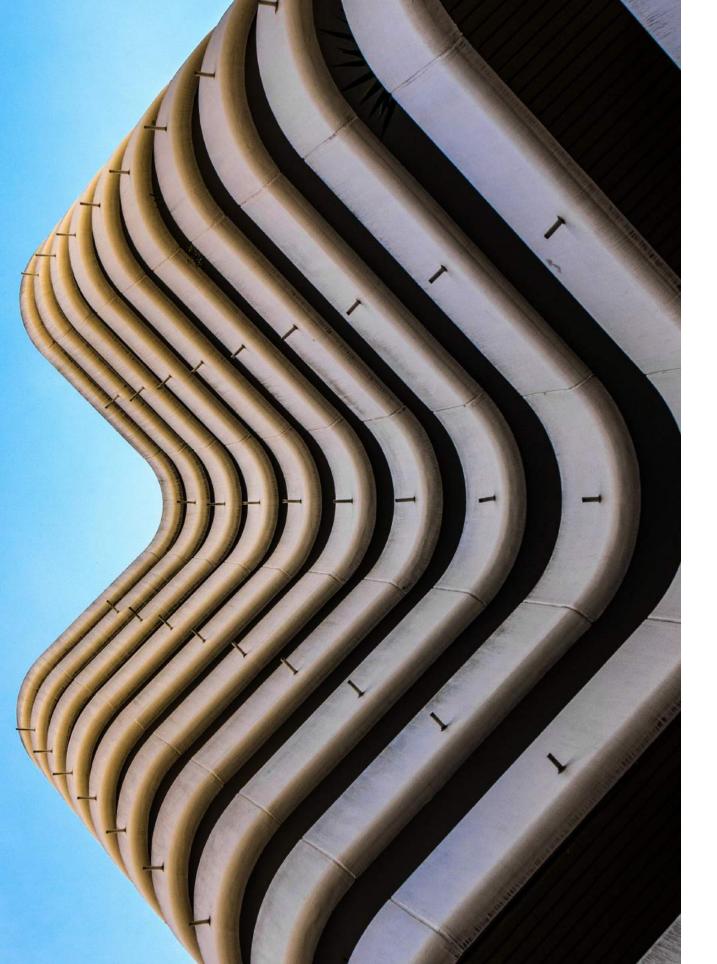




Creative insights

How agencies are using data to drive creative strategy, aka **the jobs to be done**



Introduction

"The revolution in audience insights has not been matched by a revolution in advertising"

Today we understand audiences a lot better than we did ten years ago, but we still talk to them as if we don't.

The revolution in understanding audiences has been driven by the availability of new data that is based on new behaviors online. But there's a gap between what we can do and what we are doing.

In a recent study by eConsultancy ('Top Digital Agencies In The World 2017') about 100 of the top digital agencies in the world, the word 'insight' appeared 58 times within 62 pages. This wouldn't have happened ten years ago. Insights are now the engine of digital agencies.

Using insights as a focal point isn't new, but the scale is new and interesting. This comes from agencies now being on the execution side as well as the strategy and planning side, especially when it comes to social media, across multiple channels.

While working daily with hundreds of agencies across the world, Pulsar surveyed and interviewed strategists, planners, analysts, and creatives in the UK and US, between 13 major creative and media agencies. Their answers gave us illuminating insights into how data makes it into the workflow of creative teams, how it becomes insights, and how those insights are incorporated into the strategy for the next campaigns.

We pulled together a list of the tasks creatives and planners complete to extract insights from social data in order to inpsire and support the development of creative strategy.

We then turned them into a framework of jobs to be done when turning raw data into audience intelligence.

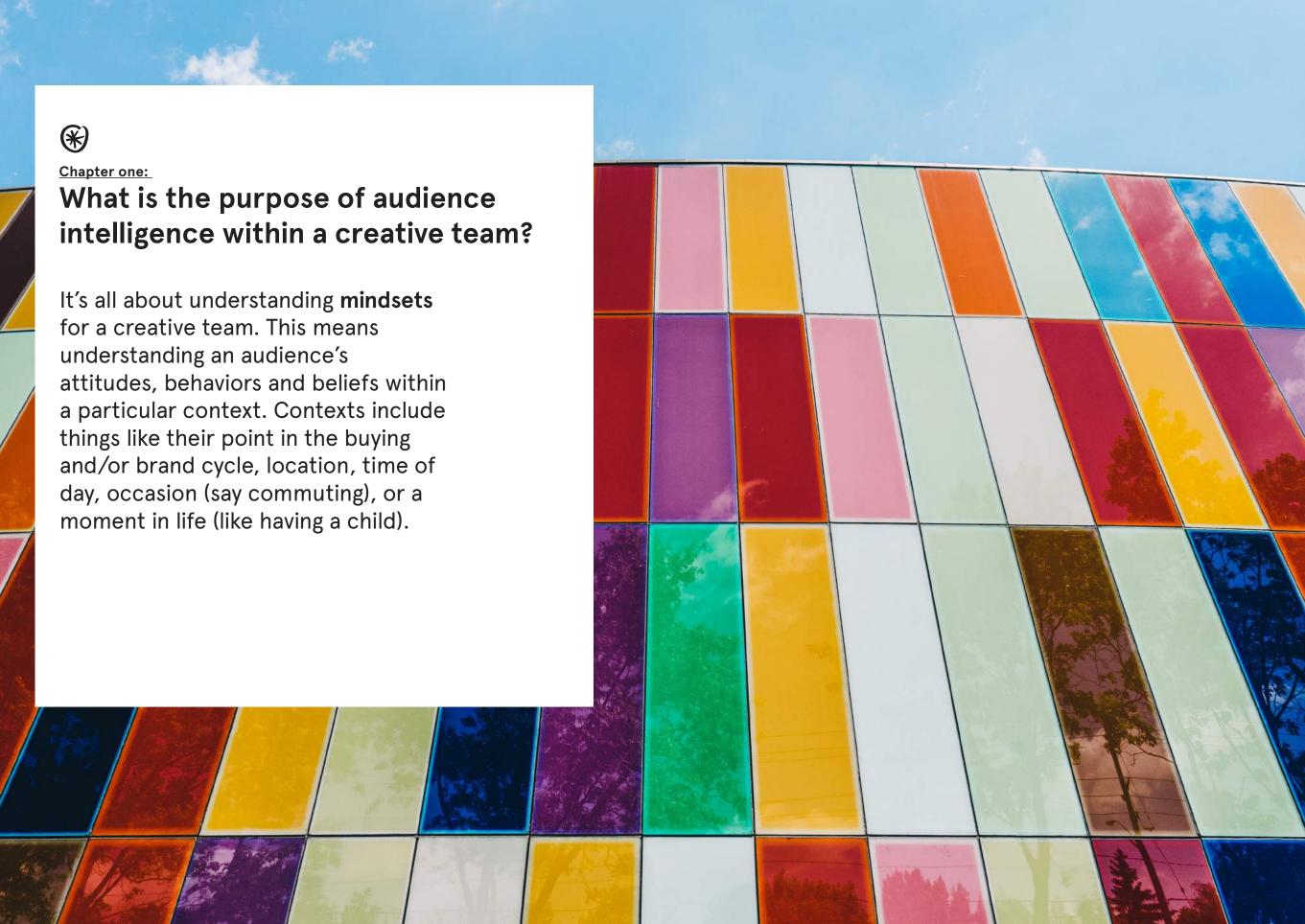


The role of creatives is changing

On both the client and agency side, the very definition of creative is changing too. "A smart creative is an exceptional class of employee who demonstrates a balance of technical knowledge, business expertise and creativity." (eConsultancy Top Digital Agencies Report). These wouldn't have been in the top three features of this type of role even a few years ago.

The ability of smart creatives to have technical skill is evolving into an ability to synthesize insights and 'cut through the noise.' This is used as one of the key drivers of whatever creative strategy/idea is generated by the team.

We wanted to demystify this concept so we looked at the actual ways agencies are using data to develop creative strategies, in practise. How are the most successful agencies using data to support creative work?



What is data for? Understanding the general, understanding the specific

Speaking to creatives, patterns emerged. Our study sought to find out what tasks are they trying to complete within their organization.

The key thing outlined is the fact you have to become an expert, fast.

You need to know context - more than your clients, who have years of experience - but you *also* need to know something unique and new to them.

Therefore, the creative team are trying to uncover two sets of knowledge with data.







GENERAL

•Become an expert in everything, fast

On one side - the general, or the context. This is what gets you through the door with a proposal.

Here you will need to know:

- → Category trends
- → Category attitudes
- → Key brands and positioning within the category
- → Brand perceptions within category

For this, agencies use market research agencies which provide syndicated research or research designed specifically for the industry, tackling general issues within the space.



SPECIFIC

•Identify a fresh new perspective on the problem

On the other hand - specifics: what actually gets you the business once you're through the proverbial door.

You will need to know:

- → A particular audience relevant for the creative strategy
- → Feelings within a specific behavior happening within the audience
- → A new consumer dynamic that has not been covered before
- → A state of mind at a particular moment of the day/week/life of this audience

For this, people use sources like social data which makes up 90% of the go-to source for uncovering insights, and also serach data.





Who needs audience intelligence?

We found there are mainly two agency personas using data for creative development - the analyst, and the planner:



Analysts

Looking for:

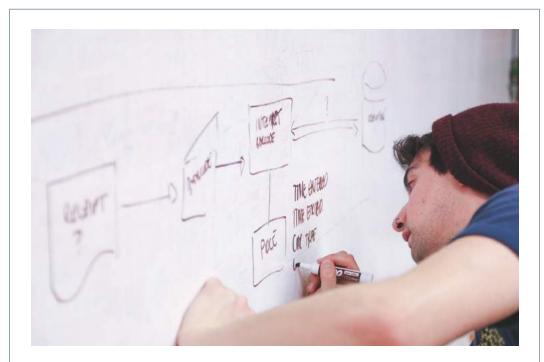
• Foundational insights, for internal clients

Concerned with:

- Not being involved from the start
- Being a 'number monkey'
- Working in short timescales (2-3 days)

They take pride in:

- When their findings are at the center of the strategy
- Proof of being mathematically sound
- Elegant and simple proof of a point
- Their skill with analytics tools



Planners

Looking for:

• Inspiration they can prove, for external clients

Concerned with:

- Having to work very fast 2-3 hours minimum
- Not getting enough recognition
- Budget restrictions

They take pride in:

- Challenging clients and changing their views with solid insight
- A single-minded, clear insight that makes it easier to get the strategy through the gates
- Big campaigns

Case 1: Analyst

Journey of an insight: baby food

This brief, presented to an analyst, was around improving the penetration of a baby food brand within a specific audience. The focus here was on understanding the behaviors around baby food.



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- Performed full analysis of client sites and social
- FIND the major topics within the category and brand
- Framework based analysis of site metrics, use of industry reports, web analytics and social data



- Identified homemade food as a topic worth investigating
- FOCUS on homemade food as a topic
- Homemade food was identified as odd by a mum who was part of the team, seemed unrealistic



- Created searches to focus on 'going to' vs 'just made' and found large volume difference with 'going to' being larger
- FOCUS on the topic in two different moments
- Searches set up with a very simple difference, with the intention of only looking at volume differences



- **Built** slides leading up to the difference between aspiration and reality
- **SHOW** a simple, single minded difference
- Worked with a designer to create custom graphics for 'beautiful slides' which showed a sharp, simple difference



- **Used** 'going to' to demonstrate the scale of the opportunity
- **SHOW** the scale of what they found
- Had to prove this was the general population – hard to do – but could show scale and benchmarks to establish robustness



- Focus on some individuals (influencers) who show what these people are like
- IMMERSE on users who can help you to understand the audience qualitatively
- Selected users to study based on balance of influence and sharing of personal experiences

Audience insights were key here. Using the data around keywords from the generalist area of baby food to identify behaviors around the product allowed the analyst to delve into specifics, which ultimately informed the creativity of the strategy.

Case 2: Planner

Journey of an insight: bottled water

This second case study was a brief given to a planner to help a bottled water brand sell more units. The focus here was on identifying and understanding key moments rather than behaviors.



Briefed to help a water brand sell more units



- Knew from data analytics that on-the-go morning was a key occasion
- FIND commercially valuable moments
- Info came from the client



- From strategy knew they needed to find 10 motivations to buy
- FOCUS on specific framework that works for the strategy
- They worked out they would need 10 from looking at their budget and calculating the number they could do



- **Used** one word to set-up the search 'commuting'
- FOCUS on a particular moment which is valuable
- Didn't use complex terminology as was short on time



- Removed layers of information to immerse themself in commuting
- **IMMERSE** in the data to understand the occasion
- Stripped away the 'junk' and general conversation, but in doing so learnt the general moods around the topic



- Focused on people who shared their inner feelings
- INMERSE in content from individuals who share their circumstances
- Bottom layer of people who provide honest, introspective views on their circumstances



- Consolidated feelings into 10 triggers and showed these as bullet points
- **SHOW** the data as a series of discrete, simple findings
- Key was keeping things simple, no visualizations were used

Here the planner was looking for an audience in a general landscape – identifying the right moment to pull data from gave 10 very specific insights to inform the strategy.

What the insight journeys have in common

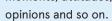
Find, focus, immerse, show - four key steps to turn data into creative insights

We found that every time the analysts and planners use data they go down a path that takes the same steps. The workflows are detailed, but studying the data, we found the tasks of both planners and strategists boil down to a 'differentiate and demonstrate' method with four steps to move through: find, focus, immerse and show.

A typical journey from data to insight goes like this:

→ Receive a brief

Collecting context on the subject and identifying potential areas to explore. These can be: behaviors, occasions, moments, attitudes, perceptions,





→ Find:

→ Show:

Ensure there's enough depth and detail - a gap in the market, and an audience to create a strategy, and present it clearly.



→ Immerse:

Finding out every detail you can about that thing to bring color to it. If it's an occasion what are the key feelings around it? If it's a behavior, what are the triggers of that behavior? What is the language around it?

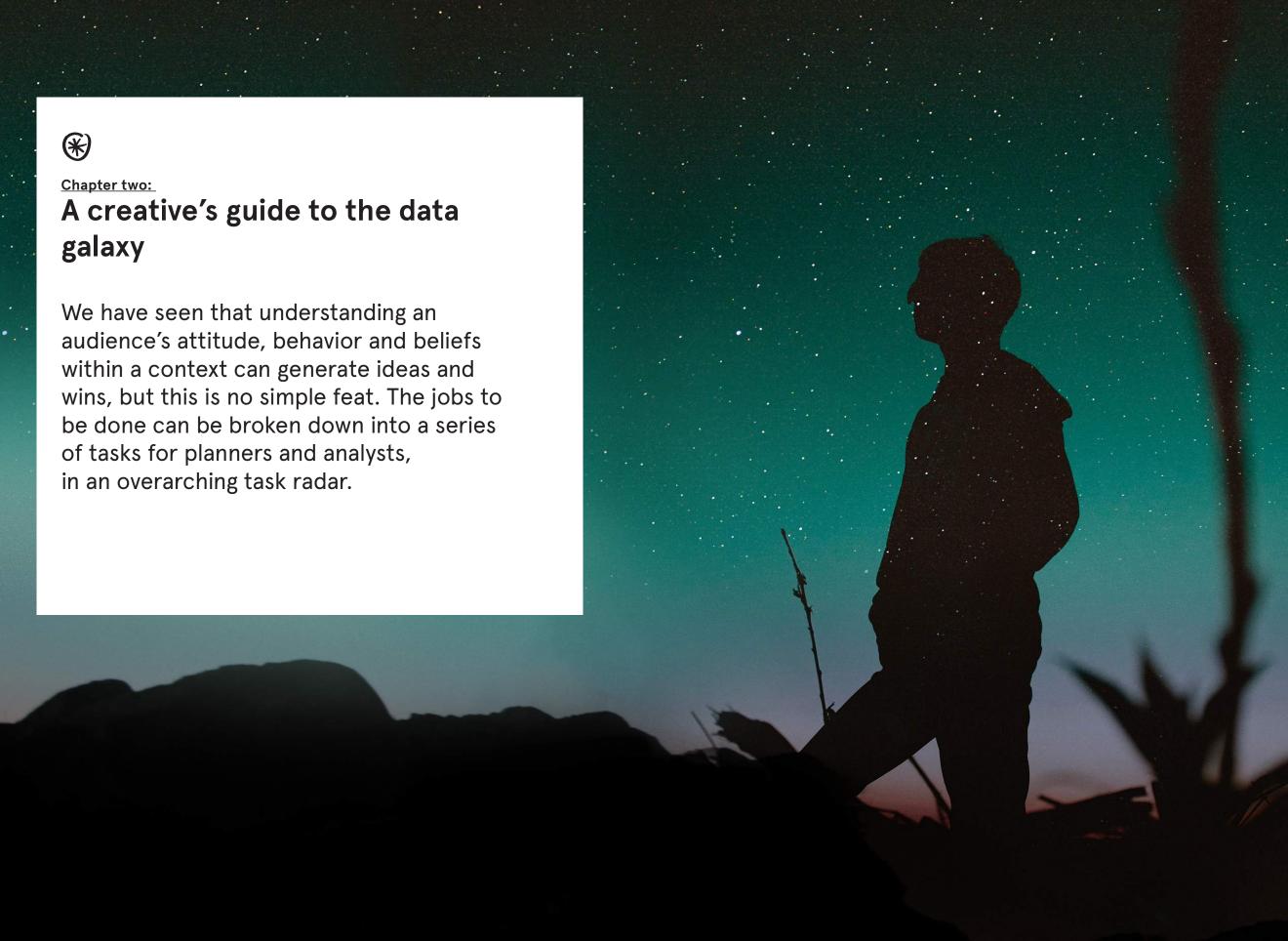


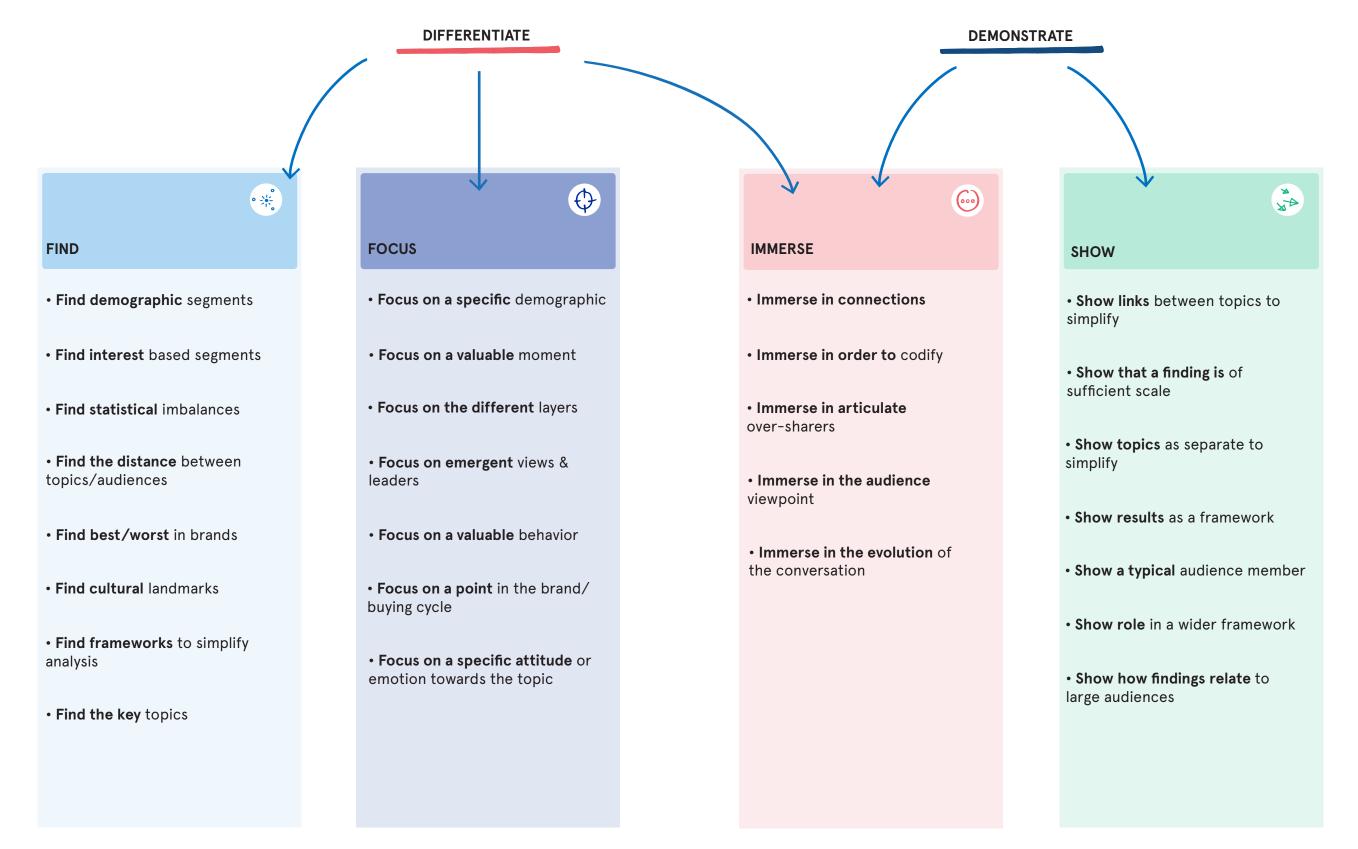
→ Focus:

Exploring that specific angle to assess whether there's enough to use it as a seed for creative strategy.



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Find: where do I start?

This is about trying to understand a surface level summary. People look at general mechanisms like demographics, interest-based segments, cultural landmarks and so on.

One of the go-to ways to start uncovering insights is to find statistical imbalances: anything that sticks out, in terms of performance in a data set, that moves away from the baseline or the benchmarks.

For example, how do people express being stressed/in need of a break? Looking at two different demographics, millennials and baby boomers, you might assume that millennials would moan about being busy most, but it's baby boomers (35.7% compared to 22.7%).

This sort of thing would change a creative strategy and messaging: for example, a beer brand was trying to pitch a new beer to drink quickly while taking a break, and finding the right language to appeal to different demographics is a key challenge, so identifying this statistical imbalance is vital.



Find demographic segments

By understanding demographic segments users can challenge audiences that may have been removed incorrectly, or remove further audiences.



Find the distance between topics/ audiences

Amalgamate results, pulling together results where they are close to reduce complexity.



Find interest based segments

Interest based segments take an established demographic target and make it easier to understand for marketers.



Find statistical imbalances

Running comparisons between the basic differences (channel, age etc) is counter-productive: find tensions which no-one has yet solved, giving you a fresh creative challenge.



Find the key topics

Once you have a clear sense of the landscape, identify areas of interest – usually there is a commercial consideration first.



Find best/worst in brands

Finding brands who get good consumer engagement and bad consumer engagement (low and/or combative) is a valuable way to understand the space and get inspired.



Find cultural landmarks

This can be thought of as a 'virtual tour' of the category or area, helping the user to understand what they are seeing and get a feel for the cultural cues within the area.



Find frameworks to simplify analysis

Approach the analysis within the platform methodically to avoid becoming lost in data.



Why it's important

For this, creatives like to be able to triangulate themselves in a new area, fast. Ways to do this include looking at case studies or reports, interconnected tools, and having pre-set frameworks. This allows them to move on to focus in on insights.



Focus: give me control

Once you have found a general picture, it's time to create a hypothesis. Focus in on specific demographics that are of value to build a commercially viable strategy. This is a navigational phase, where movement to and from specific areas of interest are critical.

This is where client sales happen, by showing the business case for focusing in on this audience, occasion or other context. The angle can come from sales data (showing a time/channel as valuable), demographic data (showing a particular audience is valuable), or survey data (showing a bias towards a specific quality or characteristic within a valuable audience).

Build a matrix using tools - what audience is involved, what triggers this behavior, what language do they use to discuss these triggers, how do they respond?

Focus on a specific occasion that has commercial value, to expand a moment into usable insights. For example, the audience of the movie Blade Runner seemed to be 25–34 men mainly. The team missed a trick in advertising by not using female-focused marketing that would have balanced this gap rather than the gender neutral marketing that was used.



Focus on a specific demographic

Demographics are one of the easiest ways to ensure social data feels interconnected with other data sources. This gives social results more weight.



Focus on emergent views & leaders

Looking at industry leaders and influencers allows for the sharpening of insights, as they present a more refined and 'forward' view of what it should be.



Focus on a specific attitude or emotion towards the topic

Focusing in on a hypotheses of how people view the category in order to prove/falsify it, typically involving sentiment towards a target (e.g. brand, category, event).



Focus on the different layers

The process of 'stripping away' layers of data to get to the truth and orientate users not only to the consumer, but the whole environment.



Focus on a valuable moment

The way consumers feel within these moments are typically referred to as 'mindsets'. This helps to lock into needs and orientate yourself to a given moment.



Focus on a point in the brand/buying cycle

By focusing in on consumers who are at that particular phase, identify commercially critical insights, which ladder back to the objective from the brief easily.



Focus on a valuable behavior

Capitalizing on a particularly positive trend, such as a buying behavior, is valuable. This tends to focus around frequency, i.e. regular purchasers.



Why it's important

Creatives are looking for a way to zoom in and prove their case, so need to be able to identify what's valuable. Using frameworks can only help so much, this is where they need to get granular, and there are many ways to do this.



Immerse: help me understand

This is where a creative gets to know and understand more about the audience they are dealing with. They can then make decisions based on a depth of knowledge, and convince clients of their expertise.

Here it is vital to bridge the difference between 'understand' and 'know': knowing is from big picture descriptive stats - large numbers, sentiment and major topics. Understanding is the ability to know WHY these statistics are the way they are. It's also about collecting evidence: screengrabs, graphs etc. This immersion process by its nature is hard to repeat, because it's difficult to re-find evidence after going through these deep channels.

26 - JOBS TO BE DONE



Immerse in connections

This is a process that is almost entirely tool driven, involving looking up connections and identifying a way to understand the landscape.



Immerse in order to codify

This is typically part of a more scientific process of defining the data in order to use measures and statistics more accurately.



Immerse in the evolution of the conversation

Simply by 'scrolling' through content users can pick up a lot of information, whether the conversation has been the same, whether it has changed, how a brand has altered their way of thinking.



Immerse in articulate over-sharers

Critically this isn't about just speaking to people who overshare, it is about speaking to people who over-share and represent the data, whether that is looking at outliers or looking at the core.



Immerse in the audience viewpoint

Why it's important

This is about scale of view. Immersing in

the connections helps find the implicit

followed by immersing in the evolution

of the conversation over time to feel the consistency and changes, to understand how

the audience evolves and what their thinking

is - via links, topics, keywords etc. The most

popular way of doing this is through deep

diving into individuals who represent the

statistics - 'oversharers' or 'influencers'.

factors that have been missed so far

This is usually geared towards understanding how brand content fits with general content, in order to identify why the brand has a role in their lives.



Show: tell my story

Once the creative has found the topic, focused in, immersed in the content, added some color and they have a thing to show. At this point, it is about turning the data into the story they want to tell, with absolute control over what it's saying, or how it can be drawn together or split up.

Three things matter when showing data:

- → Make it big: in a world of data numbers need to be big. In the process of immersion and focusing, often things become smaller, so at the point of 'show' findings have to be reconnected to big numbers and/or shown to be big.
- → Make it simple: clients dislike complexity and it makes it hard to brief to creatives. Either collapsing findings into one, or splitting them into clear defined sections helps to avoid unclear findings which make it hard to use.
- → Make it connect: frequently results from audience intelligence are not just social. It is often about connecting these results with other sources of data or understanding how this fits into a wider framework, e.g. the bigger digital journey.

Creatives need to show that a finding is of sufficient scale: what do the audience you're talking to understand? The clients need to know what you're talking about as well as how to talk to their audience. Data doesn't supply 'feelings', so add examples of individuals and 'human warmth' to create compelling big figures and data.



Show how findings relate to large audiences

Being able to show that a specific finding is linked to a global trend and crucially, a big global trend, makes life much easier.



Show topics as separate to simplify

The core message here is simplicity, making the complex world of conversation easy to work with. This could be statistically driven or a more visual point.



Show that a finding is of sufficient scale

This is pure storytelling, whether or not it reflects reality at this point is less important, the key is telling the story well.



Show links between topics to simplify

This is related to the 'find' process around identifying distances. Collapse findings into a smaller number, in order to simplify the story they want to tell.



Show results as a framework

Focus on the ability to take the chaotic world of social media and 'tame it' into a framework, that makes it easy to understand and easy to work with.



Show a typical audience member

This is a case of bringing the human to data, by taking one individual and showing them as an entirety, their demographics, personality, interests and habits.



Show role in a wider framework

The focus here is on bigger projects, and integration with the new world of apps and services that marketing is moving into.



Why it's important

This is not about representing the data as it is, it is about turning the data into the story the creative wants to tell. They want absolute control at this point, to be able to draw together or split up the data in order to tell the story of what they have found. They've turned the data into a creative study with different tasks for detailing analytical process and using data, and now it's time for action.



Conclusion

Differentiate and demonstrate

As we have shown, breaking down huge data sets makes it possible to get a clear general picture, as well as the specific insights that creatives need.

When people look at data-driven marketing they think of something really smooth: datadriven strategy/lead generation and so on. But in reality behavior is a lot more chaotic.

Examples are given in order to 'feed the beast', as an inspiration to get client buy-in, but not used throughout the process, which is entirely different from the linear data-driven strategy we're told about.

However, the journey of the most successful insights always follows the differentiate (find, focus) and demonstrate (immerse, show) pattern we have seen. Using these steps allows a smooth process to be created out of chaotic online behavior.



Takeaways

- → Our report found that data is not being used by creativity to the extent of its powers, but this is because of a changing landscape in both the insights we can uncover, and the way they are used.
- → Both the analyst and planner personas need to go through a 'differentiate and demonstrate' workflow to pull out audience insights to make the most of the technology and data available.
- → Audience intelligence allows us to move through the steps of find, focus, immerse and show in a way that has never been done before.

Methodology

METHOD:

13

interviews

2 hour

interviews conducted via video conference

- **8** x Strategists **Planners** Creatives
- **5** x Analysts
- 7 x US Based
- **6** x UK Based
- **5** x Pulsar Users
- 8 x Non Pulsar Users







INTERVIEW OUTLINE:

Introduction to role

Success and frustrations

Defining the role of audience understanding

Tools and their uses

Case study in detail

- -Workflow
- -Jobs to be Done





About Pulsar

Pulsar is an advanced audience intelligence platform that helps you find the story in the data.

Pulsar leads the evolution of social listening by bringing all the digital signals of your audience into one place and leveraging the power of data visualization and AI to help you uncover the personas, trends, behaviors and affinities that will make your marketing bullet-proof.



Contact Pulsar to see what the platform can do for you...

UK: +44 (0)20 7874 6577 US: +1 646-902-9394 www.pulsarplatform.com info@pulsarplatform.com