BRAND REACTION INDEX 2026

FINANCIAL SERVICES DEEP DIVE





Emotional connection reveals where financial brands are building future strength

RED C's **Brand Reaction Index** captures **consumers' immediate emotional response to brands,** going beyond awareness, usage and functional performance to reveal which brands generate positive feeling.

1. **Who leads emotional connection:** How the UK's biggest financial services brands compare, and which brands stand apart in a category where neutrality often dominates

2. **What drives connection:** Why human service, trust and recognition can create stronger relationships, while heritage, digital innovation and product performance alone do not guarantee connection

3. **How audiences differ:** How emotional responses vary across generations, revealing that no single type of financial brand connects equally with everyone

Why does the BRI matter:

How consumers feel about a brand today can provide an early indication of future brand strength, helping identify opportunities and risks before they are fully reflected in traditional brand metrics.

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What is the Brand Reaction Index?

BRI captures consumers' immediate emotional response to brands, revealing who creates genuine connection rather than simply recognition or usage



CAPTURE THE GUT REACTION

Consumers are shown brands and asked to quickly identify the emotion that best reflects how they immediately feel

The methodology deliberately captures an immediate reaction rather than a considered brand evaluation



TURN EMOTION INTO A SCORE

Positive emotion % - Negative emotion % = BRI

BRI scores range from

-100 to +100

Higher scores indicate stronger positive emotional connection.



UNDERSTAND FUTURE BRAND STRENGTH

BRI is designed to capture the current mood towards a brand and can act as an early indicator of changes in wider brand health.

2026 UK study | 131 brands | 16 sectors

Why do we measure BRI for brands?

01 A strong positive emotion is recognised as impacting future purchase intent – the stronger the likelihood that the consumer will purchase or use this brand in the future

02 BRI has been noted to be very reactive – e.g. it provides an assessment of current mood of consumers and highlights challenges that brands may face at a particular moment in time

03 The reactive nature of BRI means it is an early indicator of future metrics – e.g. a lowered BRI suggests other brand health measures will start to fall in the future

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01

Setting the benchmark for emotional connection



Our Top 10: Overall, M&S Food is the most emotionally connected brand



RED C's top 10 most emotionally connected brands 2026:

M&S FOOD	LEGO	WALKERS	M&S	ALDI
+51	+50	+49	+48	+47
LIDL	IKEA	HEINZ ESTD 1869		National Trust
+47	+43	+43	+42	+42

Top 3 Financial Services Brands: nationwide +35 (#17) AVIVA +14 (#47) SKIPTON BUILDING SOCIETY +11 (#61)

Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

We've also analysed BRI scores by generation

Gen Z

1997-2008
Ages 18 - 29

Millennials

1981-1996
Ages 30 - 45

Gen X

1965-1980
Ages 46 - 61

Baby Boomers

1946-1964
Ages 62 - 80



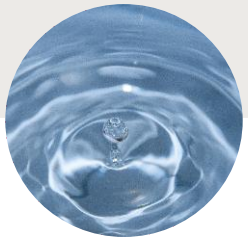
What connects Britain's most emotionally connected brands?

Despite coming from a range of sectors, our Top 10 brands each use some or all of the following levers to underpin connections



"Everyday intimacy" beats aspiration

They play a role in daily rituals, personal space and identity and leisure/downtime



Simplicity & clarity of proposition

They all stand for something instantly understandable. For example, M&S Food = quality you can trust



Trust built through consistency over time

Nearly all are long-established, highly consistent in delivery and resistant to trend-chasing



"Small joys" rather than big promises

These brands deliver low-stakes, repeatable pleasure that can easily be embedded into everyday life



Nostalgia & childhood link

Nostalgia acts as an emotional multiplier in particular when linked to childhood memories

How well do Britain's biggest financial services brands connect emotionally with customers?

first direct
NatWest
LLOYDS
HSBC
BARCLAYS
HARGREAVES LANSDOWN
Revolut
TSB
nationwide
AVIVA
TRADING 212
SKIPTON BUILDING SOCIETY
AJBell
F&C INVESTMENT TRUST SINCE 1868
AXA
monzo
interactive investor
Bank of Ireland
Vanguard
Leeds Building Society
POST OFFICE



Financial brands in the UK must connect with consumers living through very different financial realities

Our latest segmentation shows a highly polarised market with more than **4 in 10 (42%) Comfortable or Thriving** and more than **1 in 4 UK adults (27%) Struggling OR Under Pressure**



We've segmented UK adults according to how they perceive their current financial situation



Thriving – 11%

They are confident financially and are happy to spend on things that enhance their lifestyle

Av. Income: £49,600



Comfortable – 31%

They feel stable financially and are spending as normal

Av. Income: £44,200



Cautious – 32%

They are keeping a closer eye on spending and being more selective about purchases

Av. Income: £38,100



Under Pressure – 17%

They are actively cutting back and focusing on essentials wherever possible

Av. Income: £33,600



Struggling – 10%

They are managing costs day-to-day and non-essential spending is limited

Av. Income: £28,900

02

Financial services struggle to create connection, but some are breaking through



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BANKS AND DIGITAL BANKING

The category is increasingly digital, but newness alone does not guarantee connection



First Direct and Monzo lead emotional connection among banking brands

Both score +9, narrowly ahead of Lloyds (+8) and NatWest (+6), suggesting neither digital-first nor traditional banking currently owns the emotional connection

first direct	+9	monzo	+9	LLOYDS	+8
NatWest	+6	Bank of Ireland	+5 ⬆+9pp	Revolut	+5
HSBC	+3 ⬆+7pp	BARCLAYS	-0	TSB	-2

Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

New banks are disrupting the experience, but not dominating emotional connection

Digital-first banks have created new expectations around convenience and ease, but the BRI data shows no simple emotional advantage over legacy players. Connection depends less on how new a bank is, and more on whether it gives consumers distinctive reasons to feel positively about it

1

Digital relevance: New banks can build stronger connections with younger audiences
Monzo is the clearest example, scoring +19 among Gen Z and +14 among Millennials, before falling to neutral among Baby Boomers. This points to a strong younger relationship, but one that does not yet translate equally across generations

2

Legacy strength: Heritage doesn't have to come at the expense of younger relevance
Legacy players remain competitive with younger consumers. HSBC scores +21 among Gen Z and Lloyds +15, placing both ahead of several newer competitors and challenging the assumption that younger audiences naturally connect more strongly with challenger banks

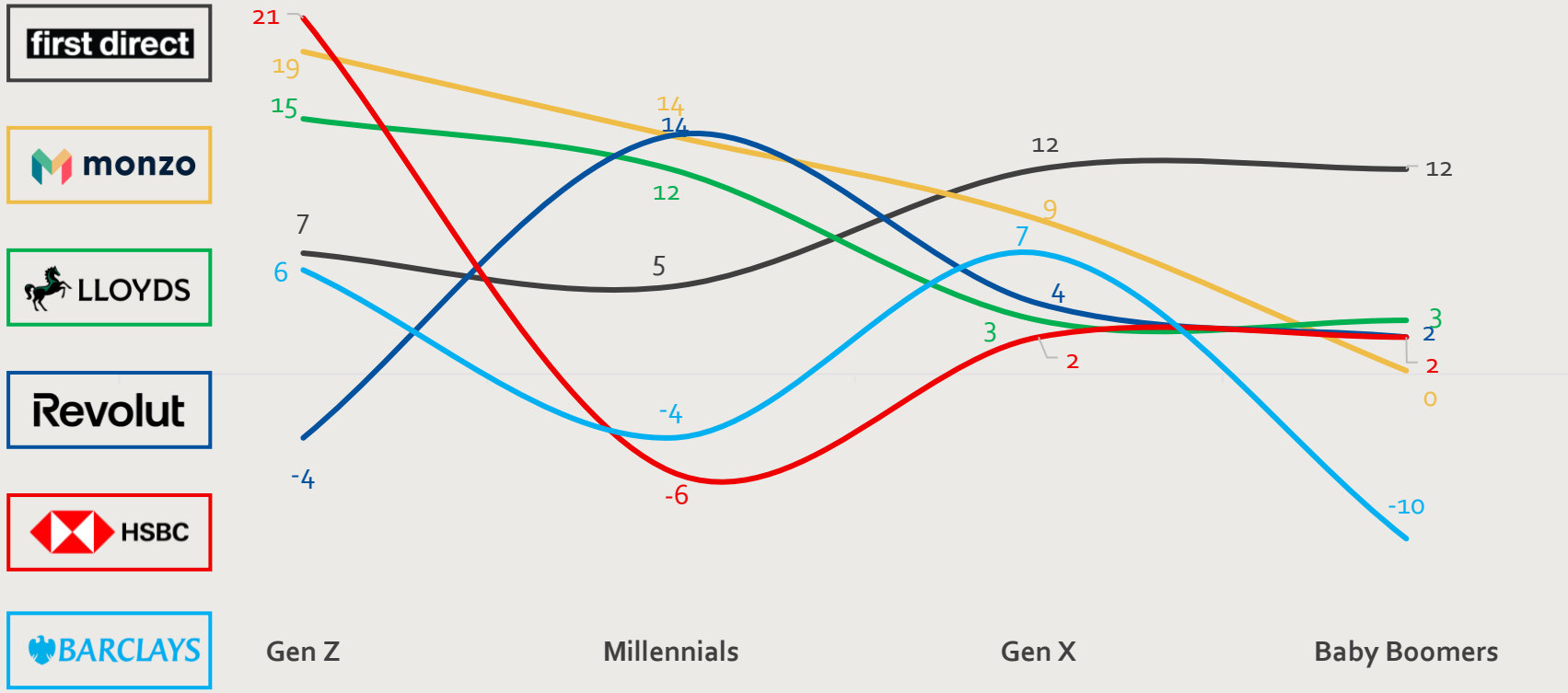
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Beyond functionality: Digital alone isn't enough
Revolut scores -4 among Gen Z despite reaching +14 among Millennials, while Monzo performs very differently. The variation between digital-first brands shows that being new or digital is not enough to guarantee positive connection

No single bank wins across every generation

Monzo skews strongly towards younger consumers, while First Direct strengthens with age. Legacy brands are more mixed, with HSBC particularly strong among Gen Z despite weaker Millennial sentiment

Brand Reaction Index score by generation



Monzo is the clearest example of a new bank translating modern banking into younger emotional connection, but this advantage does not carry across generations.

First Direct demonstrates a different route to connection, with emotional strength increasing with age.

Crucially, newer does not always mean stronger: HSBC and Lloyds score ahead of some digital-first competitors among Gen Z, challenging assumptions around younger consumers and legacy banks.

Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

SAVINGS, INSURANCE & MUTUALS

Nationwide shows just how far financial brands can move beyond functional connection



Nationwide stands apart as the clear emotional leader in financial services

At +35, Nationwide sits well ahead of Aviva (+14) and Skipton (+11), establishing a level of emotional connection unmatched by the other brands in this group

nationwide +35 ↑+6pp

AVIVA +14

SKIPTON BUILDING SOCIETY +11

AXA +6

Leeds Building Society +5

POST OFFICE +1

Post Office is held back by continued anger regarding the Sub-postmaster scandal

Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

Nationwide makes a functional financial relationship feel more human and rewarding

1

Presence: Dependable customer service with a human touch
As banking continues to go digital, Baby Boomers value accessible, human support, and Nationwide stands out for maintaining strong high-street presence alongside consistently high customer satisfaction

2

Loyalty: Redefining the rules of banking
In a market that often prioritises new customers, Nationwide rewards existing members through the Fairer Share initiative. This approach builds trust and reinforces a sense of value and ownership that encourages loyalty

3

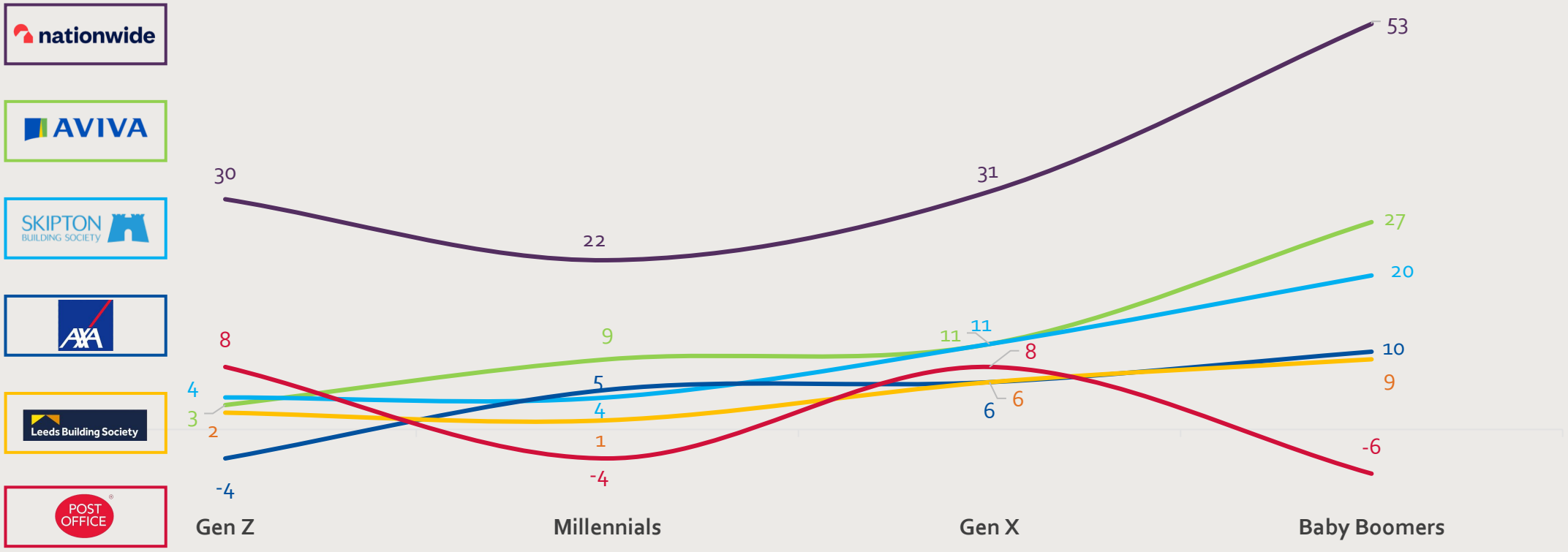
Consistency: Investing in brand building with Dominic West
Through long-running campaigns, including working with Dominic West, Nationwide emphasises its member-first positioning. In doing so, Nationwide has built a warm and recognisable brand



Nationwide wins across generations, with connection strengthening dramatically among Boomers

Nationwide leads this group across every generation, rising from +22 among Millennials to a standout +53 among Baby Boomers. Aviva and Skipton also strengthen with age

Brand Reaction Index score by generation



Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

INVESTMENTS & PLATFORMS

Investment brands struggle to build meaningful emotional connection

BRI scores cluster around zero, with Vanguard highest at just +2 and Interactive Investor falling to -4, highlighting limited emotional differentiation across the sector



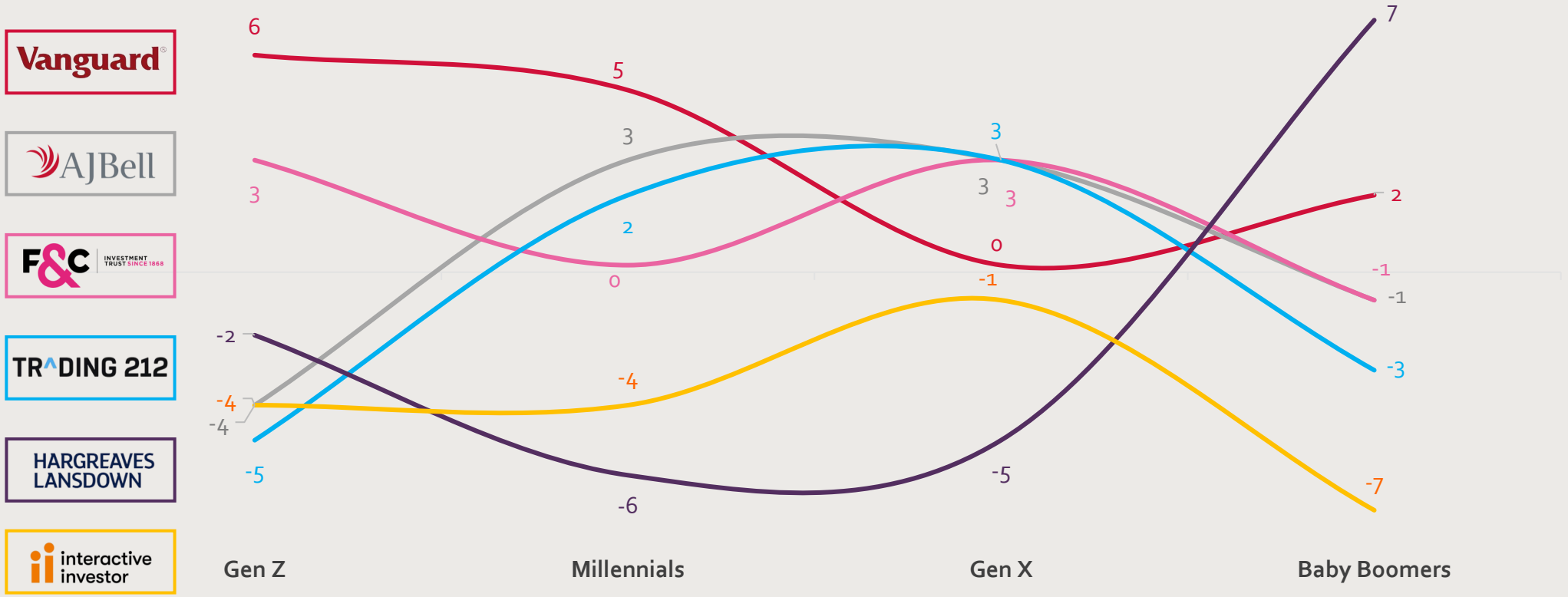
Vanguard	+2	AJBell	+1	F&C INVESTMENT TRUST SINCE 1868	+1
TRADING 212	-0	HARGREAVES LANSDOWN	-1	interactive investor	-4

Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

No generation has formed a consistently strong connection with investment brands

Scores remain low across age groups, with few consistent generational strengths. Hargreaves Lansdown stands out among Baby Boomers at +7, while Vanguard performs more positively among younger audiences

Brand Reaction Index score by generation



Source: RED C 2026 BRI survey
Base: All respondents (n=542-544) per brand

Investment brands struggle to make long-term value feel emotionally meaningful today

Investing is built around future reward, but the experience can feel complex, uncertain and distant from everyday life. This leaves brands competing for functional consideration rather than creating the distinctive, positive experiences that build emotional connection

1

Distance: The reward sits in the future
The emotional pay-off from investing may take years to realise, limiting the immediate moments of reward that help build connection elsewhere

2

Complexity: Confidence must come before connection
Financial language, product choice and unfamiliarity can create distance, making simplicity and reassurance particularly important

3

Risk: Potential loss competes with potential reward
Investing inherently involves uncertainty, creating a very different emotional starting point from categories centred on more immediate enjoyment

Financial brands build stronger emotional connection when they create long-term relationships, not just transactions

- Across financial services, the strongest brands give consumers more than functional delivery. Nationwide shows how human service, familiarity and tangible recognition can create positive feeling in a category where neutrality often dominates.
- Digital innovation alone is not enough. Monzo demonstrates the potential for newer banks to build younger connection, but strong Gen Z scores for Lloyds and HSBC show that heritage is not necessarily a barrier to relevance.
- Investment platforms face a different challenge: future rewards can feel distant, while complexity and risk suppress immediate positive feeling. The opportunity is to make financial progress feel clearer, more personal and more rewarding in the present

For brands with lower BRI scores, the opportunity is therefore not simply to optimise the financial product, but to create more distinctive and positively felt moments around it.



03

Appendix: How we assess emotional connection?



Learning from the best: Guidelines for brands wanting to increase their BRI score



IN A SCREEN-SATURATED WORLD, PEOPLE VALUE THE TANGIBLE & HUMAN

Consumers are increasingly drawn to in-person experiences or things that create human conversation or connection.

Look for ways to create community and real-world engagement rather than relying solely on digital interactions.



CULTURAL PRESENCE DRIVES RELEVANCE IN KEY MOMENTS

To show up in conversation, brands need to participate in culture and create impact through big moments & consistent presence.

Partnerships and conversations need to feel genuine and reinforce brand identity / brand values.



TRUST & NOSTALGIA ARE POWERFUL LEVERS IN THE MIDST OF UNCERTAINTY

In more cautious spending environments, brands must earn their place: reliability, value, and being on the customer's side.

Trust takes time to build and is earned. Bonus points if nostalgia echoes 'simpler times', bringing comfort and reassurance.



RED C's Brand Reaction Index methodology is rooted in key behavioural science principles

> Humans make 'fast and frugal' decisions to arrive at 'good enough' choices
>
> **Gerd Gigerenzer / Behavioural Economist**

The three shortcuts used to arrive at 'good enough' choices are:

Availability Heuristic

The brand easily comes to mind

Affect Heuristic

The brand evokes positive feelings

Processing Fluency Heuristic

The brand is easily recognised in-store/online, etc

How consumers feel today shapes the brands they choose tomorrow

Paul Ekman is an emotional psychologist who theorised that basic human emotions (happiness/enjoyment, sadness, anger, fear, surprise, disgust and contempt) are innate and shared by everyone, and that they are accompanied across cultures by universal facial expressions.

By defining the emotion that consumers attach to brands, we can quantify those that have stronger positive emotions vs. those that don't.

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01

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The reactive nature of BRI means it is an early indicator of future metrics – e.g. a lowered BRI suggests other brand health measures will start to fall in the future



The 2026 BRI study includes 131 brands, covering a wide range of sectors

- Retail & Marketplaces
- Groceries
- Home & DIY
- Media & Entertainment
- FMCG Food & Drink
- Optical Services
- Gaming & Toys
- High Street food chains
- Property & Places
- Travel & Transport
- Financial Services & Investing
- Utilities
- Telecoms & Essential Services
- Technology & AI
- Sports
- Social Platforms



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THANK YOU

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