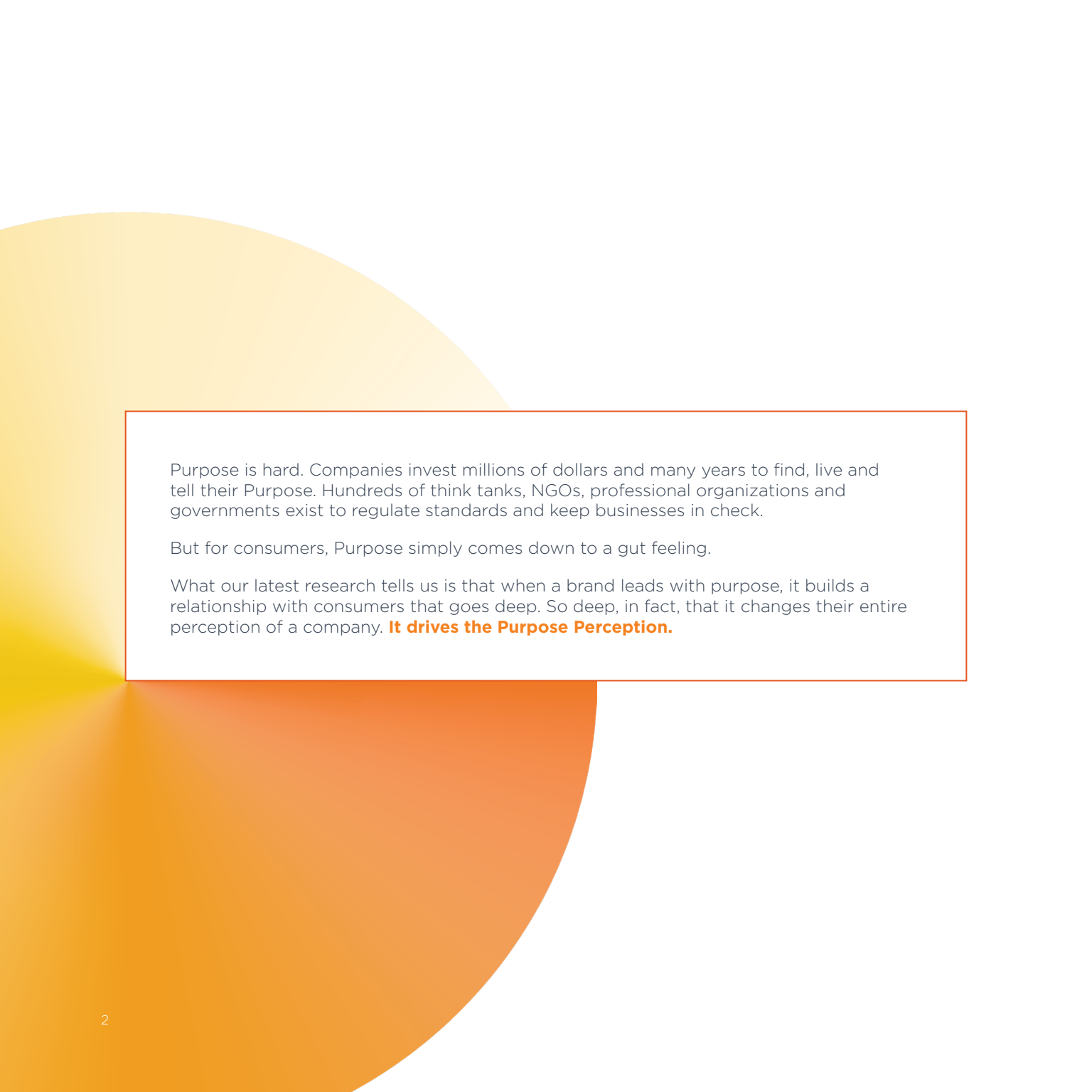




# **PURPOSE PERCEPTION**

IMPLICIT ASSOCIATION STUDY

**PORTER  
NOVELLI** 




Purpose is hard. Companies invest millions of dollars and many years to find, live and tell their Purpose. Hundreds of think tanks, NGOs, professional organizations and governments exist to regulate standards and keep businesses in check.

But for consumers, Purpose simply comes down to a gut feeling.

What our latest research tells us is that when a brand leads with purpose, it builds a relationship with consumers that goes deep. So deep, in fact, that it changes their entire perception of a company. **It drives the Purpose Perception.**

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# APPLYING SOCIAL SCIENCE TO PURPOSE

When humans make decisions, they use two distinct processes. These are called System 1 and System 2 thinking.

## SYSTEM 1

When humans use System 1 thinking, it is **automatic, intuitive** and **unconscious**. We don't think too hard about it — we use our gut.

## SYSTEM 2

When humans use System 2 thinking, it is a more **analytical** approach; it's slow and controlled. We filter out our instinct and biases to make a conscious effort to unpack options.

While System 2 thinking seems like the right approach when making decisions, humans are much more likely to rely on System 1 thinking — we go with our instincts. What does this mean for marketers? It means that, to truly understand the consumer mindset, we must strip away the noise — and begin to appreciate individuals' unconscious and intuitive reactions.

*Source: MDRG Inc. 2021*

# UNPACKING IAT

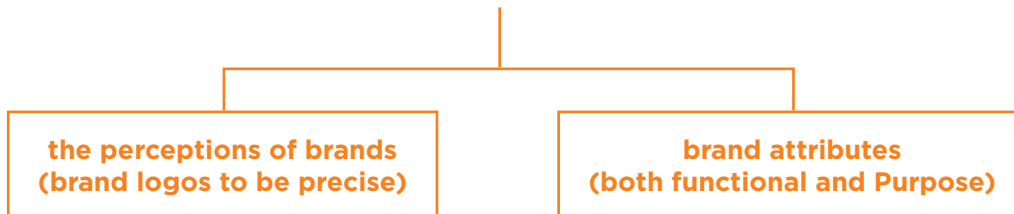
One tool social scientists use to understand System 1 thinking is a research methodology called Implicit Association Testing (IAT). IAT is a measure within social psychology that detects our automatic, unbiased perceptions. We all have biases, but we do not necessarily know they exist, or explicitly express them. Implicit Association Testing was originally developed to uncover our unconscious biases related to age, race and gender, but has recently expanded into the world of marketing.



**Why IAT?** For nearly 30 years, we've conducted our legacy Purpose research to understand consumer expectations of responsible brands. In 2019, we implemented biometrics technology to understand how consumers psychically and emotionally responded to Purpose messaging. Building from this research, we leveraged the power of social psychology to further unpack why consumers prefer Purpose-driven brands. This research adds another layer to the business case for Purpose — and the importance of strong storytelling to complement sound business strategies.



**In our research, we evaluated two items:**



For this study, we had respondents compare eight different brands within four industries. Four of the brands are generally considered Purpose-driven and four are more “conventional.” In this psychological test, we forced respondents into System 1 thinking by asking them to make decisions as quickly as possible (in 800 milliseconds or less to be exact), thus preventing their ability to think too much about a response. Because of this, we were able to access respondents’ automatic associations.

Our brains contain a vast semantic network — an interconnected web of knowledge. When respondents are exposed to a stimulus — in our case a brand logo — it activates their semantic network and triggers what is felt about that brand. As a result, respondents are faster to react to the appearance of words that they innately relate to the brand versus words they do not as easily relate. In practical terms, the faster the reaction time to choose an attribute, via clicking on the keyboard, the stronger the implicit association. The results of IAT show how consumers associate key attributes to brands. With an exit survey, we then asked respondents to tap into their System 2 thinking to understand how they rationally perceive the eight brands we tested.

**Let's talk attributes.**

For this study, we compared reactions between functional attributes and Purpose attributes to understand which type of attributes respondents were faster to associate with certain brands and which would inspire further action.

What type of attributes did we use?



# STRONGER MENTAL CONNECTIONS THROUGH PURPOSE

Purpose brands have staying power; they stick in consumers' minds in a way other brands just do not.



In fact, **78 percent** of exit survey respondents indicated they are more likely to remember a company with a strong Purpose.

We also saw this play out during the implicit association testing. When evaluating brands, respondents made higher associations between brands and Purpose attributes versus functional attributes. By higher association, we mean respondents were faster to indicate Purpose words, rather than functional words. This suggests that when consumers store information about brands, they make stronger mental connections with Purpose words.

	FAST ASSOCIATION	MEDIUM ASSOCIATION	SLOW ASSOCIATION
PURPOSE BRAND	<b>Caring</b> <b>Charitable</b> <b>Compassionate</b> <b>Courageous</b> <b>Eco-Friendly</b> <b>Ethical</b> <b>Inclusive</b> <b>Responsible</b> <b>Sustainable</b> <b>Transparent</b> <b>Trustworthy</b>	<b>Socially-aware</b> <b>Values-driven</b> Delicious High-quality Unique	Affordable Boring Cheap Classic Convenient Essential Familiar Fun Indulgent Innovative Practical Reliable
CONVENTIONAL BRAND	Trustworthy	<b>Caring</b> <b>Compassionate</b> <b>Responsible</b>	<b>Charitable</b> <b>Courageous</b> <b>Eco-friendly</b> <b>Ethical</b> <b>Inclusive</b> Affordable Boring Cheap Classic Convenient Delicious Essential <b>Socially-aware</b> <b>Sustainable</b> <b>Transparent</b> <b>Values-driven</b> Familiar Fun High-quality Indulgent Innovative Practical Reliable Unique

**BOLD: purpose attributes**

NON-BOLD: functional attributes

## PN'S TAKE >

Even though we consider ourselves logical and modern human beings, we know a majority of our decisions are made through System 1 decision-making processes, including the brands we trust and ultimately purchase. As study respondents were more likely to have an implicit response to Purpose words, we can posit that these words are more likely to be connected to System 1 thinking — which ultimately drives the behaviors brands seek — like purchase.

Overall, when a brand is Purposeful, it connects with consumers on an emotional level, while a brand that is functional connects with consumers on a rational level. We feel Purpose automatically, but have to think through function rationally — which means Purpose becomes more deeply embedded into our psyche and, ultimately, our decisions.

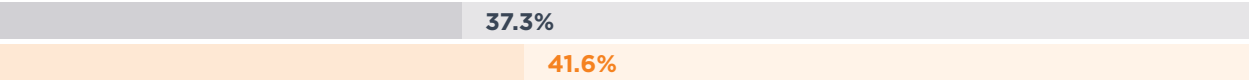
# HOW PURPOSE ATTRIBUTES TRIGGER ACTION

For marketers, our main charge is to not only inspire goodwill and strong reputations, but also drive action.

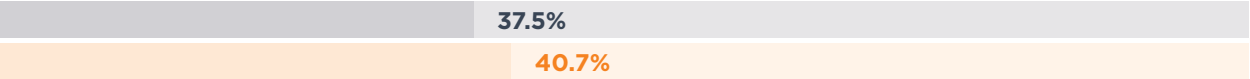
To more directly connect brand association with desired consumer behaviors, the research then explored what types of brand attributes most motivate consumers to take specific actions. The research uncovered that, when compared to functional attributes, Purpose attributes were more likely to drive certain desired behaviors. When forced to select the most and least important messages from a set which is repeated numerous times (a methodology called Maximum Differential Scaling), respondents were more likely to indicate Purpose words as motivators for deciding which brands to trust, work for, be loyal to and, ultimately, have a deeper connection with. This reinforces that Purpose can act as a signal to consumers to engage with a brand in myriad ways.

## BRAND ATTRIBUTES THAT INSPIRE ACTION

TRUST A BRAND



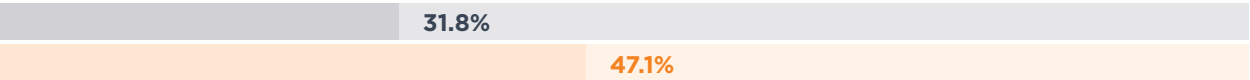
BE LOYAL TO A BRAND



HAVE A DEEPER CONNECTION WITH A BRAND



WORK FOR A BRAND



These findings were reinforced in the exit survey, which asked respondents a series of questions about how they would support Purpose-driven brands. Here, we see the actions revealed in the IAT setting confirmed through self-reported data. More than three-quarters (78%) of respondents cited they'd be more likely to want to work for a Purpose-driven company, while nearly the same amount would be more likely to trust (76%) and be loyal to (72%) that company. But, this fervor to support these brands expands to additional reputational benefits as respondents also cited a willingness to defend (70%) and even forgive (72%) Purpose-driven companies that make a misstep.

## WHEN A COMPANY LEADS WITH PURPOSE, RESPONDENTS WERE:

**78%** MORE LIKELY TO WANT TO WORK FOR THAT COMPANY

**76%** MORE LIKELY TO TRUST THAT COMPANY

**72%** MORE LIKELY TO BE LOYAL TO THAT COMPANY

**70%** MORE LIKELY TO DEFEND THAT COMPANY IF SOMEONE SPOKE BADLY OF IT

**72%** MORE LIKELY TO FORGIVE THAT COMPANY IF IT MAKES A MISSTEP

## PN'S TAKE >

Purpose brand attributes motivate reputational brand benefits among consumers in a way functional attributes cannot. A strong consumer-brand relationship goes further than traditional brand benefits, such as quality, function and cost by incorporating beliefs, traditions, practices and rituals that strengthen affinity and make the brand a meaningful part of consumers' lives. This affinity drives the behaviors that companies seek.

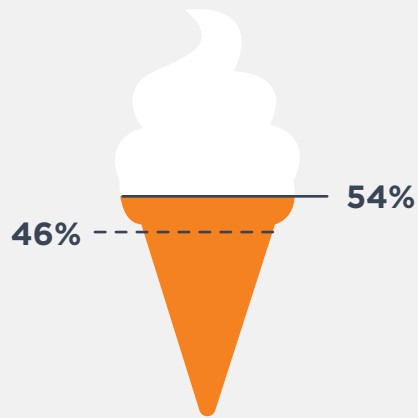
Among all attributes tested, “trustworthy” and “inclusive” were the Purpose attributes most likely to drive these desired actions among all brands tested. Brands should seek to be honest and act with integrity — as well embrace justice, equity, diversity and inclusion — not only within their brand ethos, but also in their actions, in order to gain greater levels of connection to consumers.

## WHEN ARTICULATING PURPOSE GETS COMPLEX

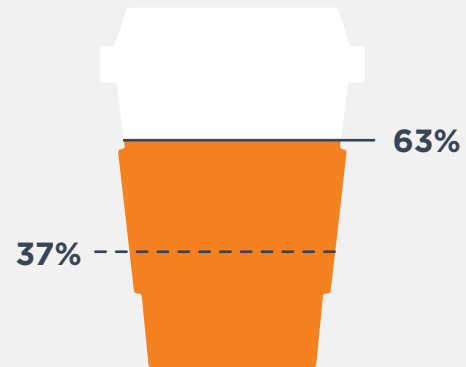
Why do we like a brand? It's more than a pricepoint or a new feature. It's because that brand speaks to us; we feel a kinship. Can we articulate this feeling or emotion? Not so easy.

To further explore how our implicit associations inform our overall brand preference, we explored not only which brands respondents preferred, but why. For this section, respondents were asked about two different brands in the same industry: one generally considered Purpose-driven and one generally considered more conventional. When asked which brand they preferred, respondents chose the Purpose-driven brand over the conventional brand in three-out-of-four cases (with a tie for the fourth case). However, when asked to describe why they preferred these brands, most respondents reverted back to functional descriptions of the brands, products and services, using words and phrases describing performance, quality and cost.

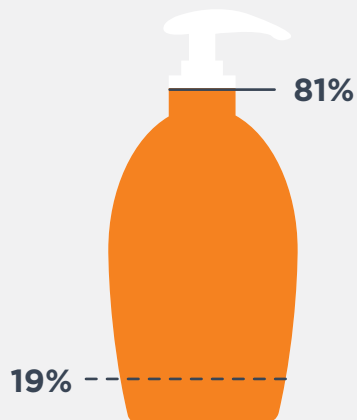
## THE MAJORITY OF RESPONDENTS PREFERRED PURPOSE BRANDS



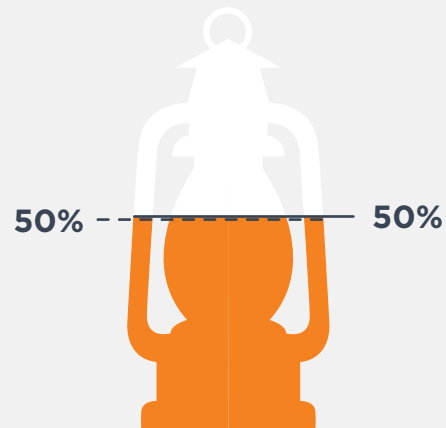
FOOD/BEVERAGE



QUICK SERVICE CAFÉ



PERSONAL CARE



OUTDOOR RETAILER

———— PURPOSE BRAND      - - - - CONVENTIONAL BRAND

## PN'S TAKE >

Although consumers prefer Purpose-driven brands, they have a harder time articulating exactly why that is. This shows that for brands, there is something about this emotional connection to Purpose that makes them more appealing; it's the secret sauce, in a way. Purpose is what drives the underlying emotional connection to, and preference for, a brand. Product attributes are just the tactile or quantifiable way brands appeal to consumers on the surface, but do not foster a longer-lasting emotional brand relationship.

# WHY MARKETING MATTERS

Consultants, strategists and advocates alike will emphasize the importance of “doing the work” internally. Companies must have the programs, policies and strategies in place to truly be Purpose-driven, and for good reason. Once consumers look under the hood, they’re likely to call out inauthenticity, but this doesn’t mean brands should shy away from communicating their Purpose.

When examining the implicit responses of our four brand sets, most respondents correctly and quickly associated Purpose attributes with the Purpose-driven brand. However, an outlier existed in one industry category where the Purpose-driven brand and conventional brand both garnered high associations with Purpose words, indicating that both brands were getting “credit” among respondents for being Purpose-driven.

## PN’S TAKE >

This finding shows us that strong programs, policies and initiatives are only half the battle for Purpose-driven companies. Brands must actively communicate their Purpose too — and embed it into their brand ethos at myriad touchpoints. Here, we see brands that are not “doing the work,” but show up in the marketplace with a strong marketing story and brand ethos are getting credit for Purpose. This also reveals that while many experts may associate Purpose with “harder” terms like sustainability, human rights and responsibility, consumers also give credit to brands for leading with Purpose when they espouse “softer” Purpose attributes like family-friendly values and a customer-first experience. However, a flag for marketers, as consumers become more educated on the nuances of being a responsible organization and take the time to do their own research, they will be better equipped to more correctly identify a Purpose-driven brand over a brand with strong marketing and great customer experience.

# PURPOSE AND IMPULSE

When shopping aisles (or web browsers) are filled with many choices — all the bells and whistles and almost endless iterations of functional benefits — consumers oftentimes use one guidepost for making that final decision — their gut.

Our exit survey data revealed that many respondents consider Purpose a key attribute when deciding which brands to support and why. Sixty-six percent of respondents said they consider a company's Purpose when making purchasing decisions, and a further 62 percent of respondents said a company's Purpose is an important factor when making a quick or impulse purchase. Further, when all things remain equal (cost and quality), 71 percent of respondents said they would purchase from a Purpose-driven company over the alternative. And perhaps highlighting why consumers tend to have higher associations to Purpose-driven attributes, 78 percent of respondents said they are more likely to remember a company that has a strong Purpose.

## HOW PURPOSE IMPACTS PURCHASING DECISIONS:

**66%** WOULD CONSIDER A COMPANY'S PURPOSE WHEN MAKING PURCHASE DECISIONS

**62%** BELIEVE A COMPANY'S PURPOSE IS AN IMPORTANT FACTOR WHEN MAKING A QUICK OR IMPULSE PURCHASE

**71%** WOULD PURCHASE FROM A PURPOSE-DRIVEN COMPANY OVER THE ALTERNATIVE, WHEN COST AND QUALITY ARE EQUAL

**78%** ARE MORE LIKELY TO REMEMBER A COMPANY WITH A STRONG PURPOSE

## PN'S TAKE >

Bolstering what we know from our respondents' implicit responses, these quantitative data also confirm that consumers consider a company's Purpose-driven attributes when making purchasing decisions — and that these brands are likely to have staying power in consumers' minds. In a grab-and-go situation, Purpose could be the tiebreaker for that quick decision. Further, Purpose acts as a differentiator, not only on the product shelves but in the overall perception consumers have of various companies.

## FINAL THOUGHTS

Purpose is more than a marketing tactic; it's much more than a term thrown around at conferences. It is something that is so deeply embedded into our experience with a brand that it becomes a feeling. We can't see it, and sometimes we can't even articulate it, but we know it's there. Purpose is complex and deep, and it's emotional over rational. And within this complexity is the notion that consumers overwhelmingly gravitate toward it. In a world with so much clutter, myriad messages and touchpoints, Purpose is breaking through. In the fight to win not only consumers' hard-earned dollars, but also loyalty and trust, Purpose is the clear leader.

## ABOUT THE RESEARCH

The Porter Novelli Purpose Perception Study was an online survey conducted by HCD among a sample of 1,200 US adults ages 18-69 between August 28-29. The study employed implicit association testing and maximum differentiation scaling techniques in addition to traditional polling questions.

## ABOUT PORTER NOVELLI

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