeing, and try to bring a bit more of the consumer perspective into it.”

As well as “giving the answer” to the question in that specific part of the business, Scrimgour says the agency is working on designing processes that might be followed across other parts of the company. “It’s about saying, ‘if



this is a really important journey, this is the process we might follow'. And, because this is important, we need to validate it with some research. You're designing something that then goes further and wider."

On the agency's work with Axa, Scrimgour adds: "There is a need, at every junction, to be trying to drive the research agenda, as well as doing the research."

### Evaluating the approach

Consistency and cohesion are desired outcomes of this way of working, but another perspective is cost. Coursing research in the first instance to a customer panel has helped to realise cost efficiencies, as well as operational ones, says Alcantara.

"We have only had it [the panel] for a few months, but we're more or less saving around a quarter – 23% on average – than if we just decided to do research ad hoc, or as different business units."

Is this about simply doing less research? While the team has made cost savings, for Alcantara it's important to have upfront conversations about the best approach to take.

"A lot of the conversations we have in the organisation are about resolving that healthy tension and really finding out

when it's best to [do research] transversely and when it's best to do things more locally.

"There will be instances when you would need more bespoke, advanced work that is related to your business. It's all about being open about the challenge that you're trying to solve."

Another, less quantifiable take on value is the impact of how the team influences decision-making within Axa. Alcantara cites the example of the company's 'voice of the customer' programme, which gets feedback from 8.9 million customers across the UK and Ireland. One of the longer-term projects Alcantara is involved in is connecting the insight from that programme within an insights management framework, as well as ensuring consistency in tools and methods for customer feedback. Senior stakeholder buy-in is key.

"Getting the board to agree that, fundamentally, it is a good idea for us to connect insight helps with their

decision-making, because they would be able to see things end to end and act on it much quicker. It also helps us to become more consistent and more cost-effective."

### Connecting the learning

Within Axa, insight colleagues across the UK and Ireland meet monthly to share their insights via an insight community hub called INCH, offering an opportunity to contribute to wider discussions.

Alcantara says: "We talk about what we've done, our successes, and our challenges. We also take the opportunity to signpost the research that we have been gathering."

The forum has existed for the past year and is part of efforts to build an insight community across the different parts of what is a complex business.

In addition to the work his team is doing to connect insight within Axa, one of Alcantara's priorities is to look to all agency partners for inspiration and to work more consistently with them to "maximise" the insight they are producing.

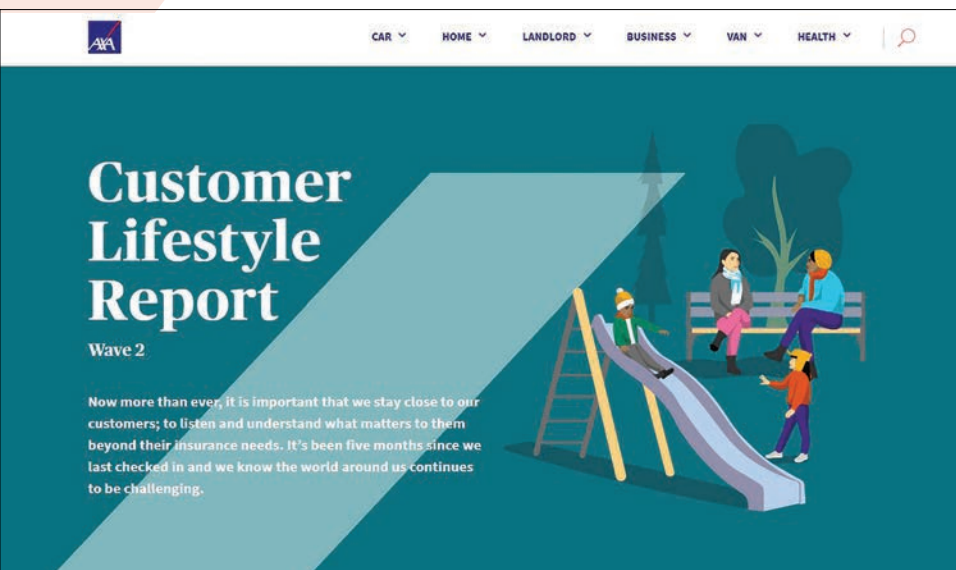
Looking to the future, he feels a combination of customer understanding and market nous will be key to staying as competitive as possible – and joined-up thinking will be central to that.

"Axa is a trusted household name and we've been in the market for a long time; that, in itself, really brings a lot of equity and respect from the customers that we serve, as well as the industry at large. However, as an organisation, we don't want to sit on our laurels," Alcantara says.


"If we are able to create best-in-class customer understanding, we would be in a position to offer distinctive, disruptive, inclusive products to our customers. That is also coupled with a keen sense of knowing market conditions, because we do operate in a highly regulated competitive market.

"How, then, do we anticipate or get better at acting on these changes in such a highly regulated competitive market? Part of the solution is leaning into the insight that we gather – and, I think, joining up that insight."

●  
**"We're trying to provide more inclusive products – but what does that look like?"**  
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# Life lessons

To mark the last issue of *Impact*, Lorna Tilbian reflects on 10 lessons learned from 40 years of observing the stock market



**W**hen it comes to the stock market, there is nothing new under the sun and history simply repeats itself with a twist. 'It is different this time' are the five most expensive words in the investment lexicon.

The year 1984 started with the flotation of global news agency and financial information group Reuters, and closed with the privatisation of telecommunications giant BT Group. In between, all the talk was of the summer Olympic Games in Los Angeles. It all seems a long time ago, with many lessons learned since, but things haven't really changed in the markets, mainly because human nature hasn't changed since the dawn of time.

**1) Supply and demand:** It started with the Romans and not much has changed. More buyers than sellers and the share price goes up; more sellers than buyers and it goes down. Simple.

**2) Fear and greed:** These human emotions drive the supply and demand equation. Greed prevails at the top of the economic cycle, when buyers see eternal growth, and fear at the bottom, when sellers see only endless valleys of despair. So, shares get overbought and oversold. Occasionally, the pendulum swings to the middle and equities are priced about right and wildly oscillating human emotions are kept in check.

**3) Fad and fashion:** Whether it's the dotcom boom and bust of the late 1990s and early noughties, big tech's recent pandemic bubble, or the current artificial intelligence hype, markets react to the new and different like over-excited teenagers. Share prices are driven to the moon and back. Often, they end up in the gutter and join the 90% club. The best companies, however, soar back up again over time. Patience is the answer.

**4) Bull vs bear:** Investors ignore bad news in a bull market and good news in a bear market, so it's important to stay grounded and let common sense prevail: bad news is ultimately bad for share prices and good news is ultimately good for them. Reality will be reflected in the valuation, eventually.

**5) Climbing a wall of worry:** Markets climb a 'wall of worry', recovering gradually as the bad news fades and the good news shows tentative glimmers. The darkest hour is just before dawn.

●  
**"Markets react to the new and different like over-excited teenagers"**  
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Interestingly, markets begin to rise when things stop getting worse, not when they actually (and noticeably) recover.

**6) All that glitters is not gold:** The US market is not the panacea to the ills of the London market. Of the 20 UK companies raising more than \$100m (£80m) that have floated in the US over the past 10 years, excluding special purpose acquisition companies, eight have delisted and only three are trading above their initial public offering price, according to the LSE. The rest are trading down by an average of 71%.

**7) Growth vs value:** These are two sides of the same coin, with growth in the early life-cycle of a company usually alongside an upturn in the economy. Best to hold defensive and lowly priced value stocks in a recession and highly valued go-go growth stocks in an economic upturn. It ain't rocket science.

**8) Concentration creates a fortune, diversification preserves it:** Most entrepreneurs make their fortune by obsessively focusing on their business and then diversify the proceeds to preserve it. Don't put all of your eggs in one basket.

**9) Up on an escalator and down in an elevator:** In normal market conditions, shares move up in a measured fashion – like an escalator – as they grow their earnings, but come racing down in an elevator if they issue profit warnings and investors bail out. Invariably, human nature is too optimistic at the start of the downward journey and too pessimistic towards the end.

**10) The price-earnings ratio:** The best management teams under-promise and over-deliver so the market is always surprised on the upside. Outperform earnings (E) expectations and, in turn, share prices (P) outperform. If companies look after the 'E' in P/E, the market will always look after the 'P'.

Fast forward 40 years, to 2024 – what's the talk as we approach the summer Olympic Games in Paris? Happily, it's good news; the FTSE 100 recently hit an all-time high of 8455, UK gross domestic product grew 0.6% in the first quarter, dragging us out of recession, and inflation recently dropped to the Bank of England's 2% target, which could pave the way for two interest rate cuts by the end of the year.

It is too soon to call the next bull market, but it does appear that the worst is over. But don't forget the 10 simple lessons.

# Seeing different realities

**At the MRS Equality Summit, a case study on designing accessible research for Meta's virtual reality team showed how progress, not perfection, can make a difference.** Katie McQuater reports

Since 2023, PA Consulting has worked with the virtual reality (VR) team at Meta to research the experiences, needs and behaviours of people with disability, primarily to inform Meta's VR offer, as well as future immersive technologies.

Lauren Adrover, senior UX researcher, Reality Labs and accessibility and equity lead, Meta, said: "As we build this immersive future of computing, we are acutely sensitive to wanting to do it with everyone."

Elise McNamara, senior consultant at PA Consulting, said: "Working towards best practice is a continuous journey. We made a lot of mistakes along the way, but that helped us unearth some of our most valuable learnings. Progress requires compromise. When it comes to accessibility research, of course we all want to aim high. But there are quite a lot of practical barriers that come with running inclusive research."

The first part of the study was at-home ethnographic research with people living with disability, to explore the barriers faced while using VR. A competitor review examined the benchmark for accessibility features within the market, to understand where Meta's technology was at risk of falling behind. Lastly, the researchers ran a quant study to understand people's behaviours around accessibility features – both those living with disability and the wider population.

"The risk of excluding people with disability isn't a hypothetical concern – we're already seeing this happen with other fast-moving technologies such as AI," said Phoebe Canning, associate partner at PA Consulting.

Adrover said: "The bar for our research was especially high because we appreciate the enormous value that immersive tech brings to people with disabilities." For example, people with disabilities

could use VR to feel less isolated or gain a greater sense of agency by participating in a virtual world.

## Addressing assumptions

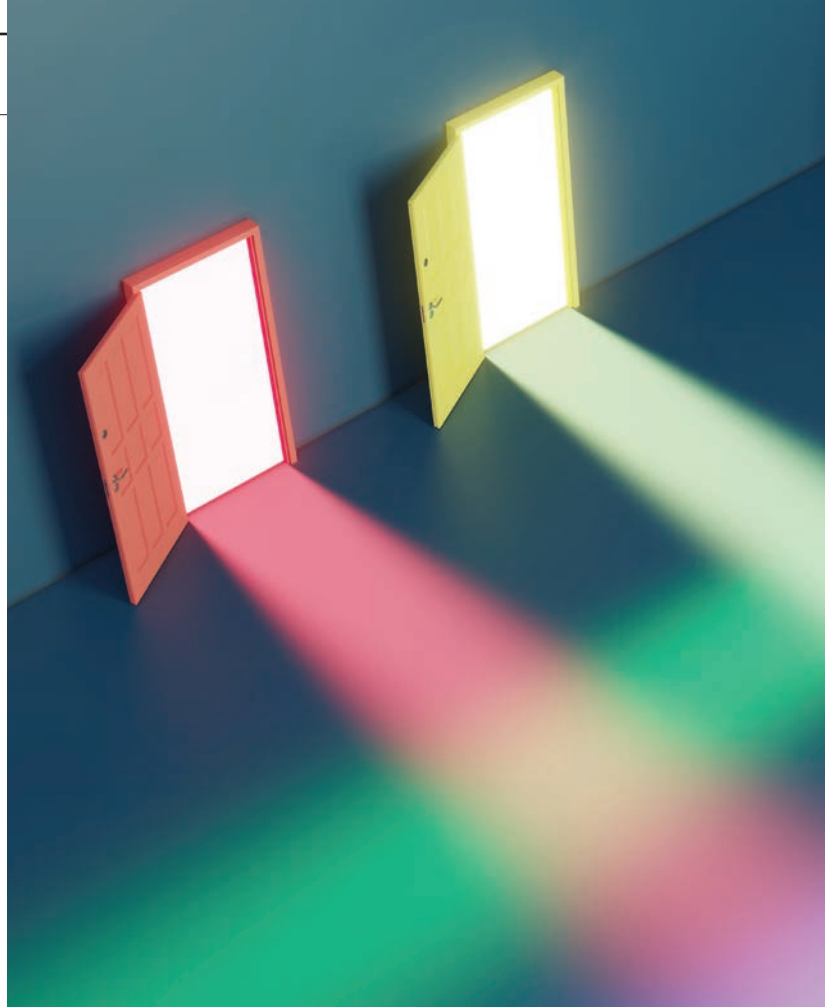
The researchers first addressed what they called their 'accessibility research orthodoxies' – common, ingrained assumptions that risked hampering an inclusive approach. These were:

1. People living with disabilities would be extremely hard to find and recruit
2. Only specialist moderators could run accessibility research
3. People living with significant disability wouldn't be able to fully complete a quant survey.

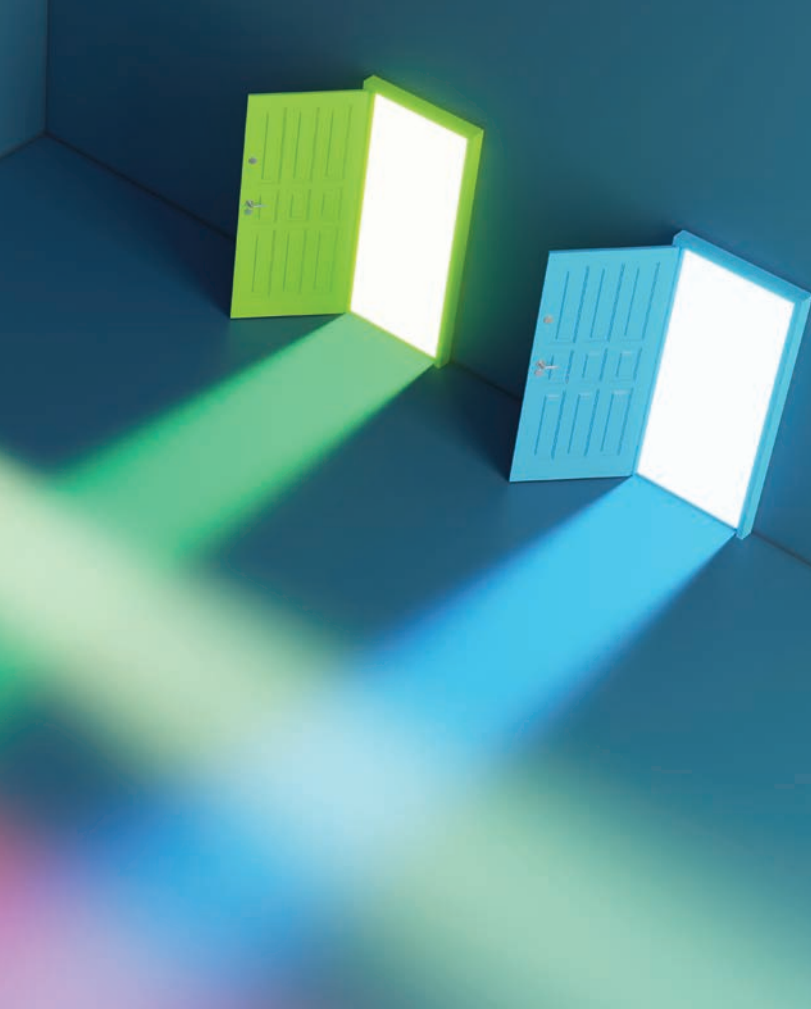
The team then designed its research with the aim of subverting these assumptions.

## 1. Recruitment

The assumption that it would be hard to recruit for this research was "not totally unfounded", said McNamara. The target audience for the qualitative stage was people who are frequently using VR, living with a range of disabilities, who were also customising their devices to cater for their needs. The researchers partnered with specialist disability panels and charities, but one of the most successful avenues







●  
**“Everyone’s experience of disability – and therefore the barriers experienced – is unique”**  
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for recruitment proved to be online: the team worked with disability influencers who use their platform to talk about accessible gaming, and found the majority of respondents in this way.

## 2. Moderation

The second ‘orthodoxy’ was the belief that a specialist moderator would be needed. To address this, the researchers educated themselves in accessible language and understanding the power dynamics in a shared space with participants. “We also took our cues from participants themselves,” said Canning, “mirroring the language that they use.”

For one participant, this meant not using the word ‘disability’ as that was not how the individual identified.

In a post-fieldwork questionnaire, some participants said they would have found it helpful to have more of an upfront discussion to prevent

anxiety ahead of the session – an insight PA Consulting took into the quant stage.

## 3. Survey design

The researchers co-created the survey with people with lived experience and experts in the space – consulting on issues such as format, flow, usability and language. Changes included replacing sliding scales with radio buttons to help with cognitive processing, and AI-generated voice-overs to avoid participants reading lots of lengthy questions.

To ensure anyone who wanted to participate in the research could do so, the researchers used dual participation. They also worked with a CATI agency to help field the research for those unable to use the online survey.

One area that proved particularly challenging was making the survey screen-reader accessible. “Although we had 100 people with total sight loss complete the survey, we needed to think about the user experience,” said McNamara. “There is a massive difference between making something screen-reader compatible, versus accessible.”

## Findings

Prioritisation of themes wasn’t simple, as everyone’s experience of disability – and therefore the barriers experienced – is unique. One of PA’s approaches to distilling recommendations was assessing the prevalence of the need, and the size of the need, for a certain assistive solution.

Meta’s Adrover said: “We were thinking about how many people we can impact. We were taken aback by the intersectionality of disability; how many different groups need the same solution in their technological behaviours. Live captions are clearly of use for people with hearing loss, but we also found that people with cognitive difference really appreciated live captions for lowering cognitive load.”

Meta also held a co-design session with people who are blind or have low vision to inform creative, multi-sensory haptic solutions for immersive VR products. Another important factor was finding ‘curb cuts’ – solutions that also benefit the wider population. “Being able to identify where this overlap lies helps the team to build a commercial case for change internally,” said Canning.

Researchers have a key role in amplifying the voices of those living with disability, McNamara said, adding: “We need to continue to share our best practice, share our learnings and challenge our assumptions to build inclusivity one step at a time.”

● For further coverage of the MRS Equality Summit, see [research-live.com](https://www.research-live.com)



# MRS Mentoring Scheme

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# Evidence alone isn't enough



**I** like to think, as an industry, we're doing pretty well for ourselves. Across data, insights, and analytics, there are countless success stories and chances for us to pat ourselves on the back. Apart from, dare I say it, in storytelling.

It seems as though I'm not the only one with doubts. Those at the MRS annual conference this year will have heard the countless times storytelling was mentioned. If you have attended any event recently, across data or insights, you'll see it still takes up a decent chunk of the agenda (along with AI, of course).

This leads me to my main question – why are we still sh\*t at telling stories?! There were sighs and raised eyebrows in the room every time storytelling was mentioned at the annual conference. Someone nearby joked that 'we've been banging on about this for the past 20 years'. So, why do we still struggle with it? It seems like such an essential trait of uncovering insights – being able to weave them together into a story to engage stakeholders and, ultimately, persuade, inform and influence them on what should be done next.

Rather than sit and moan about it, let's get to something useful. I'm not claiming to be an expert by any means, but here are some tips I have picked up along the way to improve data storytelling:

**1.** Know your audience. I know this seems obvious, and we say it time and time again. For me, this is a two-way street. Yes, you need to know more about them – what they know, want and expect, how they feel, how much experience they have. But – and this is the gamechanger – know what you want of them, too. Before every presentation, I now sit and write down what I want from the audience. What do I want them to think, feel and do because of what I'm about to tell them? Knowing what you're aiming for helps you know how to get there.

**2.** Give storytelling the importance it needs and deserves.

Rudyard Kipling once wrote: 'If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten.' Your data and your 'so what?' is more likely to be remembered if you tell it as part of a story. The more likely they are to be remembered, the more likely they are to be actioned and, therefore create the change you're striving towards. This stuff is important – treat it as though it is. Invest the time and the budget to get this right.

**3.** It's easy to confuse storytelling for data visualisation, or a data narrative – when, in fact, these are two important components of storytelling itself. Harleen Thethy, vice-president of digital

analytics at Barclays, talked through this relationship between narrative, visuals and data as a vehicle for creating change at a recent keynote at the Melbourne Business Analytics Conference.

Not every story will have the same elements – and nor should they.

Surprise surprise, it all depends on the desired outcome. If you're wanting to engage, combine your data viz with a good narrative. If it's more about explaining, swap out your visualisations for data. If you're wanting to enlighten, combine your data with some pretty visuals. But if you're wanting to inspire change, you need all three of these.

That's what it's all about, right? We want to inspire change. To inspire evidence-based decision making. Based on our evidence. But the evidence alone just won't cut it – it's not enough. Using that evidence along with great visuals and a powerful narrative is what will get us to that action. And that is where it all starts to get exciting. I don't know about you, but that's the bit that gets me out of bed in the morning.

●  
**“Using that evidence along with great visuals and a powerful narrative is what will get us to that action”**  
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# Mind games



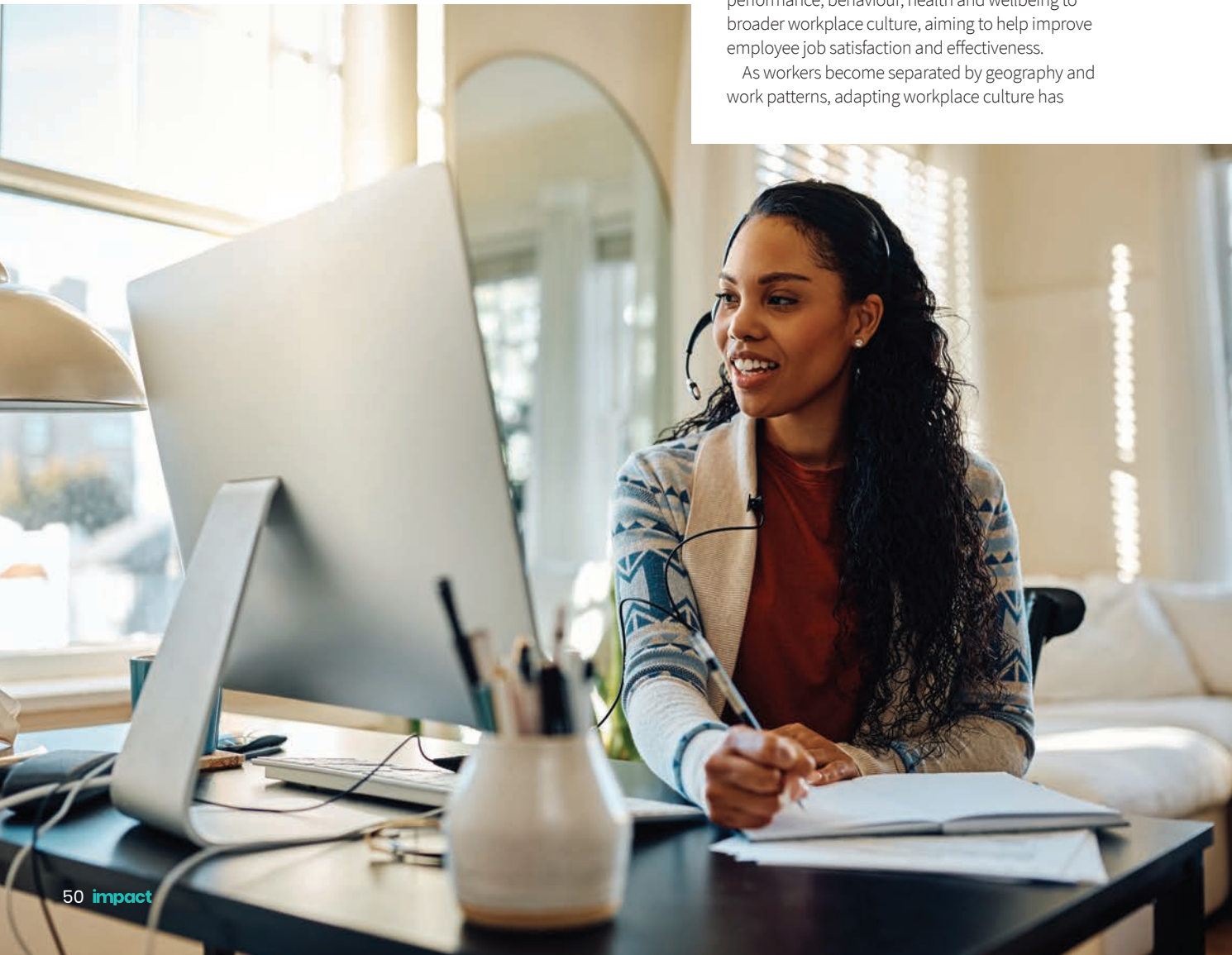
**The world of work has changed dramatically since 2020. Liam Kay-McClean speaks to chief workplace psychologist Benjamin Granger of Qualtrics about his role at the company and the future of the workplace**

**W**e are living through possibly the biggest upheaval in the world of work for generations. From the pandemic ushering in a new era of hybrid work, to the looming potential (and threat) of artificial intelligence (AI), it is hard to think of a more uncertain time for workplace dynamics since the advent of the personal computer.

As an example, in 2019, 4.7% of workers in the UK worked from home, according to a study on homeworking before and after lockdown from Wiserd, a collaboration between five universities in Wales. Between 22 May and 2 June 2024, according to ONS data, 14% of UK employees only worked from home, while 26% travelled to work and worked from home.

In this context, a chief workplace psychologist sounds like a good idea. An occupational psychologist generally applies psychological knowledge, theory and practice to the workplace and deals with issues ranging from employee performance, behaviour, health and wellbeing to broader workplace culture, aiming to help improve employee job satisfaction and effectiveness.

As workers become separated by geography and work patterns, adapting workplace culture has



become vital. Experience management and AI business Qualtrics has had such a role in place for the past two years, with the position filled by Dr Benjamin Granger. Working within Qualtrics' XM Institute, he leads research and thought leadership around experience management (XM), employee experience (EX), and the intersection between EX and customer experience (CX), in addition to his internal role as workplace psychologist. He even touches on candidate experience, for job applicants.

Speaking to *Impact* at Qualtrics' X4 conference in Salt Lake City earlier this year, Granger says that he believes his role is a natural fit. "I think the role of a psychologist in an organisation that does what we do is a no brainer," says Granger. "What we're doing is measuring experiences that humans have.

"The umbrella phrase I would use to describe it is psychological ergonomics. We need to understand psychologically how people process information."

When Granger joined Qualtrics in 2015, he was initially working in EX advisory services, moving up to lead that department before taking up a joint role as chief workplace psychologist in 2022. In April this year, he shifted to becoming full-time chief workplace psychologist. Granger has a PhD in industrial organisational psychology from the University of South Florida and, prior to Qualtrics, worked as senior consultant – selection strategy at telecommunications firm Verizon.

When he first took up his current role, Covid-19 was in full swing, and workplace dynamics – previously centred on office working – were jettisoned in favour of home working.

Granger says that in terms of the employee experience, the pandemic was a grand experiment "as a single intervention that affected everyone in every organisation". It led to large-scale changes in how people work and also how they engage more broadly with their organisations. "That has spurred a lot more interest [in EX], with people saying 'we can't keep operating the way we used to – we need to change how we deliver'."

Qualtrics data showed a higher level of burnout for leaders during the pandemic, according to Granger, as they were expected to be much more hands-on in communicating with their staff during an uncertain period, while also navigating Covid-19 and its restrictions. For example, Qualtrics' 2023 *Employee Experience Trends Report* found that 46% of top-level leadership globally was at risk of burnout in the third quarter of 2022.

Staff have also become more accustomed to fast change within organisations, he says, with the speed at which businesses adjusted to restrictions in 2020 used as

a yardstick to measure progress in other areas of workplace strategy and culture. Data is therefore playing a key role. "I can't think of a conversation with executives where they are not talking about data-driven decisions," says Granger. "Many leaders have already bought into the idea of CX metrics, and so, very wisely, HR professionals are creating a set of metrics and data that are very similar, putting them in the same place, juxtaposing them for leaders, so subconsciously they see them as equivalent."

## Grappling with technology

Granger argues that EX and CX, fundamentally, have substantial overlap, and many of the skills that can help companies engage with their customers can be transferred to helping them build strong company cultures and positive relationships with their staff.

"Underneath the skin, we all have the same skeletal frame and inner workings," he says. "There are some differences in terms of access to data and information. But people have very similar needs, wants and desires, and that plays out as consumers and employees."

Occupational psychology is likely to play an even more pivotal role as AI comes to the fore. For all its promise, in the eyes of many people, there is fear that AI could take jobs, radically alter them or leave people's qualifications significantly out of date at a speed that would make it impossible to retrain fast enough. Granger says that how AI's introduction is communicated internally will be key to whether it is accepted by the workforce, and whether some of those concerns can be efficiently salvaged.

"I find AI to be a big experiment. Some companies will do really well and they will communicate about it well," he suggests. "People will gradually be more comfortable and confident with it. I'm interested in how organisations are going to communicate about AI, and how they are going to ease employees into it."

For this reason, psychology will become even more important in the workplace; Granger predicts that it will continue to expand in the coming years. "If we're going to be introducing AI, if we're going to be running businesses made up of people and then serving people, we have to be thinking of psychological ergonomics," he adds.

"Every organisation has a unique fingerprint, but underneath the surface it is just a group of people using shared resources to achieve shared goals. Every company on earth is exactly that.

"If you are to be successful managing groups of people through constant change, we need to know how people think, we've got to know how people react to change and how you communicate and adopt new technology.

"That's psychology."

●  
**"To be successful  
 managing people...  
 we've got to know how  
 people react to change"**  
 ●

# Small wins

**Fractional leadership is becoming well established in marketing, and could offer the answer to ‘brain drain’ and budget squeezes.**

By Katie McQuater

**J**ournalists are acutely aware of new terms. Too often, these are buzzwords – meaningless concepts with limited staying power or that don’t withstand scrutiny. Every now and then, however, a new concept comes across the desk and just seems to make sense.

‘Fractional’ working is a model of leadership, prevalent within finance and law, that is now making its way into marketing, with the rise of the fractional chief marketing officer (CMO). Definitions differ, but one common characteristic of fractional roles is that they are embedded within an organisation, unlike consultancy. They work part-time, rather than full-time, but, like consultancy, they may work with more than one business at a time.

By engaging highly experienced executives on a fractional basis, companies can access strategic senior expertise at a lower cost than employing a full-time leader or team, and may take this approach to steer them through periods of transformation or to access a particular specialism.

Ben Leet, former chief executive at Delineate, who left in 2023 to set up his own consultancy, works across several research technology (restech) businesses on a fractional basis.

“I’ve got email IDs, Slack IDs and Teams accounts. I’m operating like I’m part of the client’s business, but part-time,” says Leet. “The old-fashioned language would be part-timer. Fractional sounds sexier. Effectively, I work part-time for four or five different companies.”

Rachel Forde, co-founder, The Zoo.London, says a fractional executive has historically been more akin to a non-executive director – someone with their corporate career behind them, employed for a couple of days a month or a quarter – but this is now changing.

She explains: “What we see now is the rise of the fractional consultant across senior people in the marketplace who are not necessarily looking for a portfolio career just yet – more that they are looking for fractional opportunities and projects on a

short- to medium-term basis as they work out their next full-time permanent role. Or, what we are seeing more of, the ‘serial fractional CMO.’”

Forde, a former media industry executive, co-founded The Zoo.London as a network to link senior talent with businesses. She expects to see more companies using what she calls “agile and fluid talent” when they need it. “Most businesses are in need of heavyweight expertise or a specialism, but don’t necessarily want to pay for it on a full-time basis; the fractional consultant is the solution for this,” says Forde.

Leet’s approach to his new career was driven by his skill set: “I’m one of life’s generalists – I’m good at a lot of things, I’m not an expert at any one thing. I realised there are a lot of tech businesses – start-ups – that need a bit of many different things, and those things change over time depending on where the business is in its life-cycle. I can fill those gaps quite easily.”

## Valued insight

Corporate insight functions are becoming more attuned to the importance of learning from past experience. Companies including PepsiCo and Carlsberg Group have built repositories of insight to avoid starting from scratch at every opportunity and to derive continued learning from existing data, for example. Could fractional insight leadership offer the same benefit from the perspective of drawing on rich individual knowledge?

Leet thinks fractional working could benefit companies in the research industry, and predicts that artificial intelligence (AI) will bring a raft of new technology-led start-ups to the sector, integrating restech in the same way martech and adtech (marketing and advertising technology) have each become part of one unified ecosystem. With this

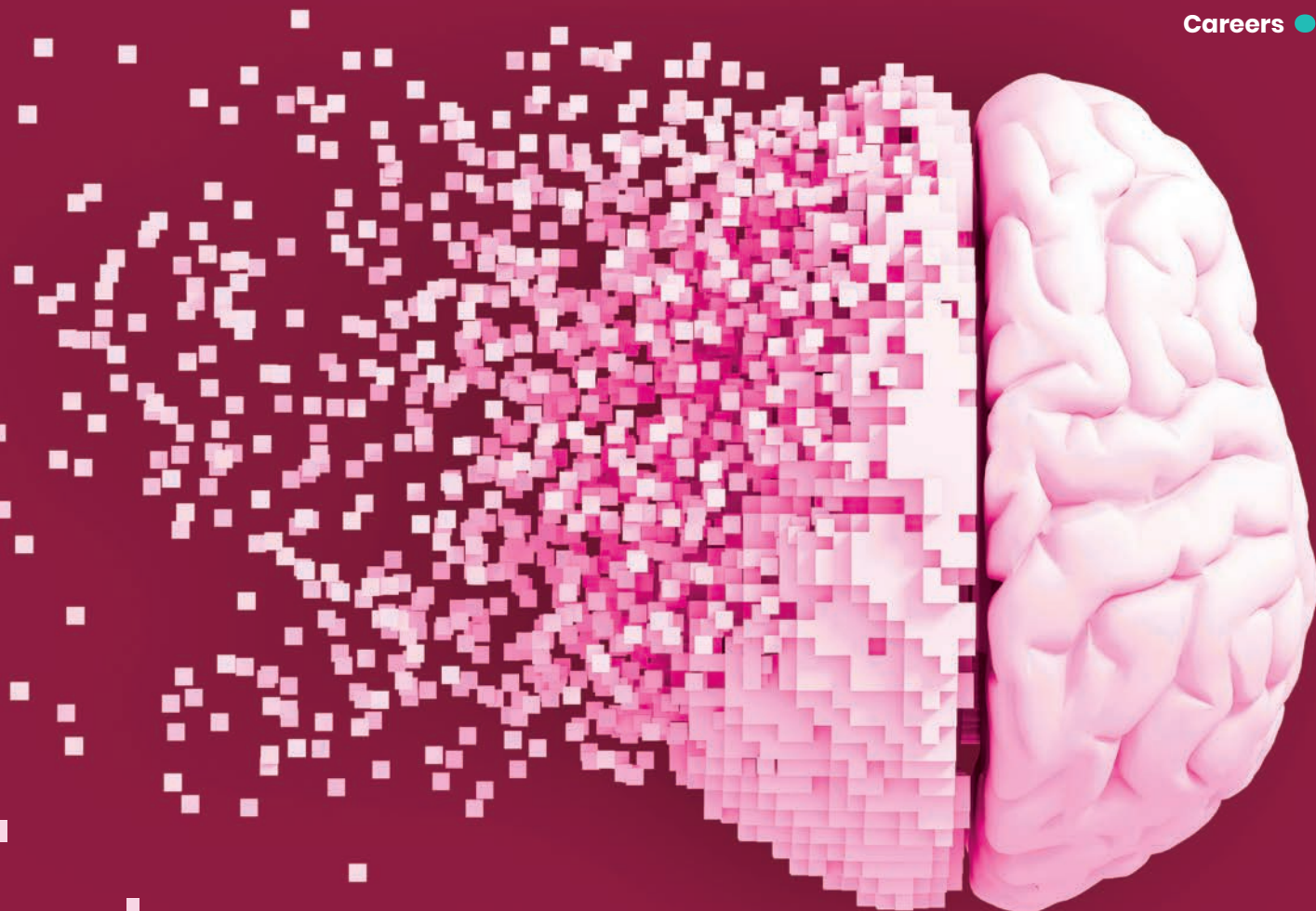
shift, he expects that insights start-ups will increasingly need fractional executives to help them.

“There’s a huge opportunity for people to work as I do within this next wave of technology businesses that’s going to hit our industry pretty hard,” he says.

“Every data business is separated – there are no common data standards; no data-transfer mechanisms. We’re all operating in silos and AI is going to change that; create a more connected ecosystem. You’ve got old sages like me who have been around for 20 years and gone through the hype of online panels and self-serve. We can add value to these businesses that are going to be founded by 25- to 30-year-olds, who are technically brilliant, but haven’t got that back-catalogue of experience.”

●  
**“The old-fashioned language would be part-timer. Fractional sounds sexier”**  
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Forde can see the value in brands employing fractional consultants in the insight function, helping to address the issue of senior ‘brain drain’, where experienced leaders leave the industry. She says: “When it comes to customer insight, there’s a lot to be said for knowledge and wisdom of what’s come before and may come again, and that helps to save a lot of time reinventing the wheel and wasting resources.”

Today’s uncertain times could mean boom or bust for fractional working. In the US, there has been a large number of redundancies across several sectors, but particularly technology, where the past year has seen a wave of lay-offs. Karina Mikhli, founder of Fractionals United, a network of senior leaders working as ‘fractionals’, or aspiring to, says there has been an increase in fractional executives on the supply side, as people are let go. This, however, has not yet been matched by businesses’ demand.

“There is a smaller increase on the demand side and we’re hoping this will escalate as awareness continues to expand. It’s happening, because it’s a win-win and makes sense, but too few know we exist yet.”

The lack of awareness may be compounded by a close-minded view of work. Part-time is still a rarity in the

research industry. A recent salary survey by research-focused recruitment agency Elizabeth Norman International (ENI) found that only 2% of respondents in permanent employment (across all seniority levels) are in part-time roles.

Liz Norman, chief executive at ENI, says: “We very rarely get briefed for part-time roles. We often get asked by candidates for part-time roles, so there is demand for them, but employers argue that employees need to be there when clients or marketing departments demand things, making it difficult to be that flexible.”

Acceptance of remote working is also key to the success of fractional work, says Mikhli. “Needing to be on site hampers our effectiveness and ability to do this across several clients,” she adds.

But companies could be missing a trick by failing to engage leaders on a fractional basis. Mikhli name-checks small- to medium-sized businesses, start-ups and scale-ups as types of businesses likely to use fractional roles, but adds that all leadership functions can be helped by fractional support. “It’s less about the business area and more about the area needing a leader rather than an individual contributor.”

A little bit of support can go a long way.

# Six years in behavioural science



In 2018, the then editor of *Impact* invited The Behavioural Architects to write a regular column on the latest thinking in behavioural science for market researchers. Since then, we have published more than 24 articles examining how new findings in behavioural science can help researchers better understand consumers and create more effective research methodologies and practices.

We have explored a breadth of behavioural science concepts, many of them new or evolving, ranging from sludge and shifting baseline syndrome to social tipping points and the intention-action gap. We've also looked at the power of combining behavioural science with adjacent fields, such as data science and social network analysis.

In our final *Impact* article, we celebrate six years of behavioural science insights. If it weren't for these advancements in behavioural understanding, what wouldn't we know? What wouldn't we be doing? What impact has this new knowledge had in our sector?

## 1) Two articles looked at how behavioural insights can better inform perceptions of age, and how age can affect our decision-making.

Our very first article, 'The socially driven teenage brain', published in October 2018, explored how young adult brains often continue to develop and mature until at least our mid-20s. Up until this time, young adults may be more impulsive and take more risks, particularly if driven by social rewards from their peers. These findings have led to changes in the law. For example, in 2022 Scotland amended its sentencing guidelines based on a review of evidence; in cases where defendants are under 25, judges must "have regard to the intellectual and emotional maturity of the young person at the time the offence was committed". Many other countries already consider the ages of 18 to 25 a grey area, and only recognise someone as an adult when they reach 21 (Germany) or 25 (Switzerland).

For researchers, these findings mean it is especially important to consider the context in which teenagers may be deciding: are they alone or among peers; how is information framed; does it highlight any social rewards or risks? Interventions that leverage adolescent impulsiveness in search of a reward, or that use peer influence – particularly of popular, high-status peers – have been found to be more effective.

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“If it wasn't for these advancements, what wouldn't we know? What wouldn't we be doing?”  
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In 'The age effect on making decisions', published in July 2020, we looked at how younger people tend to rely more on their analytical and reasoning skills – known as fluid intelligence – to make decisions. As people age, they tend to make decisions by drawing on their knowledge and experience – known as crystallised intelligence. As we approach our 70s, it is more likely we will see a noticeable cognitive decline.

The older we get, the more likely it is that we'll have a positive outlook and be drawn to positive information, which rather goes against the 'cantankerous old people' stereotype. Younger people, however, tend to be drawn more to negative information. Surveys have found that younger people appear to be more anxious about climate change. A 2021 Ipsos Global Advisor survey found that 20% of young people believe it is too late to fix climate change, compared with only 12% of over-50s, but these attitudes are understandable given the findings above.

These insights have implications for how we communicate with different age groups.

If older people struggle with complex decision-making, we need to make provisions for that, trying to find ways to facilitate decision-making, or perhaps designing the process so that tried and tested experience and learned rules of thumb can play a part. Similarly, if we

want to get the attention of older people, presenting them with positive information and positive stimuli could be more effective. Conversely, to get the attention of young adults, we might do better with negative stimuli.

## 2) Sometimes in research, what matters is what you don't do, rather than what you do do.

In our January 2020 article 'The limit of reading facial movements', we voiced our doubts about increasingly popular facial-coding technologies. Robust behavioural science found flaws – namely that facial expressions and movements that might express emotion are not uniform. For example, a scowl might not necessarily mean someone is angry, and a neutral expression may mask angry feelings.

Even more significantly, focusing only on the face might mean we miss other non-verbal signals. Alan Cowen, at University of California, Berkeley, found that emotion might be more easily communicated via tone, body language and touch.



In 2022, the Information Commissioner’s Office advised against the use of emotion artificial intelligence (AI) and facial coding, saying: “Developments in the biometrics and emotion AI market are immature. They may not work yet, or indeed ever.” Similarly, NielsenIQ stated that: “Following our recent completion of a multi-year, multi-country evaluation of facial coding, we have concluded that the methodology shows little correlation with what people feel, and even less correlation with what they do.”

**3) We also recognised that with great knowledge comes great power.**

In our increasingly online world, sludge or deceptive design has become more common – an issue we have discussed in our articles. Sludge can intentionally use deceptive or manipulative techniques to prevent us from doing something that’s in our interest, or pressure and persuade us to do something that isn’t. It can also be unintentional; caused by poor design or legacy technology. However, researchers, regulators, consumers and consumer bodies have all been working to call out sludge. It is now a defined and recognised concept with a growing, weighty body of research to back it up.

Many regulators and governments are also tackling it. The New South Wales government in Australia has developed a sludge audit to stamp out sludge in government policy and it has partnered with the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development’s Behavioural Insights Team to run International Sludge Academies for governments interested in running similar audits. In many ways, the

recognition of sludge has also informed the Financial Conduct Authority’s new consumer duty in the UK; financial providers must ensure consumers face little to no friction in achieving outcomes in their best interest. Behavioural scientists including Professor Leonhard Lades and Dr Stuart Mills have explored the detrimental impact of sludge on adopting environmental behaviours. In the Republic of Ireland, for example, the high administrative burden to apply for and install free solar panels on school roofs means almost no schools apply, and Lades is investigating how that burden can be reduced to increase uptake.

Finally, our April 2023 article ‘The adult years of behavioural science’ discussed how behavioural science has come through the ‘teenage years’. It has withstood big shocks and developments to enter the calmer waters of adulthood. Our article ‘The Devil is in the detail’, published in April 2019, looked at how the replication crisis was less a crisis and more of a learning point, and how it has been a chance to improve research practice. While many weird and wonderful concepts in psychology (and other fields) could not be replicated, many frequently used concepts from behavioural science – such as anchoring, loss framing and sunk-cost fallacy – did replicate.

We have loved sharing these insights with you over the years. The world of behavioural science will continue to build a deeper understanding of human behaviour and decision-making every day.



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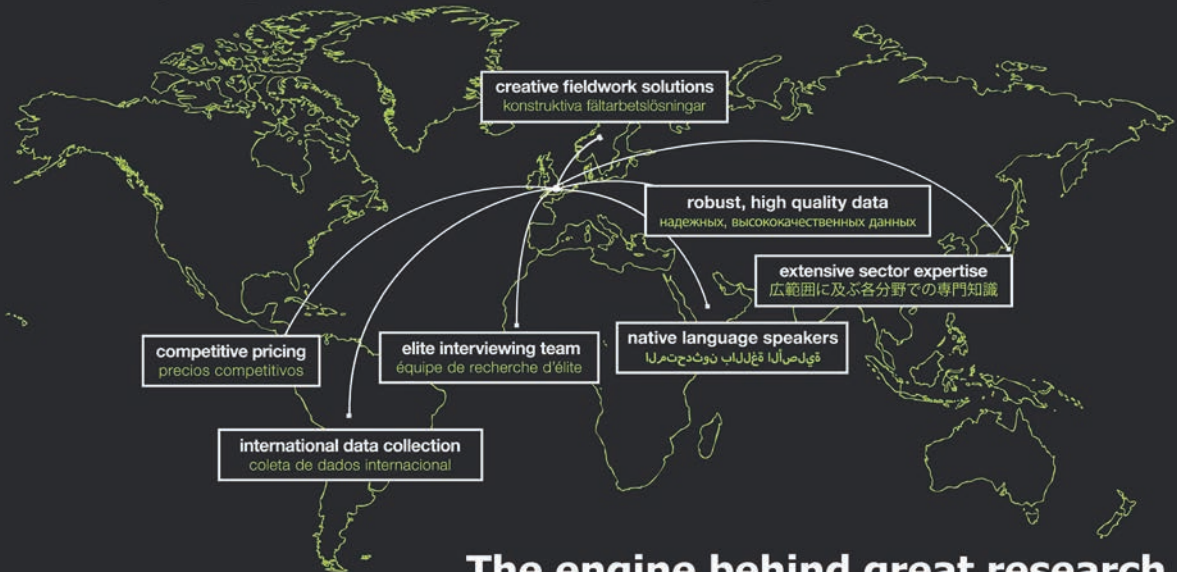


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# From top table to many tables

**To achieve customer salience, insight professionals must challenge, create, connect and collaborate. By Jane Simms**

**D**anny Russell is worried. Non-executive director at insight agency FlexMR, and a former senior insight professional at companies including Telefónica, Sky and British Airways, he believes that the link between brand and customer in organisations has weakened over recent years, a trend exacerbated by the change in working practices precipitated by the Covid lockdowns. However, he insists, this is an opportunity, not a threat, for insight professionals – provided they embrace a new way of working.

Citing surveys from the likes of the Institute of Customer Service and KPMG Nunwood, which show customer satisfaction levels have stagnated over the past decade, Russell says: “I really do think we have lost sight of the customer in our thought processes, and forgotten the need to put the customer absolutely at the heart of everything we do.”

There is a gap between rhetoric and practice, he notes. While chief marketing officers (CMOs) want their organisations to be customer-centric, research from Forrester, in 2022, found that nearly half of all decisions are made on gut feel, with no data or insight informing them whatsoever.

With the Brexit fallout, international wars and an energy crisis to contend with – to name just a few – companies have a lot on their plate, as Russell admits. But perhaps the biggest challenge, he believes, is the

effect that hybrid working has had on decision-making. “You tend to miss out on those serendipitous ‘corridor conversations’ and impromptu meetings, which are valuable opportunities to nudge projects forward,” he observes.

“Not only are companies taking much longer to make decisions, but insight professionals may be unintentionally sidelined.”

That has to change. “If the insight industry is to achieve the nirvana of ‘insight-driven decision-making’, we need to ensure that the customer is at the front of everyone’s mind – even if we’re not in the same room,” says Russell. “The way to achieve this ‘customer salience’ is to forget our historic quest for ‘a seat at the table’ and look instead for ‘a seat at many tables.’”

FlexMR has designed its ‘4C model of customer salience’ (challenge, create, connect and collaborate) to help insight professionals to do this. It involves challenging their existing patterns of thinking, devising targeted strategies for different groups of stakeholders, connecting decision-makers directly with customers, and fostering collaboration with and among stakeholders, around the focal point of customers. The goal is to culturally embed customers at the heart of decision-making.

While it’s important to influence all stakeholders, the CMO is clearly a critical target, given that two-thirds of insight teams report to them. The IPA’s *Bellwether Report* reflects eight consecutive quarters of decline in market research budgets. “I talk to a lot of CMOs, and they genuinely want to improve the customer experience, but lots of ‘stuff’ gets in their way,” says Russell. “The 4C model is a way of reducing some of those barriers.”

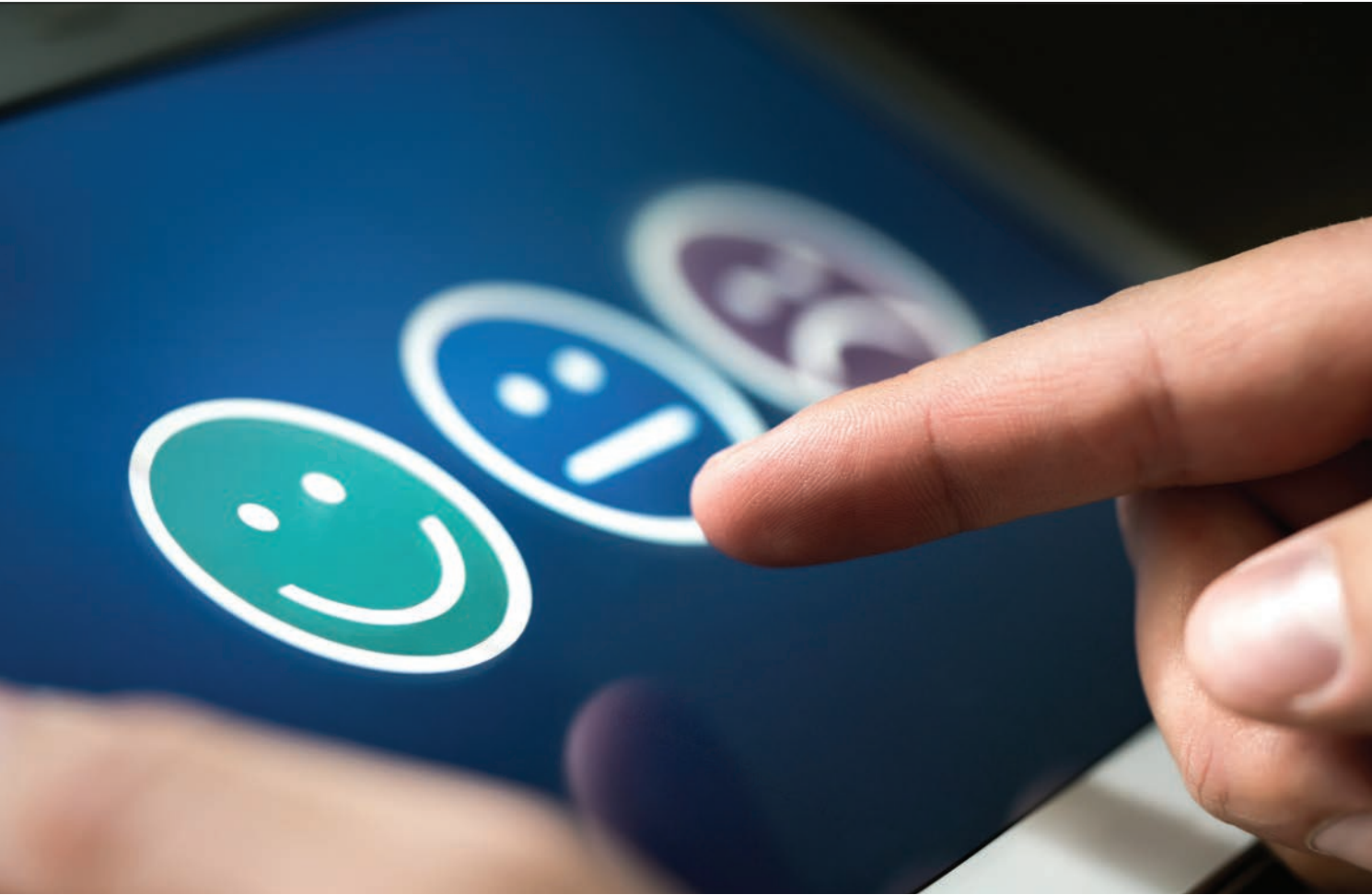
Hannah Fisher, marketing director at Saga Cruises, part of Saga Group plc, is exactly the kind of stakeholder that insight professionals need to influence – but she needs no persuading.

“We are a customer-centric organisation through and through,” says Fisher. “We use all the levers FlexMR talks about, probably without even realising it; it’s just how we operate.”

A central insight team for Saga Group runs the ‘experienced voices’ (EV) panel, comprising several thousand customers. The panel provides first-hand insights to all divisions and departments in the company, and, in Saga Cruises, these insights shape everything from itineraries and destinations to cabin prices. Fisher and her team use the panel to test advertising campaigns, craft media strategy and develop propositions, and are currently using it to inform a major strategic initiative on customer life-cycle planning.

The marketing team also uses its NPS ‘voice of





customer' programme to connect decision-makers in the business directly with customer issues – almost in real time. Fisher explains: "At the end of every cruise, all customers complete a survey on every aspect of their experience. When we aggregate those scores, we can see, ship by ship, what issues there are, and we feed that information back to the relevant teams so they can drive improvement immediately."

She continues: "Everything we do in marketing is generated from true insight: we are constantly listening to customers and improving what we offer them, based on their distinct needs. The more we can engage with them and embed them in what we do, the more satisfied they are, and the more likely they are to repeat purchase and recommend us to others. It's a virtuous circle."

Russell believes insight teams could be more proactive in fostering 'trusted partnerships' with their

different stakeholders – not least CMOs. After all, he points out: "Insight is one of the very few departments that permeate across the organisation, and we are therefore ideally placed to join everything up to enhance the final customer experience."

And the prize is there for the taking. Customer-centric companies are, on average, 60 per cent more profitable than those that aren't, according to research by Deloitte & Touche in 2014.

Judging by Russell's conversations with CMOs, insight could well be pushing at an open door.

●  
**"To achieve the nirvana of 'insight-driven decision-making', we need to ensure the customer is at the front of everyone's mind"**  
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● **Hannah Fisher and Danny Russell will be speaking at the Customer Salience Summit, exploring how insight teams can deliver long-term value and create cultures of customer-centric decision-making, on 3 October at RSA House, London. For tickets go to [Eventbrite.co.uk](https://www.eventbrite.co.uk) and search 'salience'**

# Generating discussion



**T**he Information Commissioner's Office (ICO) has launched a consultation series on how aspects of data protection law should apply to the development and use of generative AI models. In this article, I will summarise the first two consultations and, where applicable, share MRS' response to the ICO consultations.

Generative AI refers to AI models that can create new content – for example, text, computer code, audio, music, images and videos. Typically, these models are trained on extensive datasets, which allows them to exhibit a broad range of general-purpose capabilities.

Generative AI can autonomously generate several types of new outputs. One dataset could be used for improving customer interactions through enhanced chat and search experiences, or assist with repetitive tasks such as replying to requests for proposals.

The first call for evidence from the ICO addressed the lawful basis for web scraping to train generative AI models.

## What is web scraping?

Web scraping involves the use of automated software to 'crawl' web pages, gather, copy or extract information from those pages, and store that information (such as in a database) for further use. The information can be anything on a website, including images, videos, text or contact details.

Information scraped from internet environments such as blogs, social media, forum discussions, product reviews and personal websites may contain personal data that individuals have placed there. Additionally, these may contain information that was not placed there by the person to whom it relates (such as discussion forums, leaked information).

In the first consultation, the ICO has analysed whether legitimate interest (LI) is a valid lawful basis for training generative AI models on web-scraped data. In the ICO's view,

LI can be a valid lawful basis for training generative AI models on web-scraped data, but only when the model's developer can ensure they pass the three-part test:

- Is there a valid interest?
- Is web scraping necessary, given the purpose?
- Do individuals' rights override the interest of the generative AI developer?

These are considerations controllers and developers will need to apply, and this will allow developers to thoroughly consider the appropriateness of the processing and consider its risks and whether it infringes on individual rights.

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“There must be a lawful basis for processing data, and the purpose must not be in breach of other laws”  
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## Purpose limitation in the generative AI life-cycle

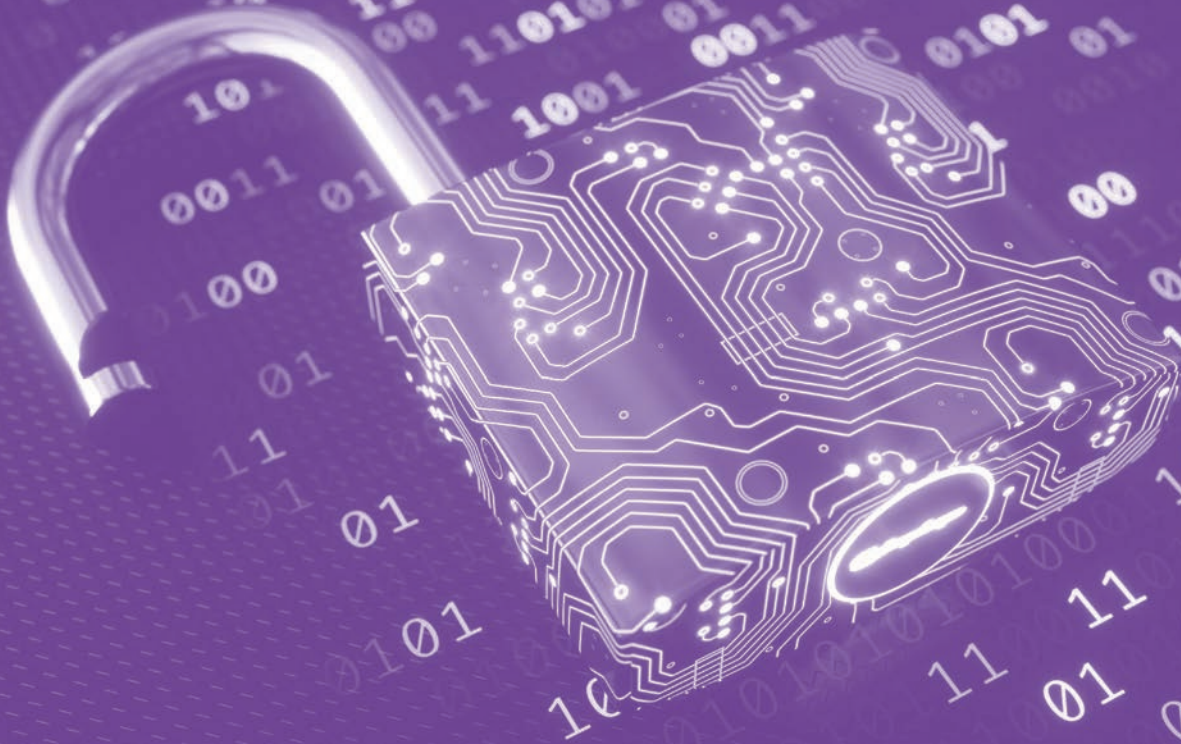
The second chapter focuses on how the data protection principle of purpose limitation should be applied at different stages in the generative AI life-cycle. This requires organisations to be clear and open about why they are processing personal data, and to ensure that what they intend to do

with it is in line with individuals' reasonable expectations. There must be a lawful basis for processing data, and the purpose must not be in breach of other laws.

The generative AI model life-cycle involves several stages. Each stage may involve processing different types of personal data for different purposes. This can make it challenging for developers and controllers to set a singular purpose or have the purpose clear at the outset of the project, as well as to clarify the delineation of roles between controllers and processors.

However, the expectation from the ICO is that this needs to be well considered, although different organisations may have control over these purposes, helping to delineate the boundaries of purposes.

Nonetheless, having a specified purpose in each stage of the generative AI life-cycle is essential and will allow organisations to appropriately understand the scope of each processing activity,



mitigate risk, evaluate its compliance with data protection and help them evidence that.

The ICO is certainly at the inception stages of its analysis around regulating generative AI, and is seeking input from industry to inform future planning and decision making.

MRS has submitted a response to the second chapter of the ICO consultation and will continue to input into later chapters. At present, our response is seeking more clarity from the ICO.

In our response, we asked the ICO to consider and address three key concerns and questions, including:

- The exemptions provided in Article 89 and Recital 162 of the General Data Protection Regulation. In essence, these provisions mean that if research is conducted for historical, scientific, or statistical purposes, while safeguards must be ensured, it reduces the onerous burdens for further processing.
- With regards to the reuse of data gathered for research purposes, if research data is gathered for one research project and client, and the data is used to train research models – for

example, create synthetic data models, which may be used repeatedly for other research projects, is it reasonable to gather consent for ‘research purposes’ without having to explicitly state the specific type of research projects that the data may be used for in the future?

- And finally, will the ICO provide guidance for determining when users of generative AI model data become controllers and when they are processors? Users seldom have access to identifiable personal data; this data is only accessible to the owner of a generative AI model. Therefore, if models are used, will the users always be processors, or will there be instances where the users could be joint controllers?

We hope to gain more understanding from the ICO and contribute to the ongoing discussions on regulating generative AI. It is imperative that there are clear considerations and planning around the delineation of responsibilities (this is already a challenging matter across the industry), and that there is clarity around the exemptions that should be provided in accordance with Article 89 and Recital 162 of the GDPR, and the reuse of data.





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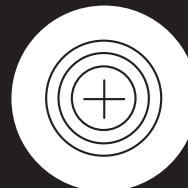
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## Time to make a different impact

I'm not saying goodbye, even though this is my last column in *Impact* magazine. I'm delighted that the relationship between the Society and its members has never been stronger. MRS is here to protect, promote and connect the research sector, and I'm confident that we will be creating a new and refreshed platform to help us do this – even without *Impact*.

Digitally speaking, our conversations happen in so many different places – on social media, websites, blogs and podcasts, in online conferences and at networking events, and in private discussion forums. We all enjoy this constantly adapting and organic landscape, but as I have frequently said to many of you, we need focus. We need to create impact ourselves by ensuring we have a really significant focal point and platform where we gather the research community together to share, discuss and learn, and make a noise!

Our intention is to build on the thriving community that already exists on Research Live. As our most international channel (the US, the UK and India are the three largest audiences – in that order), Research Live is a growing community and is the perfect setting to share and discuss what good research looks like around the world.

In retiring *Impact* magazine, we are investing more time and energy into

Research Live. That investment is in deeper, richer, and more evidence-based conversations. It's also the place to celebrate the people that make up this industry. With this in mind, our Research Heroes 2024 have just been announced on Research Live.

Now in its fourth year, this initiative enables us to applaud the many people who work together to create great research, but who are not eligible for professional recognition such as Fellowships or MRS awards. Perhaps it's someone who has shown tireless dedication to a local cause outside of work, or to supporting colleagues in difficult times.

We are all incredibly lucky to work in a sector that attracts curious and compassionate people; people who are fascinated by the world around them and who want to make an impact on it. This, I believe, is our secret sauce when it comes to recruitment and talent, and this is what keeps many people in the business of research.

That's also why I'm confident we can create a bigger and better platform to share and celebrate the curiosity that motivates us, and the reasons we work in this sector.

I look forward to continuing to talk, learn and grow with you.

PS: You can find the entire archive of 11 years of *Impact* magazine at [research-live.com/impact\\_archive](https://research-live.com/impact_archive)

### Sector and MRS news

#### New MRS climate pledge

MRS has launched the MRS Climate Pledge (replacing the Net Zero Pledge) in line with recommendations of the Science Based Targets initiative (SBTi) and designed to encourage businesses to take positive actions towards achieving net zero in the shortest timeframe feasible. The new Pledge focuses on four key areas – tracking, reduction, transparency and collaboration – and features a Climate Action list to help guide organisations on the key steps to take. See [mrs.org.uk/resources/climate-pledge](https://mrs.org.uk/resources/climate-pledge)

#### MRS Fellows

This year MRS awarded new Fellowships, Honorary Fellowships and Honorary Posthumous Fellowships at the Excellence Lunch in June. The new Fellows are: Kristin Hickey, Alex Hunt, Sinead Jefferies, Donald Osborne, Jon Puleston, James Sallows, Colin Strong and Caroline Wren.

# Making the most of your membership

MRS membership shows your commitment to research excellence, connects you to a network of more than 4,300 professionals and gives you access to a huge range of specialist benefits.

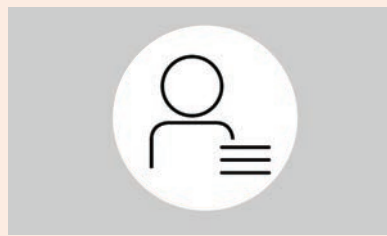
## Training and development



### Develop your whole self with our expert training

As an MRS member, you have access to the widest, most relevant range of research, insight and analytics training globally. As part of the MRS Global Insight Academy, we have expanded our 2024 offering, adding artificial intelligence and insight training, as well as leadership, methodology and storytelling courses, to equip you for the future. Members also benefit from up to 30% off each training programme, which covers the cost of your annual membership when you take a course in 2024.

## Awards case studies



### Learn from the best in the sector

Each year, the winners and finalists from the MRS Awards reveal how they have used research in projects by providing case studies. Members get access to the full range of case studies from previous finalists and winners in all categories. Members tell us that they find these invaluable for their general knowledge on innovations in the sector, as well as when making applications for upcoming award submissions. See how others are tackling research in social policy, sustainability, analytics and more, in your MyMRS.

## The Code of Conduct



### Get support with professional standards

Membership is a clear signal that you are part of a profession that delivers to the highest possible standards. The backbone of professional standards is the MRS Code of Conduct. This has recently been updated, widening its scope to include participant wellbeing and representative sampling. To support you in delivering a high standard, members get access to the Quarterly Standards and Policy webinars run by our in-house experts, as well as use of the Codeline service, which gives advice on best practice in research standards. It's the invaluable toolkit for many members.

## Access your benefits

- Sign into your **MyMRS** member account at [mrs.org.uk](https://mrs.org.uk) to access all of your benefits
- Don't have an account? It's easy to create one at [mrs.org.uk](https://mrs.org.uk) (top right-hand tab). From here, you can access your benefits, as well as read premium content on [research-live.com](https://research-live.com)
- The benefits available in your MyMRS account include: **GDPR resources; pre-recorded webinars; the Sage Research Methods; guidance on the Code of Conduct; case studies; and IJMR (for CMRS and Fellows)**

[www.mrs.org.uk/membership/benefits](https://www.mrs.org.uk/membership/benefits)



# Diary dates

## Conferences

### Catch the very best of MRS this summer in Manchester

Over the past 12 months, MRS has showcased some extraordinary research, and convened brand and agency experts to address the biggest issues facing insight teams today. This July, Manchester will host MRS Best of Events and Awards.

**17 July 2024**

### B2B Research Conference

Join the B2B Research Conference to examine how the business landscape and buyers' behaviour are evolving, and, in turn, how B2B Research is innovating to meet new and escalating insight demands of businesses.

**25 September 2024**

### Behavioural Science Summit

Attend this hugely popular conference that showcases how behavioural science research is providing stakeholders with greater understanding of consumer actions and decision-making.

**26 September 2024**

## Professional webinars

### Make that change: Overcome resistance to change using advanced AI to bring a consumer evolution

Find out from Claire Rainey and Katharina Wittgens about a comprehensive journey they went

**Professional webinars and speaker evenings are free for members.**

For information on all MRS events go to

**[www.mrs.org.uk/events](http://www.mrs.org.uk/events)**



on to unravel the complex tapestry of consumer needs using AI and machine learning.

**18 September 2024**

### Communicating across borders

It's crucial that we adapt our communications style to diverse cultural contexts. Find out in this professional webinar how communications styles vary across cultures.

**17 October 2024**

### Subcultures and niche audiences: The research journey from early adopters to mass targeting

Discover how to adapt to your audience, find the language they use, the interests they have, and the settings in which to speak to them.

**14 November 2024**

### Unlocking the power of data storytelling

In an era of AI, it's more important than ever not to lose sight of human skills. Find out why it's crucial that researchers can tell great stories through data.

**4 December 2024**

## Training courses

### Social media in market research

Find out how data from social media and online communities is used to develop consumer insights.

**11 July 2024**

### Building your inclusive toolkit for all research

This course will empower you to take an inclusive approach to any research study, no matter how big or small.

**18 July 2024**

### Online panels and communities

Understand how best to build, develop and maintain online panels and/or communities using the latest techniques.

**23 July 2024**

### Creating a compelling research podcast

Learn to produce podcasts and tap into the power of podcasting to grow impact and engagement.

**24 July 2024**



**Colin Strong** is head of behavioural science at Ipsos. He chairs the MRS Delphi Group and is honorary professor of practice at Nottingham University Business School. Strong is a published author (*Humanizing big data* and *Out of time*) and the founder and editor of Frontline BeSci

**1 What made you want to write a book about being human?**

It is amazing the number of questions you are asked that carry quite fundamental assumptions about being human: some about the reasons that sit under our behaviours, others about how we engage and change behaviour. For example, many see behaviour as being shaped by the unconscious; others say it's about the systems we live in; and some say we all have individual agency. It feels as if these differences in beliefs about being human have been exacerbated by Covid-19, climate change and tech by leading many to rethink assumptions about their lives.

**2 How has modern life changed humanity's place in the world?**

Covid has changed the way we think about the interconnectedness of our lives – we could very tangibly see that what one person does could impact many. The climate crisis has left many wondering how future generations of people might occupy this planet, questioning the notion that humans are 'top of the tree' and in charge of our destiny. Finally, some suggest that, through artificial intelligence (AI), artificial minds are possible, challenging the notion of human uniqueness. Bring these together and it is little wonder that people are rethinking what 'being human' means, given that, for

centuries, many people did not question these themes.

**3 Does behavioural science have the answers to the big issues facing the world?**

Behavioural science offers a means by which we can explore the big issues facing the world. While many think of the discipline as more 'downstream', testing ways to change behaviour, we really need to get the 'upstream' thinking right first. By that I mean how we understand, more fundamentally, what is shaping our lives, behaviours, opinions, attitudes, values, and so on. Behavioural science offers access to a wide range of thinking, evidence and research methods that give us the tools to not only unpack the big topics methodically and carefully, but also to measure, test and propose solutions that can support change.

**4 Where can behavioural science make the biggest impact?**

Right now, I would say much of the activity is around 'knowledge', such as: what AI delivers on that front versus humans; how we decide what is fake news or misinformation; and what 'facts' we trust. This is a huge challenge that runs through so much of what we do.

**5 How can research elevate how it is perceived by clients?**

Overall, research does a pretty good job of how it is perceived by clients. It is not

all clients all of the time, but there is a vibrant and successful industry with a huge range of people, skills, tools and solutions on offer. My sense is that the magic so often happens when we think carefully about the big challenges we face, and use that to inform ways to deliver creatively and intelligently on the more immediate questions that organisations have.

**6 How will generative AI change the research industry?**

I do not claim to have a simple answer, but it does feel as if our industry is well under way to working that out. Behavioural science has an important role to play here, as developments such as synthetic respondents and chatbot-based questions require us to have a deep understanding of humans if we are to evaluate how well they are performing.

**7 Are you optimistic about the future of humanity?**

A decent assumption about humans is that we are more likely than not to want to be good, trust others and act cooperatively. If that sounds hopelessly naive, then have a read of the uplifting book by Rutger Bregman, *Humankind*. He is an example of the way people are increasingly challenging the centuries-long beliefs that we have inherently selfish and brutish natures. So, overall, yes – I am optimistic.



# The Recruiter Accreditation Scheme

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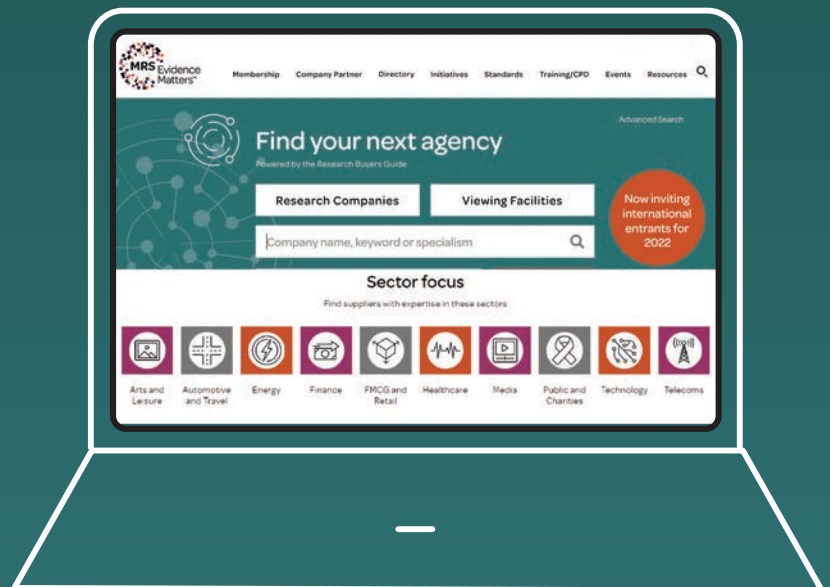
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