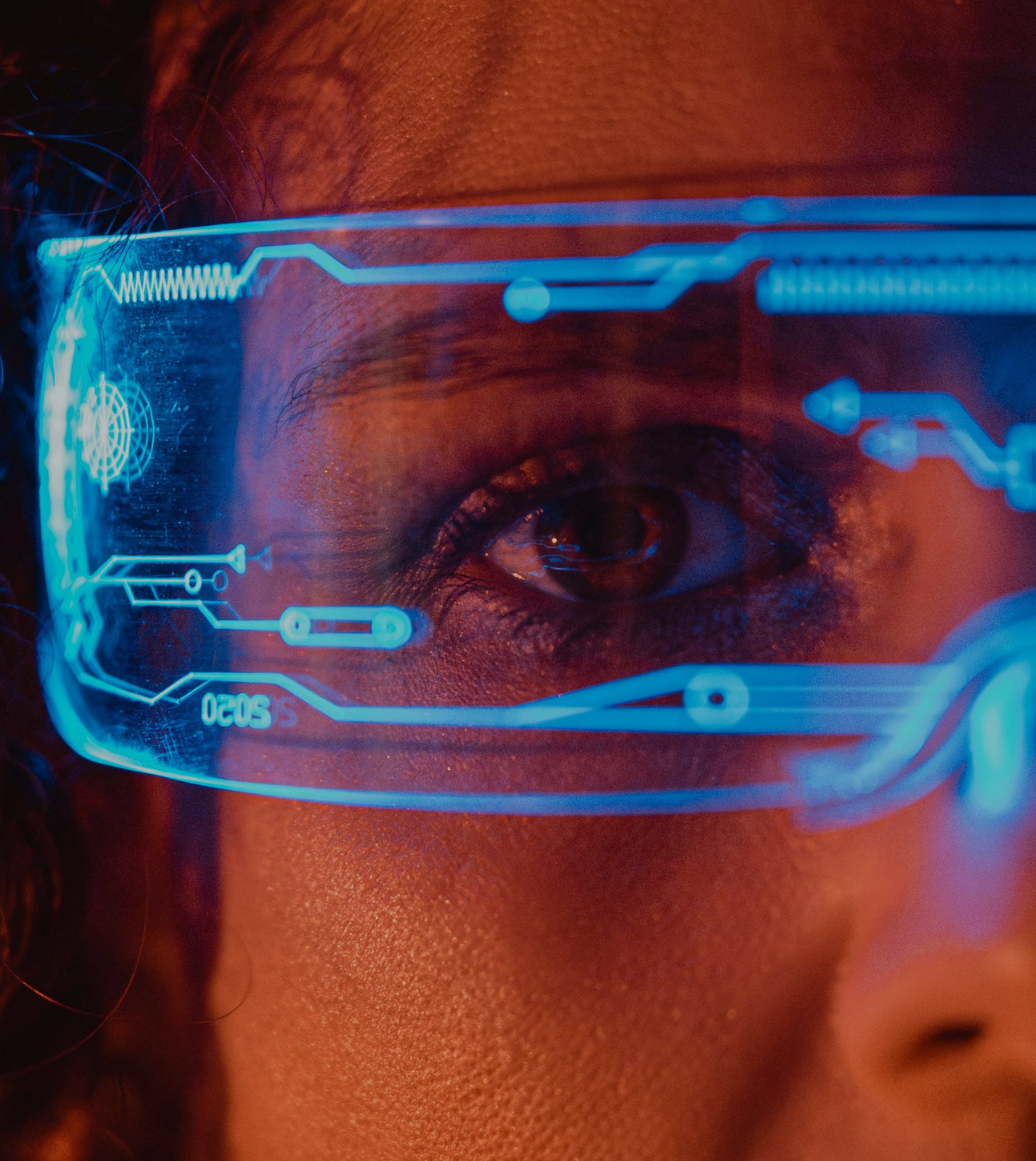
The Age of Intelligence and a new kind of ROI



We Live Context

Inspiring decisions.
Delivering ROI.

What changes when research evolves from “insight” to an operating system for decisions

Human + AI = Intelligence - and how to get the ROI.

Don’t you mean ‘The Age of Artificial Intelligence’?

No, this is about the evolution of market research, not the arrival of AI although that has a part to play.

In the 1990’s Market Research changed its name to ‘Insight’ to signal it had raised its game and to emphasize the role market insight plays as the springboard for great marketing. In the process it rightly raised the status of the Insight team in the business decision-making process. Now it’s time for the next evolution, some might say revolution.

Intelligence is the new Insight

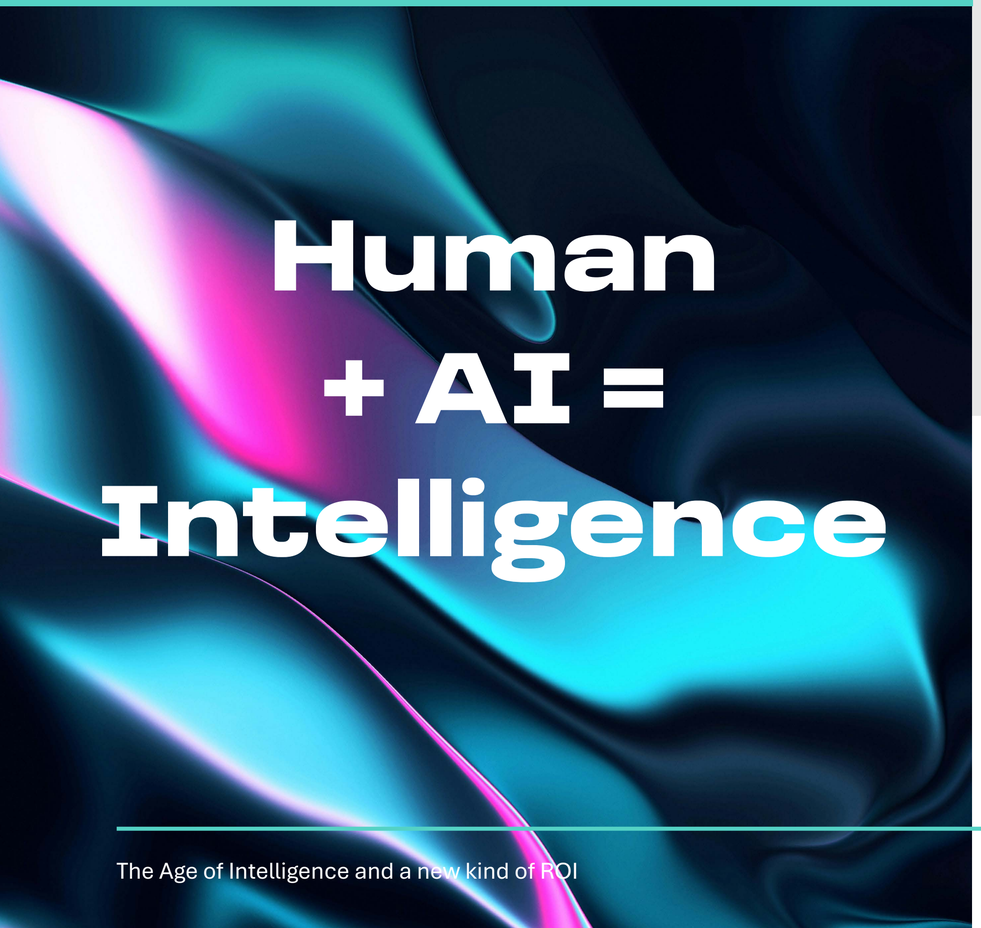
Over 125 years, Market Research has gone through several evolutions: notably, the addition of qualitative to quantitative; the application of social sciences generally and psychology specifically; from what to why, adding ethnography and semiotics to provide context – a very important word when it comes to analysis and application. Behavioural science then revived the ‘what’ using observation and experimentation .

When Market Research changed its name to ‘Insight’ it put the focus on the benefit not just a multi-methodology process.

We are now entering a new age and it’s time for another change of name to show how we can focus on the ultimate benefit, the Return on Investment behind research and insight.



We should now talk about ‘Intelligence’, for three reasons:



1 All market research is artificial

By definition market research is artificial, it is a construct based on questions that may or may not be the right ones, data that may not be complete, responses that are not always reliable, observations that may be perceptual and analysis that has ‘error variance.' Experience and professional best practice mitigate against all of this but make no mistake, Market Research is ‘man-made.’ It requires intelligence to experiment, challenge, conclude and apply it. And not just Artificial Intelligence.

2 We cannot rely wholly on Artificial Intelligence

AI can find information and analyse data beyond the speed of light, quintillions of calculations per second, drawing from every data cloud in the world. But AI has no self-awareness or self-consciousness, no memories or experience. If you ask AI, it will state it cannot see context the way humans can so it cannot reliably make judgements. The best Intelligence is both human and artificial (HI + AI = I).

3 ‘Research’ and ‘Insight’ just don’t cut it anymore; they are constraining our thinking

The evolution of Market Research terminology has been driven by advocates of new tools and techniques and presented as ‘better’. But that has ultimately constrained our thinking, making ‘qual and quant’, ‘continuous and ad hoc’, ‘primary and secondary’ feel like a trade-off. If we divide the range of ‘research tools’ under five headings it becomes clear they are complementary: we can ask people, listen to them, watch them, understand the context, and experiment. All of the tools we have can work together in harmony: surveys, in-depth interviews, social listening, behavioural experiments, ethnographic studies, and advanced analytics, etc.

And AI has made old divides pretty much obsolete. Take these examples:

Efficiently scaling depth interviews to the point where we have data that can be segmented using advanced analytics

AI and auto-transcription used to scale human depth interviews cost-effectively and provide statistical validity

Create persona avatars from segmentation studies that can be interrogated in real time, putting customers at the heart of decision-making

There is no ‘qual versus quant’ debate anymore. These legacy research industry terms are constraints; we have to move past them.

Just as the adoption of Insight signaled a new way to think about market research, Intelligence can trigger us to think differently.

Every new methodology or research technique adds to our toolkit, the ‘orchestra’ of instruments just keeps getting bigger. Like a great conductor, the skill lies in knowing what each instrument can do, which to bring in, and when. That deserves a new name: Intelligence. This describes both the process and output and encompasses both human and machine. It also acknowledges that the role is much more demanding than just ‘Research & Insight’ and the application goes way beyond just marketing.



As we adopt ‘Intelligence’ as both the process and the purpose – the how, what and why – we need to keep 3 skillsets top of mind:-

1 **Context**
We must understand the objectives fully: what problem are we trying to solve, what is the opportunity, what are the implications? You cannot just ‘take a brief,’ you have to interrogate it and, if necessary, reframe it.

2 **Choice**
We need to know all the tools and how best to use them to make intelligent choices about how to deploy them, there should be no bias, just context. We also need to use AI intelligently and choose where to add human value.

3 **Inspiration**
Not only should there be inspired thinking throughout, the actual delivery of ‘Intelligence’ must be inspiring. It has to be presented in a way that communicates clearly – not some dry PowerPoint but well-designed content that inspires and motivates action.

Inspiring decisions. Delivering ROI.

We Live Context inspires business and consumer brands around the world to make the best decisions and maximise their Return on Intelligence. Inspiration that consistently delivers Return on Investment.



Contact us to know more about the process we use to deliver ROI and access a proposal that uses Context, Choice and Inspiration.

Get in touch

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We Live Context

Research, Insight and yes, Intelligence requires investment of both time and money. Context, Choice and Inspiration can guide us to the ultimate goal of maximizing the Return on Intelligence to help business take the decisions that will maximize the Return on Investment.

Footnote: This way of thinking about ‘Intelligence’ is of course well understood in the field of National Security. Watch any James Bond or Jason Bourne movie or TV series like Homeland or COBRA and you will see how the Security Services ‘ask, listen, watch, contextualise and analyse’, how they use any and every source of data at their disposal, human and machine and how they process all this to take the best decisions.

