

CONTEXT CHANGES EVERYTHING

Contextual Brand Tracking:
Because context shapes brand
choice, it should shape brand
equity measurement too.



The choice depends on the moment

Think of a chocolate brand.

What brand comes to mind?

Most people can answer immediately. Now imagine you're exhausted after staring at your screen all day and need a quick mental break. Which chocolate brand would you choose?

And if you found yourself hungry

having skipped lunch and you needed something that will keep you going through the afternoon – what chocolate brand would you reach for then?

Imagine now you're on your way to a dinner party and need a gift to thank your host. Would you buy the same chocolate brand as before?

Same category. Same consumer. Different answers. That is because context influences the decisions we make. And if context influences the choices we make, shouldn't it change the way we track brands too?





What might be missing from your measurement?

In tracking, stability is something we encounter all too often. Awareness is stable, consideration is holding and brand equity is maintained. The numbers are clear and the trends are familiar. But what if growth and dynamism are on the agenda? How can we find opportunities and reveal new insight?

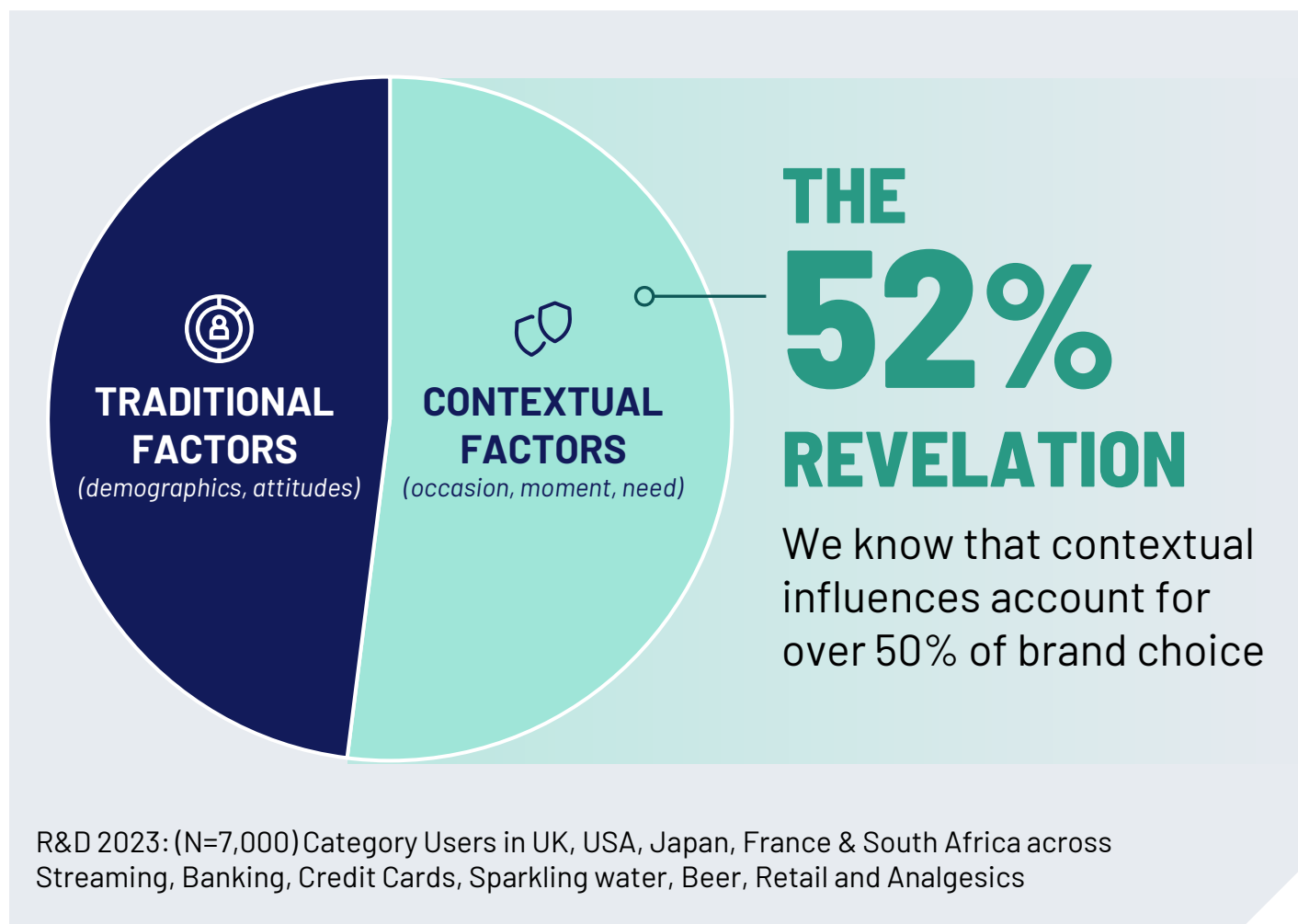
For decades, marketers have relied on tracking systems built around people, brands and categories. We measure who buys, who considers and who prefers and why. These metrics remain the essential backbone of a tracking survey.

The question to ask is whether there is something we are not seeing beyond the trend lines. Is there something we are not measuring?



People's decisions do not always happen in categories: they happen in moments, moments that are shaped by context. Ipsos research conducted across multiple markets and categories, from banking to beer, found that more than **50% of the factors driving consumer decisions are linked to the circumstances, needs, situations and occasions in which choices are madeⁱ.**

Figure 1: Factors that drive brand choice



The same person can make entirely different decisions depending on whether they are rushing between meetings, treating themselves after a difficult day, hosting friends, managing a family budget, or preparing for a special occasion.

Which raises an important question:

If context drives more than half of brand choice, how much of the story is missing from traditional brand tracking?

Growth opportunities don't always appear in standard tracking

As markets evolve and category boundaries blur, understanding when people choose a brand, why they choose it and what alternatives they consider becomes important. When context changes, competitors, barriers and drivers of choice can change too.

Ipsos' Contextual Brand Tracking goes beyond traditional brand

metrics to reveal how context influences the choices people make. By measuring brands across occasions, competitive sets and consumer needs over time, tracking with a contextual lens goes beyond understanding associations and describing brand performance. It reveals the factors that explain why a brand is chosen in one moment and not in another.

Measuring these dynamics over time creates an opportunity for brands to move beyond the familiar trend lines to find new insight into where brands win, why they win and where future growth opportunities might emerge.



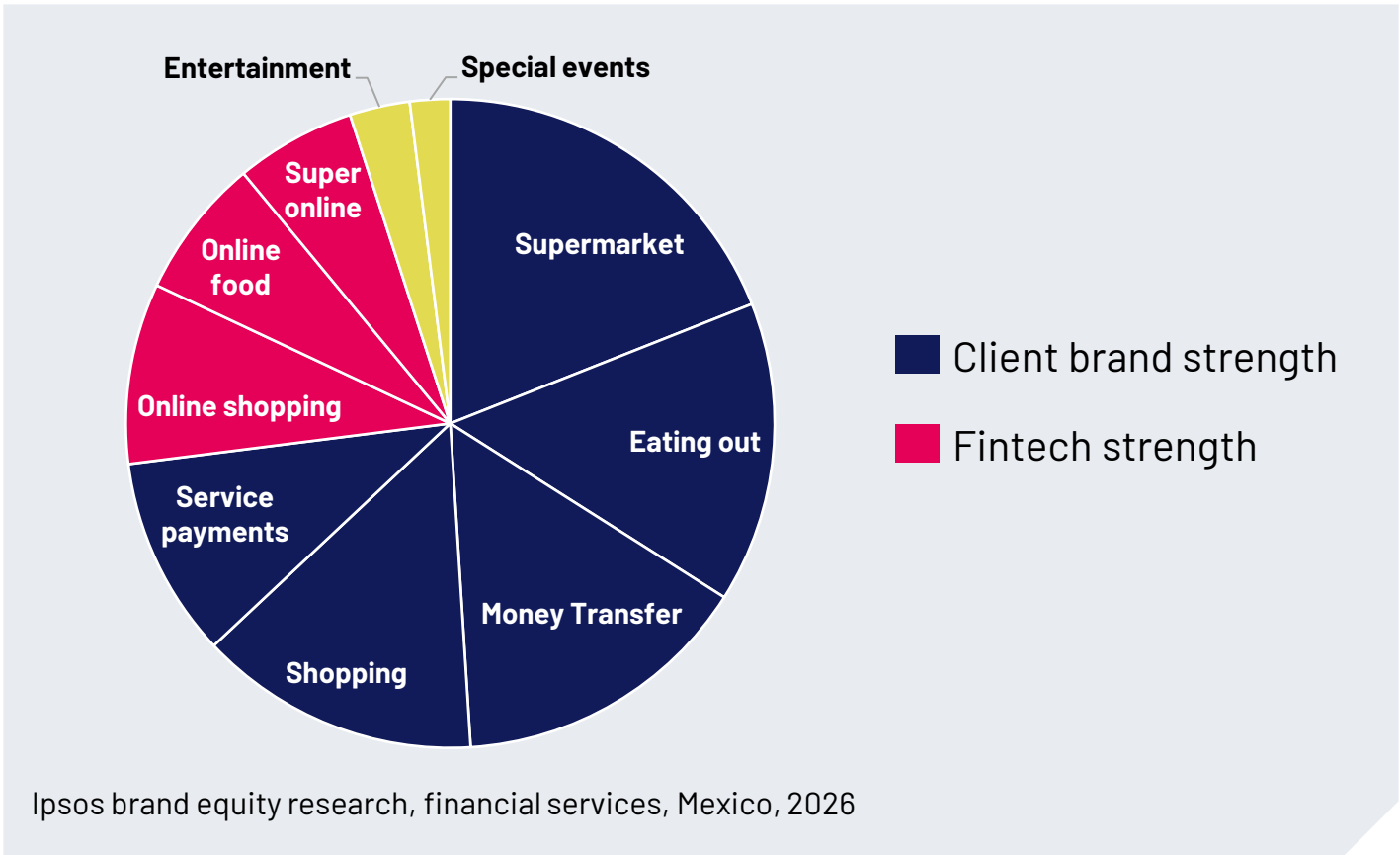
Your biggest competitor may not be in your category

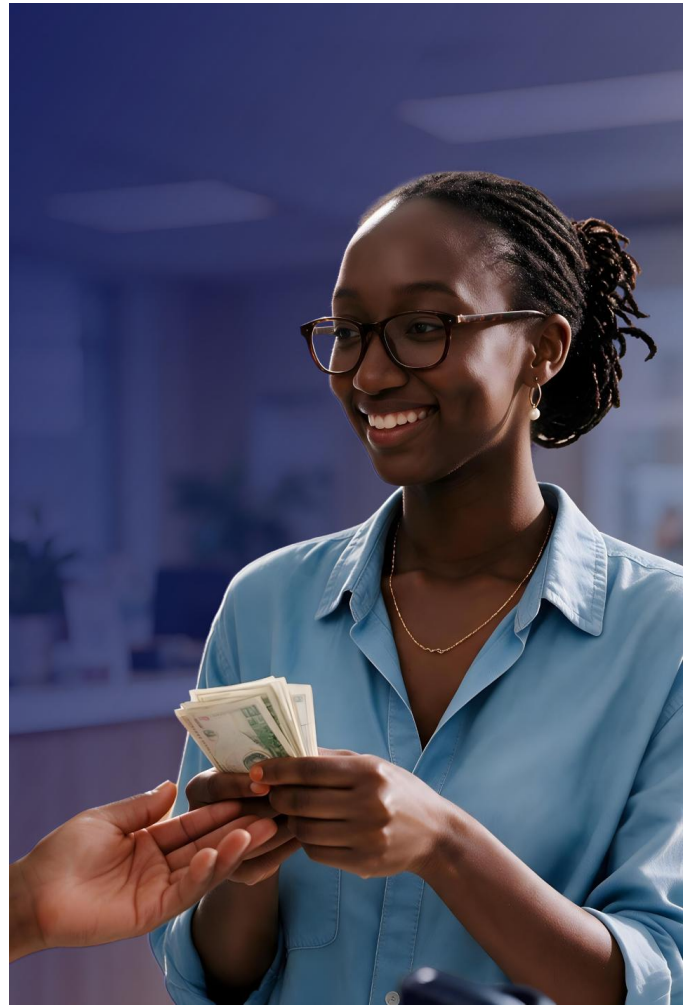
Many tracking programs assume the competitive market context is stable and category defined. A bank competes with other banks, a snack bar competes with other snack bars, a water brand competes with other water brands. But this is not always the reality; people experience brands differently.

In a recent occasion-based financial services study, a long-standing

traditional bank maintained high Brand Desire over other payment methods for transactions at supermarkets, restaurants and money transfers. But for online payments, comprising one third of all transactions, fintechs, digital wallets, payment platforms and embedded financial services posed a major threat to the traditional bank's shareⁱⁱ.

Figure 2: Relative Brand Desire strength for client and fintech brands across payment occasions





Looking beyond 'which bank' to understanding financial decisions in context fundamentally changed the conversation.

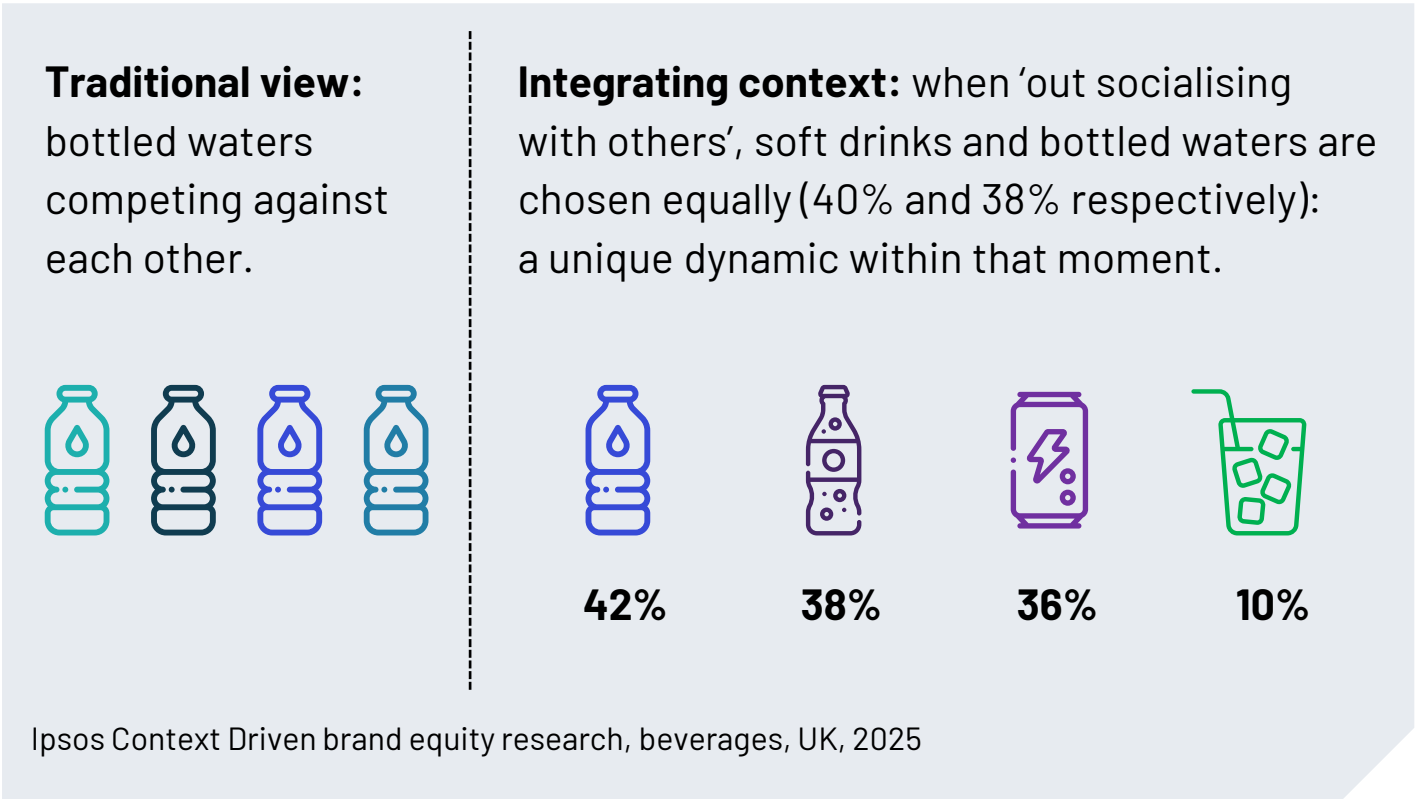


Your methodology was instrumental in uncovering key insights; we discovered that our main competitor originated from the fintech sector, rather than traditional banking, which was an aspect we had not realised due to the prior focus solely on banks during tracking."

– Insights manager, financial services provider, Mexico

Our work in the beverages category in the UK confirmed the importance of a broader perspective: when out socialising, people choose equally between bottled waters and soft drinks. And so, Coca-Cola becomes just as relevant a competitor as any other mineral water brandⁱⁱⁱ.

Figure 3: Category consumption in the past 1-2 days when out socialising with others



Context doesn't just redefine the competitive set; it can reveal emerging threats too. Hotels did not lose relevance because consumers stopped needing accommodation. Airbnb gave people a new solution to the same need.

Brands that continue tracking the competition through rigid category definitions may be surprised to discover that market share was lost to rivals they never considered rivals at all.

Finding growth opportunities through context

Integrating occasions into brand health tracking reveals opportunities that rarely show up amongst standard KPIs. Changes in behaviours, occasions, motivations and market dynamics create signals that a contextual lens can bring into focus.

Recent Contextual Brand Tracking research in Quick Service Restaurants (QSR) found that more than half of weekly QSR occasions are driven by immediate situations rather than pre-planned occasions. Hunger, convenience, time pressure and circumstance create the occasion itself^{iv}.

An occasion-based measurement system allows brands to identify which brands are best placed to win in each situation. Diagnosing brand equity within these moments changes how we think about growth opportunities and what’s on the menu.

Figure 4: Occasion sizing: weekly QSR usage



Source: Ipsos brand equity research, Quick Service Restaurants, Türkiye, 2026

Not all moments are equal

Every category contains a multitude of potential occasions, moments, motivations or needs. Some occasions are large and routine; others are small but strategically important.

Without context, brands might invest equally, but when occasions are sized, mapped and more deeply understood, priorities become clear and growth becomes less about doing more, and more about choosing decisively where to win.

In a recent brand equity beauty study, people were asked to identify their three most frequent makeup occasions. Surprisingly, 69% indicated special occasions among their top three, compared with just 27% who selected everyday use. This shows that people weren't just buying makeup; they were buying confidence, preparation and self-expression for specific moments. The implication is profound: for the market-leading cosmetics brand, perceived as 'the everyday essential', the opportunity wasn't to drive more usage more generally; it was to become a more highly desired brand for the most lucrative moment: special occasions^v. Tracking these moments gives brands the means to measure progress and evaluate the impact of their activations in the moments they seek to own.

Figure 5: Most frequent makeup usage occasions



Ipsos brand equity research, makeup, Türkiye, 2026

Measuring what you are missing

Ipsos’ Contextual Brand Tracking reveals how well brands perform at each occasion, and where new potential exists. Going beyond simply understanding whether a brand comes to mind in a given moment, it is important for brands to know *if* they’re chosen, *why* they’re chosen, or *what stops them* from being chosen at all.



The approach has truly enabled us to reimagine Brand Health Tracking! It gave us a fresh perspective and a new way of thinking.”

– Head of Consumer Insights, beverages company, Malaysia

Tracking with context also changes what winning looks like: the same attribute can matter a lot in one situation and not much in another. Another QSR contextual study revealed that when it comes to a quick, practical meal, value for money is a top three driver of Brand Desire. But when it comes to a treat with the family, an enjoyable experience for the family drives Brand Desire the most^{vi}.

Figure 6: Drivers of Brand Desire for a quick practical meal vs. a special treat

	Quick, practical meal	Special treat
1 st	Makes my life easier	Enjoyable experience for the family
2 nd	Quality and origin of products	Makes my life easier
3 rd	Good value for money	Quality and origin of products
4 th	Signature dishes	Signature dishes
5 th	Fun activities for children	New menu with creative recipes

Ipsos Context Driven brand equity research, Quick Service Restaurants, Italy, 2026

The brands that see context see more

Right now, somewhere in your market, people might be making brand choices differently than your tracker suggests. Competitors might be winning on moments that aren't measured. New competitors are emerging that a defined category may not capture. Future growth opportunities may already be taking shape, but your current measures may not be capturing them.

The question is not whether these opportunities and threats exist, but whether you identify them early enough to act before your competitors do.

Traditional tracking tells you what is happening to your brand. Context helps explain why. It reveals where brands win and lose, which occasions are growing, how competitive sets are changing and where future opportunities are emerging.

In a world where more than half of brand choice is shaped by context, the greatest risk is what your measurement might be missing. The brands that win tomorrow will be the ones that discover it first.

Contextual Brand Tracking is Ipsos' flagship contextual brand measurement solution that goes beyond standard metrics to reveal how context shapes brand choice. By examining brands across specific occasions, competitive sets and consumer needs, Contextual Brand Tracking uncovers the strategic opportunities and threats that conventional tracking misses.



For more information about Contextual Brand Tracking, contact your Ipsos representative or visit www.ipsos.com.

Sources and References

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- iii. Ipsos Context Driven brand equity research, beverages category UK, 2025
- iv. Ipsos brand equity research, Quick Service Restaurants, Türkiye, 2026
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- vi. Ipsos Context Driven brand equity research, Quick Service Restaurants, Italy, 2026



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Some visuals in this document are AI generated