THE GREAT VALUE RESET

Inflation hurts, irrelevance kills. Why brands need to rethink value to survive.

This is not a conversation about price. It goes far beyond that.

Price has always been a driver of value, and it always will be. However, what's happening now goes beyond price, and brands that treat this moment as a pricing problem will be the brands that ultimately lose out.

There's no denying the significance of the cost of living; it's a constant background condition which shapes every spending decision, forcing consumers to adapt their spending habits by either trading down within categories or trading out of categories entirely. And this isn't likely to change anytime soon. Consumer confidence in the UK sits at **46%**[1] (signalling net pessimism).

78%

of British consumers think the general economic condition of the UK will get worse over the next 12 months[2]

and a quarter of people in Great Britain believe their personal financial situation will be weaker in six months[3]. But, the value reset isn't just economic, it's psychological. It's consumers silently reorganising their lives, recalibrating their priorities, and reassessing what brings them value.

So, what does this mean for brands?

This shift in consumer expectations has a direct consequence for brands. They are being scrutinised more than ever, and the judgement of their worth is being shaped in environments they don't fully control: peer-to-peer spaces like group chats and Reddit threads, in-the-moment decisions at the shelf, and the subtle signals of what makes it into (or out of) the basket.

Crucially, the question has changed.

It is no longer
"Is this good?" but
"Is this reflective of me?"

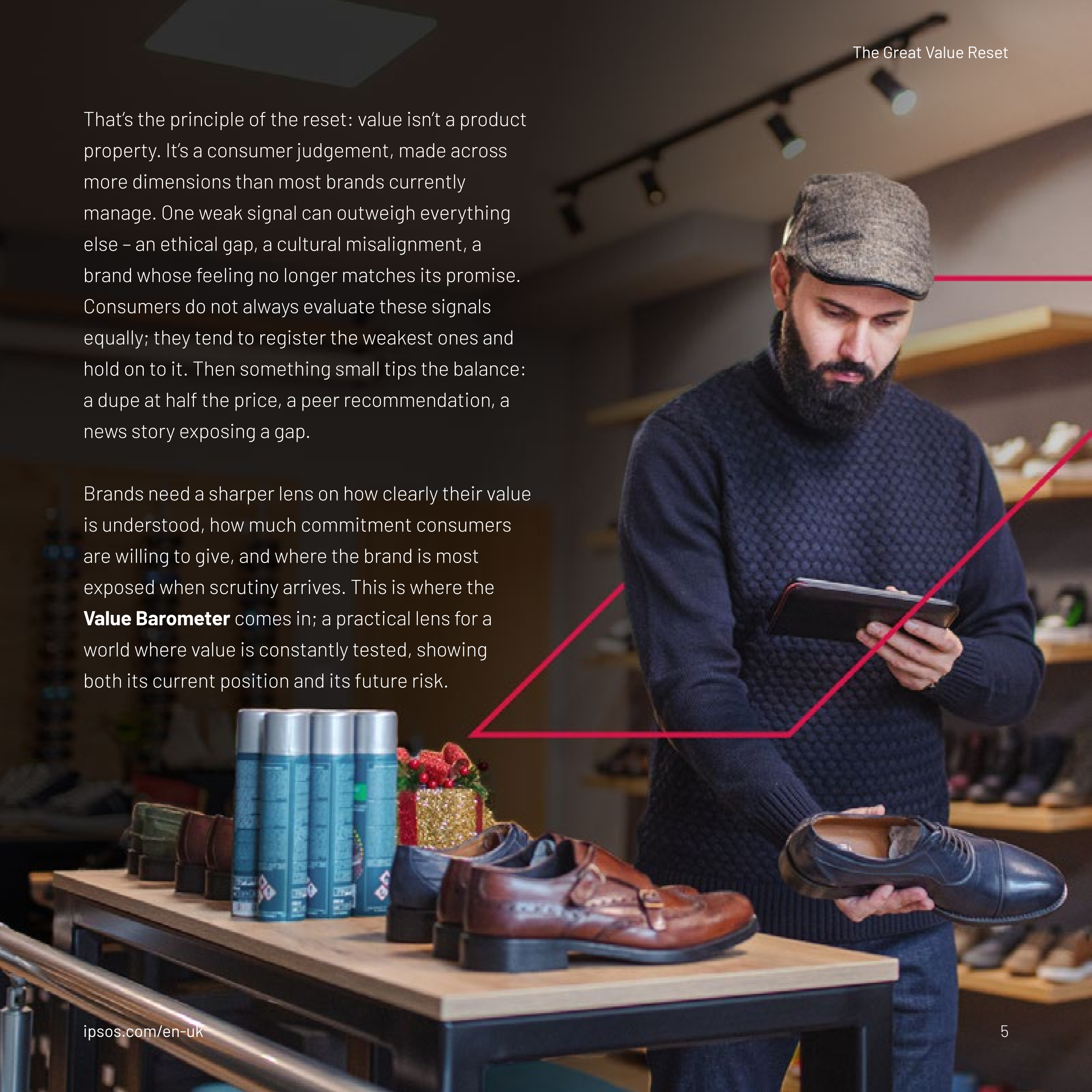
Increasingly, consumers are curating their choices in the same way they curate themselves, using brands as signals of identity, values and intent. This could be driving the co-existence of premium and price-led choices: consumers are not choosing one over the other, they are choosing both, deliberately, contextually, and for different reasons.

This is forcing brands to rethink how they build and hold value. In many categories, performance is now taken for granted and meaning is what differentiates. And that meaning is not declared by brands alone, it is judged by consumers across multiple dimensions, from price and quality to ethics, image and cultural fit.

The data is clear...

67%
of consumers globally say they buy from brands that reflect their personal values[4]

and **56%** are willing to spend more for a brand whose image appeals to them[5]. **65%** try to buy from brands that act responsibly, even at a premium[6], and **48%** of British consumers actively seek brands with a positive social impact[7].



That's the principle of the reset: value isn't a product property. It's a consumer judgement, made across more dimensions than most brands currently manage. One weak signal can outweigh everything else – an ethical gap, a cultural misalignment, a brand whose feeling no longer matches its promise. Consumers do not always evaluate these signals equally; they tend to register the weakest ones and hold on to it. Then something small tips the balance: a dupe at half the price, a peer recommendation, a news story exposing a gap.

Brands need a sharper lens on how clearly their value is understood, how much commitment consumers are willing to give, and where the brand is most exposed when scrutiny arrives. This is where the **Value Barometer** comes in; a practical lens for a world where value is constantly tested, showing both its current position and its future risk.

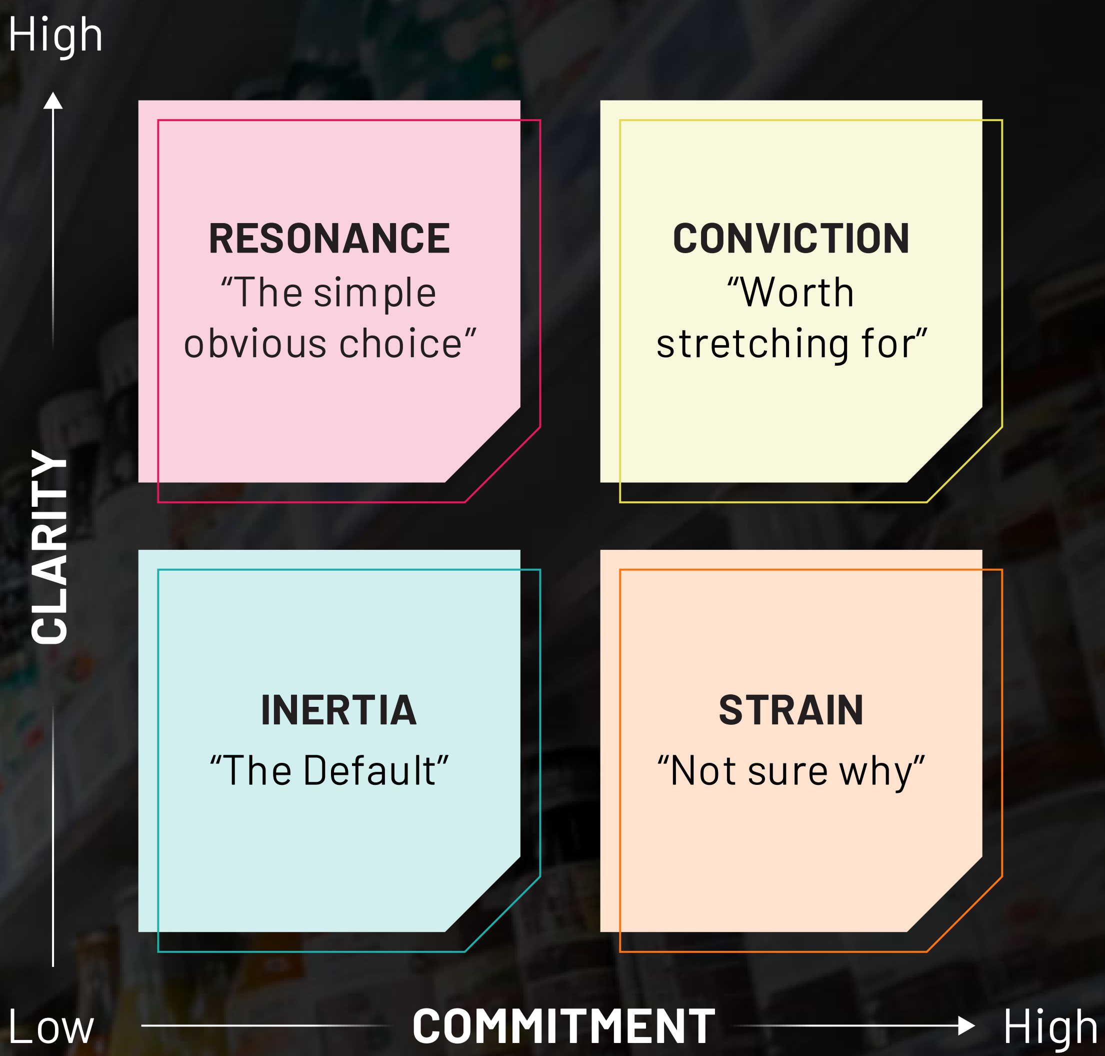
The Value Barometer

The Value Barometer combines two forces that we believe are critical to brand success in the reset: Clarity and Commitment.

Clarity is the extent to which consumers can confidently understand, assess and justify a brand's value. It reflects how clearly a brand's value is expressed across six dimensions: Reason, Integrity, Culture, Identity, Experience and Wellbeing.

Commitment is the depth of emotional and behavioural investment a consumer has in a brand beyond the transaction itself. It reflects the extent to which consumers are prepared to advocate for, defend, prioritise and actively maintain a relationship with the brand over time.

Plotted against two axes, these two forces tell us a brand's position based on consumers' willingness to invest in it and their perception of its value. Together, they define four distinct brand states: Inertia, Strain, Resonance, and Conviction.


High
CLARITY
RESONANCE
“The simple obvious choice”
CONVICTION
“Worth stretching for”
INERTIA
“The Default”
STRAIN
“Not sure why”
Low
COMMITMENT
High

Inertia
Low clarity, low commitment.

The brand is not being consciously chosen, it's just the default option.

74% of US consumers believe private label products are just as good as branded ones[8], and **79%** are willing to switch to private label if their usual brand is out of stock[9]. These are the conditions that Inertia brands face every day. Even relatively small disruptions may displace them because there is nothing holding the consumer beyond habit. The path out requires building clarity first, giving consumers something they can form a confident view of before any investment architecture can take hold.

Strain
Low clarity, high commitment.

The consumer has invested in a brand they cannot fully defend.

The luxury market lost approximately **50 million** customers globally between 2022 and 2024[10]. One possible interpretation is that some consumers began reassessing whether the emotional and symbolic value offered by luxury brands justified their cost in a more demanding economic environment. The commitment is real and powerful, but structurally strained and fragile. The customers do not have the confidence to defend when challenged.

Resonance
High clarity, low commitment.

The brand is chosen efficiently and confidently, but the consumer has no active stake in the relationship.

This is the most commercially comfortable and most strategically precarious position available. Brands in this position may be vulnerable if competitors are able to match their clarity and create genuine emotional or behavioural investment. There is nothing holding the consumer beyond a rational calculation that a better-positioned competitor can tip.

Conviction

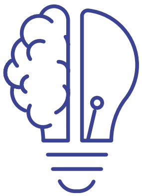
High clarity, high commitment.

The consumer has formed their own confident judgement and actively contributes to the relationship.

The clarity gives the investment somewhere real to anchor, and the investment gives the clarity something worth protecting. Brands in conviction are not just chosen, they are defended against dupes, competitors, and scrutiny. Conviction is not a destination, it is a condition that has to be earned continuously because the dimensions on which consumers form confident judgements shift over time. The brands that hold conviction across those shifts are the ones asking continuously whether their clarity is still the right kind of clarity for the consumer that exists today.

Determining your position on the matrix requires a deep analysis of both Value Clarity and Customer Commitment. Both are multifaceted constructs, comprised of distinct but interconnected pillars.

Clarity
The six dimensions



Reason

Does the brand make practical sense to me?

Is what the brand delivers coherent with what it costs and is that case easy to grasp without the brand having to explain it? **75%** of consumers globally say they can find better deals online than in traditional stores[11], which means the rational case for any brand is now perpetually subject to comparison.

Huel does this well. They provide genuine nutritional complexity made immediately legible through clear macros and transparent pricing. The consumer does not need to understand the science to form a confident view. When this dimension fails it is not because the product is poor. It is because the consumer cannot quickly and confidently form a view of whether the value adds up.

Integrity

Can I trust the brand to act responsibly and stand behind its commitments?

Integrity is earned when a brand's actions, decisions and behaviours consistently reinforce the standards it claims to uphold.

65% of consumers globally try to buy from brands that act responsibly, even if it means spending more[12]. **48%** of British consumers seek brands with a positive societal impact[13]. Brands seen to do good can trace **21%** of their brand advocacy and **8%** of their price premium to those associations[14]. Where it is absent or contradicted, it becomes the fault line through which trust breaks.

Patagonia's transfer of ownership to an environmental trust is a decision that exists beyond any campaign, lending a level of credibility that would be difficult to achieve through communications alone.

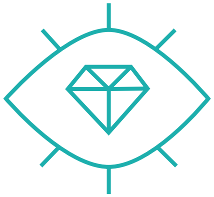
Culture

Does the brand fit my world?

The references it uses, the aesthetic it speaks, and the moment it belongs to.

Gymshark built this from the inside out, emerging from within gym culture so that every decision already spoke the language before the brand had a strategy to describe what it was doing.

When cultural fit is absent consumers do not reject a brand. They feel it is not quite for them, and indifference can be harder to reverse than rejection. Cultural legibility is not a one-time achievement. It is an ongoing discipline that requires continuous proximity to the communities that matter most.



Identity

Does choosing this brand reflect who I am?

45% of global consumers (aged 25-34 years) say they often buy products based on influencers they follow[15], and **35%** say they would trust a brand less for using AI to write product reviews[16]. The social signal is increasingly sensitive to authenticity.

Rhode skincare did not scale because it is celebrity owned. It scaled because it built a world of effortless clean beauty that women want to associate themselves with. When the social signal is ambiguous consumers resolve the uncertainty by choosing something safer.

Experience

Does this brand consistently deliver the experience it promises?

75% of consumers globally say customer service is getting too automated and impersonal[17]. The experiential dimension is under structural pressure across almost every category, and the brands that maintain consistency across every touchpoint are the ones that confirm rather than contradict their own promise.

Apple's commitment – that technology can be intuitive, beautiful, and human – is confirmed in the unboxing, the interface, the store, and the support. When the feeling diverges from the promise the consumer registers a dissatisfaction they cannot articulate, but it accumulates.

Wellness

Does interacting with this brand leave me feeling or looking better?

Increasingly, consumers evaluate brands not only on what they deliver, but on the impact they have on their lives. Wellness captures how a brand helps people feel healthier, happier, more confident or better able to thrive. Importantly, wellness is not confined to health categories. Beauty brands can enhance confidence and self-expression. Financial brands can reduce anxiety. Technology brands can simplify life. Everyday brands can create reassurance, comfort or enjoyment.

Lululemon, for example, creates value not simply through apparel, but through its association with wellbeing, self-improvement and living an active, balanced lifestyle. In an uncertain world, that contribution can become a source of differentiation and enduring value.

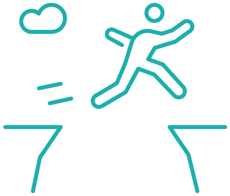
Commitment
The three dimensions

Learning

The genuine effort to understand what a brand stands for, how its products work, what makes it different.

When that learning feels rewarding, not laborious, it becomes an investment, something the consumer has actively built. Switching may then require abandoning not just a product, but knowledge that feels earned. That sense of ownership creates a depth of understanding that no simple price advantage can easily erode.

K-beauty is one of the clearest recent examples. A category built on accessible education – ingredients, routines, formulation philosophy – that invites consumers in and rewards their curiosity. The result is loyalty that conventional beauty marketing struggles to replicate. Demand for K-beauty in the UK continues to rise, with the market expected to reach almost **$20 billion** by 2033[18].



Risk

Choosing a brand before peers have validated it, and recommending it before consensus forms.

When a brand consistently rewards that risk, it creates a qualitatively different relationship built on earned trust rather than habit, where value clarity deepens and compounds with each reinforced choice.

77% of global consumers say they are more likely to trust a new product from a brand they already know[19].

Brands that create genuine early adopter confidence build a credibility infrastructure that dramatically lowers the cost of recruiting the next wave.

Personal stake

Having something personally at stake in whether the brand succeeds.

Alongside what consumers learn and the risks they take, this is about what they internalise, where the brand comes to reflect their own sense of self, priorities, or way of living.

Stanley, the insulated drinkware brand, offers a clear example. It grew sales from **$70 million** to a projected **$750 million** in just four years[20], not through traditional advertising, but through consumers who integrated it into their everyday routines. Over time, the brand came to represent small acts of self-care and consistency beyond being seen with it, and more about what it meant in their own lives.

These consumers are not just choosing a product; they are placing a part of themselves into the brand's story.

The critical point is this:
Value clarity often creates the conditions for stronger commitment. When consumers feel confident they understand a brand's value, they may be more willing to invest time, attention, advocacy and emotional energy into the relationship. Conversely, ambiguity can make deeper commitment more difficult to sustain. Viewed through this lens, clarity does not guarantee commitment, but it may increase the likelihood that commitment can develop and endure over time.

Gaining an early diagnosis

Many brands have a sense of how they're performing, however, far fewer know whether the foundations of the performance are sustainable. To gain an initial diagnosis of their position within the Value Barometer, brands need to reflect on 5 core questions…

1

Is your brand's value clear?

2

What convinces consumers you're worth choosing, and is that strengthening or eroding?

3

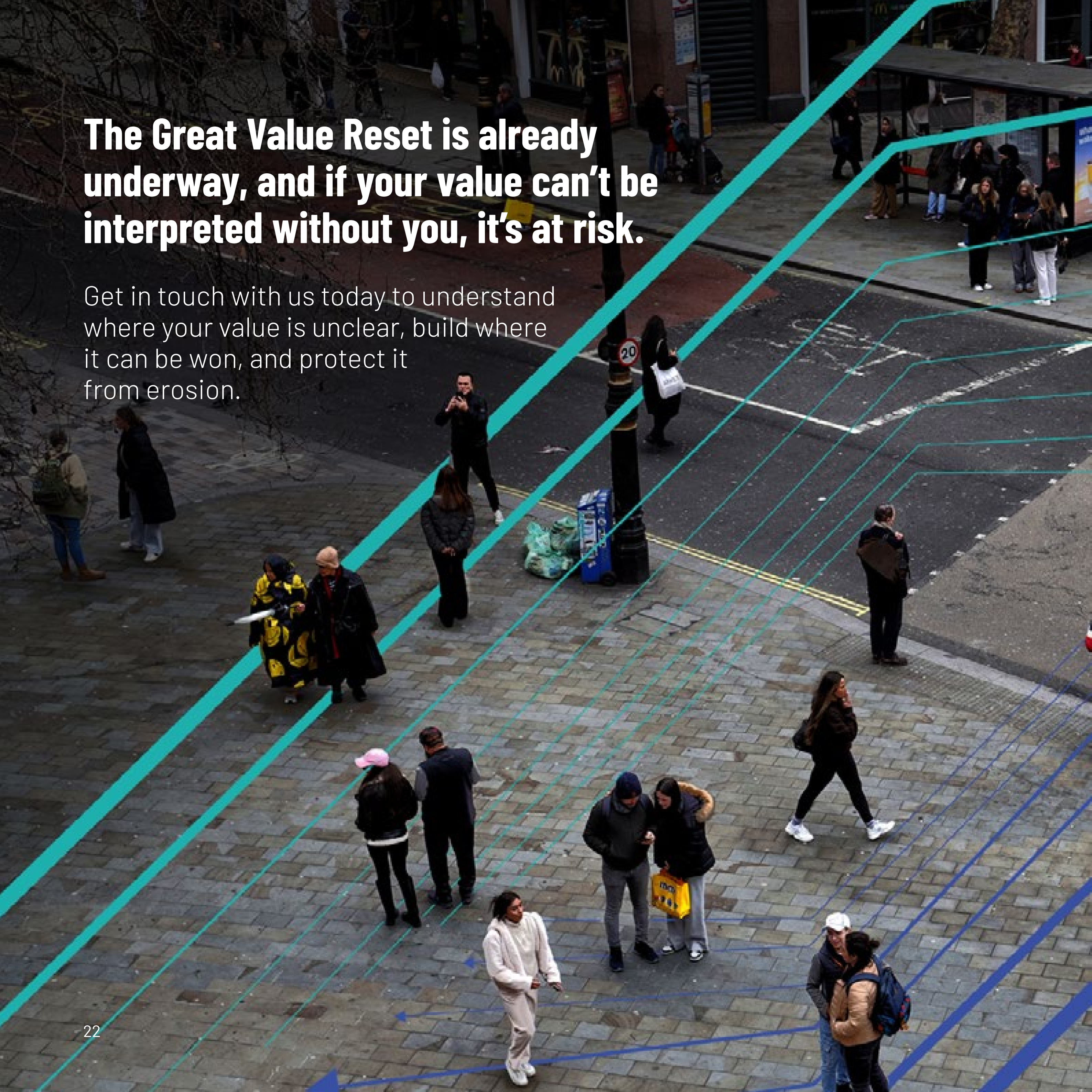
If your brand disappeared tomorrow, who would truly notice, and what will they say they lost?

4

What are you overlooking today that will undermine value clarity tomorrow?

5

If someone who had never heard of your brand went looking for a reason to choose you, what would they actually find?



The Great Value Reset is already underway, and if your value can't be interpreted without you, it's at risk.

Get in touch with us today to understand where your value is unclear, build where it can be won, and protect it from erosion.

Sources

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