



The Business Impact of Consumer Empathy

In this ebook, you'll learn the BUSINESS VALUE OF DEVELOPING CONSUMER EMPATHY. For years, Discuss.io has enabled brands to build consumer empathy across their organizations and we've learned a lot in that time. We took these learnings and operationalized the process of building consumer empathy in a way that's achievable and scalable.

The purpose of this ebook is to share our learnings. In doing so, our goal is to make consumer empathy something that's easy for brands to **EMBRACE** and **ENABLE** within their organizations.

By the end of this ebook, we want you to feel like empathy is something that's easy.

Our goal is to make consumer empathy something that is easy for brands to embrace and enable





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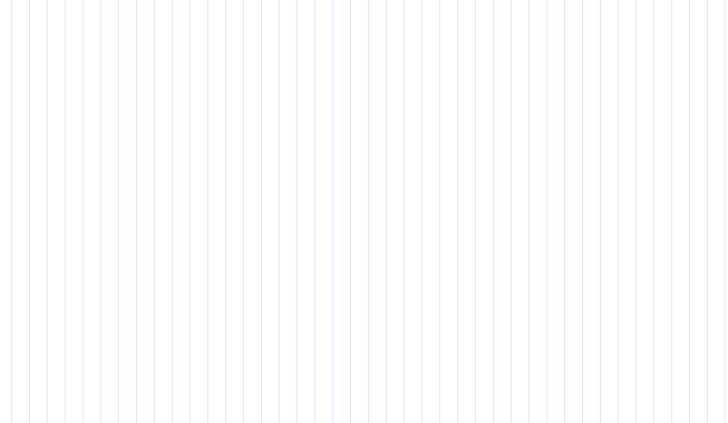
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INTRODUCTION



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WHY DID YOU DECIDE TO DOWNLOAD THIS EBOOK?

Did your CEO just declare that you were going to be the most consumer-centric brand on the planet? Perhaps you're being flooded with big data, but continue to see your team struggle to understand the consumer. Maybe you just know intuitively that it's smart to listen to the people who buy your products.

Whatever the case

Welcome! This ebook is for you.

Empathy can be a confusing concept to grasp, much less to put into practice. In this ebook, you'll learn the **BUSINESS VALUE OF DEVELOPING CONSUMER EMPATHY**. For years, Discuss.io has enabled brands to build consumer empathy across their organizations and we've learned a lot in that time. We've taken those learnings and operationalized the process of building consumer empathy in a way that's achievable and scalable.

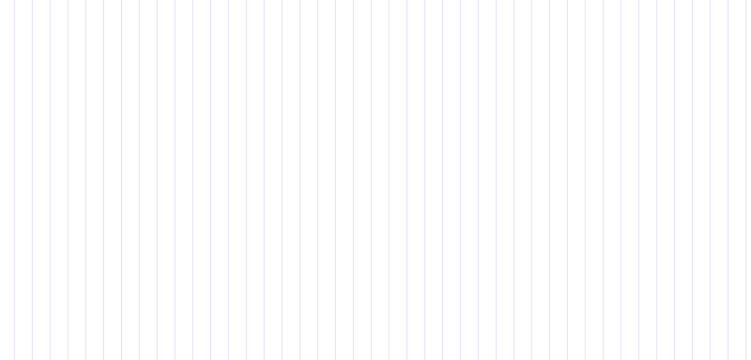
The purpose of this ebook is to share our learnings. In doing so, our goal is to make consumer empathy something that's easy for you to **EMBRACE** and **ENABLE** in order to make your organization more consumer-centric.





THE BIG DATA ERA AND HOW TO NAVIGATE IT





We live in an age of big data. Access to this data has vastly changed how we understand and interact with consumers. Quantitative data does an awesome job of telling us the “who, what, when, where, hows” of consumer behavior. Yet, we are swimming in this information without any context of the “why.”

Drowning in big data, brands often struggle to connect the dots in ways that allow them to be predictive or uncover reasons behind particular behaviors. Relying on quantitative data alone makes it hard to understand consumers holistically and can result in missing really big and important emerging trends.

A CAUTIONARY TALE

In her TED Talk, tech ethnographer Tricia Wang shares how overconfidence in big data can ignore other important emerging trends and lead to catastrophic results.

In her work for Nokia, Wang saw that, despite all logic, the iPhone was starting to gain popularity in the emerging

markets where Nokia was dominant — China, India, and Mexico. Wang presented these findings to Nokia, who dismissed them as anecdotal and unsupported by big data analyses. We now know that Nokia should have listened to Wang.

However, Nokia's not the only company to have ever made this mistake, which Wang calls the “Quantification bias,” or the “unconscious belief of valuing the measurable over the immeasurable.”

“Just relying on big data **alone** increases the chance that we'll miss something, while giving us the **illusion that we already know everything**” – **Tricia Wang**

Relying on any one method is never a good idea. True business impact comes at the intersection of big data and what Wang calls “thick” data (ie stories, emotions, conversations). At Discuss.io, we agree.





It's in these moments that we can uncover new insights to explore. By making the people who are responsible for producing consumer-facing outputs the ones closest to consumers, the whole organization wins. This allows them to make business decisions rooted in human needs, not just in assumptions about the future or whatever the historical data shows.

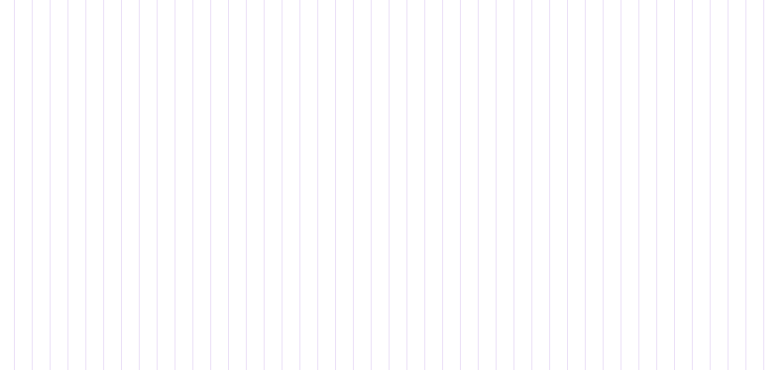
Learn from Nokia. Keep using big data - there's a lot to learn from it - but don't forget to integrate it with conversations that build empathy and understanding.

You can't measure what you don't know. You have to explore. This is where breakthroughs can emerge.



THE BUSINESS VALUE OF CONSUMER EMPATHY





Today, a lot of companies are aiming to be more consumer-centric. Having empathy for the consumer allows you to build a more consumer-centric organization. In order to build a consumer-centric organization, however, every employee, including the C-Suite needs to understand the consumer. Consumer-centric decisions are better decisions and will result in better products and marketing. Direct conversations make the consumers' experiences more relatable and more urgent.

Empathy-building conversations are not meant to be conclusive. They are intended to be informational and exploratory. They should prompt the team to think about challenges from new perspectives - the consumers' perspectives. Here are just some of the impacts of building an empathic brand:

MAKE MORE INFORMED CONSUMER-CENTRIC DECISIONS

When you focus on addressing real pain points, rather than on selling your products, you're able to access

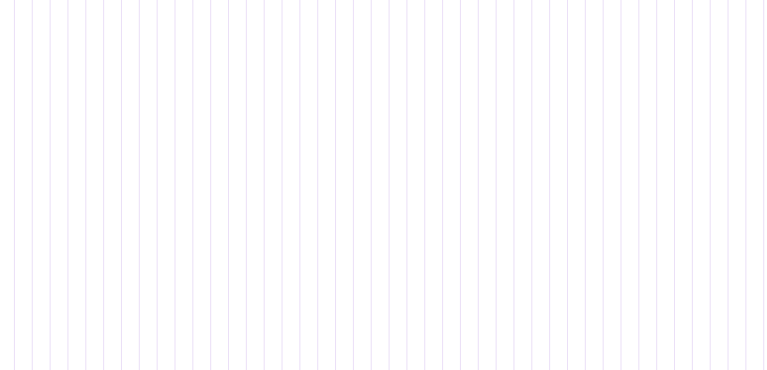
something that resonates on a much deeper level. Talking to consumers can help you to uncover these "hidden" needs and work them into your strategy and decision-making process.

CREATE MORE EFFECTIVE PRODUCTS AND MARKETING

A common challenge within organizations is that the people who design products and marketing campaigns are often not the same as those who buy them. While a young marketing manager in New York City might have some creative ideas, those ideas may not always resonate with their target market. It's important to recognize that the daily life of a young New Yorker is different than that of a soccer mom in suburban Indiana. So assumptions or gut instincts that are not accurate often lead to poor product and marketing decisions.

Creating a connection through conversation will help to bridge this gap. Our ways of life are constantly changing. It's important to encourage your teams to regularly check in with consumers so they can stay on the pulse. Doing this online, they're able to avoid unnecessary time or travel investments,





allowing consumer empathy to be achieved at scale.

BUILD TEAM EXCITEMENT

The people who are responsible for building products and marketing campaigns rarely get to talk first-hand with consumers. They may get to read a report about consumer sentiments or see some data about their behavior. When they suddenly have the chance to connect directly with the people who they are designing for every single day, it can unlock a lot of excitement and passion for these teams. Many clients have described the experience as a breath of fresh air for the creativity and strategy of their teams.

SHATTER PRECONCEPTIONS

Similar to how teams get excited when they have the chance to talk to consumers, these conversations are also valuable because they help to shatter preconceptions that these teams could have about consumers. Without talking to consumers, it's

easy to continue to believe and reinforce stereotypes and assumptions. Upon talking to a consumer for the first time, many will find their preconceptions shattered. Even though the initial conversation is only with one person, it often prompts the team to reevaluate their thinking, often leading to a better, more consumer-centric strategy. And if consumer conversations are inserted as regular components of the creative and innovation workflow, misinterpretations and preconceptions will be limited. With every conversation, understanding of the consumer continues to form, often prompting further, more formal, research.

UNCOVER UNMET NEEDS

Talking to consumers can be illuminating for many reasons. At times, consumers can take you completely by surprise with what they say. You can be talking to them and suddenly they'll say something that exposes you to a whole new world of possibility. By exposing unmet needs, you are able to build consumer-centric products make a bigger impact by addressing real client needs.



The background of the page is a dense, overlapping collage of numerous small, semi-transparent images of people in various poses and activities, creating a sense of a busy, diverse community. The collage is set against a gradient of purple and blue hues.

IN THEIR SHOES: SOME METHODS FOR BUILDING EMPATHY



When trying to understand a target market or audience who may be different than yourself, it's important to take a little extra time to understand their life, their likes and dislikes - to build empathy for them. Here are some ways to build empathy that we've seen be effective:

WATCH THEIR SHOWS, LISTEN TO THEIR MUSIC

Looking up which music and TV is popular within the demographic can be an effective way to understand the sort of messages, humor, tone, and aesthetic resonates with them. It's a great way to get in their frame of mind.

EXPLORE THEIR DIGITAL ENVIRONMENT

Having the opportunity to visit a consumer's home in person or shadow them around is a great gift, but it's invasive, expensive, and very hard to scale. In today's era, however, people spend a lot of time on the internet. This means that we have a new space to explore - one that's much more accessible. To get to know someone's interests, explore the Facebook pages that they enjoy, Instagram accounts they follow, Reddit and YouTube channels they subscribe to.

HAVE CONVERSATIONS

Having informal conversations can be a great way to get to know a consumer. Most people don't have a shortage of things to say about their interests or lives, and most consumers are willing to open up if they feel relaxed enough. Having a conversation can open up new topics of interest that you would have never thought to explore, making it great for exploratory work, as well as empathy-building.





OPERATIONALIZED CONSUMER EMPATHY

Discuss.io's Pulse Program



You've read about Nokia's mistake of not listening to consumer preferences. Fortunately for you, you're already ahead of the curve by downloading this ebook!

We believe that the solution to catastrophic failures is to become closer to consumers. By building empathy for them, you understand them better and make better business decisions.

Consumer understanding is awesome, but it's only as effective as you allow it to be. If isolated to a few individuals, or limited to infrequent interactions, it's impossible to make a true company-wide transformation.

Our clients have been coming to us for years to help them build empathy for their consumers. However, we understand why rolling out these programs can feel intimidating since the concept of "building empathy" is so vague. So we decided to operationalize our process to make it easier understand and roll out.

INTRODUCING THE DISCUSS.IO PULSE PROGRAM.

The Discuss.io Pulse Program was born out of client requests to build a distinct program with a repeatable workflow and process. Our Pulse Program helps brands operationalize and scale consumer closeness and build consumer empathy programs across their organizations through frequent, informal, and direct conversations with consumers, online. The program quickly recruits quality respondents to connect directly with brand teams via Discuss.io's purpose-built video platform. Our AI-based archive automatically turns key moments from the conversations into video clips that can be shared, stored, and aggregated with other moments across other conversations.

We can help you to roll out a successful program in your organization. To get started, we recommend setting up some time to talk to someone from our team. We will talk to you to understand the business problems that you're trying to solve and help you to design a program that will work for you.



Let's chat





THE MAKINGS OF A SUCCESSFUL EMPATHY PROGRAM DOS AND DON'TS





DEFINE YOUR INTENTIONS

Why are you wanting to build empathy?
What will success look like?

ASSIGN A CHAMPION

Having a champion is huge for the success of the program. We will work with the champion to make the program easy to roll out. However, teams need to see that someone internal is invested, otherwise they won't do it. Initially they may think of an empathy as more work, but they will soon find that it actually makes the rest of their work easier by eliminating the guesswork.

SCHEDULE A DROP-IN DAY

We suggest doing a drop-in day with consumers where people can get excited about talking to consumers. Setting up a live session with a consumer allows teams to feel what it's like to be in conversation with a consumer, without having to dive head-first into a full conversation of their own. It gives people a taste of the value of conversation and helps them to understand what you're asking them to do. They'll see it can be fun, casual, and comfortable to talk to consumers.

LUNCH AND LEARN

Scheduling a lunch and learn is a good way to convey the value of an empathy program. It gives you a chance to talk to your team instead of just sending an email. It can be paired with a drop-in, for those who don't have the time to commit to both. This is also a great opportunity to teach skills, like the basics of moderation.

SHARE WHAT YOU LEARNED

Debriefing with coworkers following your sessions is an important part of the process. Following your conversations, teams can easily search across projects and share auto-generated video clips of key moments.

It's important to note that learnings should not be taken as conclusive, but rather should be used as a jumping-off point for further exploration. Topics that emerge as trends are especially interesting to continue to explore.

Do



COMMON DEBRIEFING TACTICS:

- **In a strategic meeting or workshop:** Gather people to share a couple of key clips from their sessions and speaks to why they're relevant to the broader strategy and what the learnings prompted them to think more about.
- **In written form:** Write a short paragraph of key takeaways immediately following the session to capture what you thought was the most important
- **With highlight reels:** Send clips of key moments to team via email, internal messaging platform, or knowledge-sharing platform

Do



LAUNCH A PROJECT WITHOUT EXPLAINING THE VALUE TO YOUR TEAM

Hosting lunch and learns and drop-ins are great ways to convey the value of a empathy program. Discuss.io will also provide you with myriad support documents for your team for every step of the process.

LEAVE YOUR TEAM WITHOUT SUPPORT

The fastest path to abandonment is to leave your team in the lurch. We will provide you with all the support and documentation necessary to make your program a success. Once people get acquainted, they'll become comfortable hosting and sharing their conversations with the team. However, if you have questions or suggestions on how to improve the program and the platform, please don't hesitate to reach out.

USE EMPATHY AS A REPLACEMENT FOR FORMAL RESEARCH

There are several differences between the formal market research that's conducted on Discuss.io and a consumer empathy

program. A consumer empathy program is specifically designated to be informal, exploratory, and scalable. Empathy programs are often linked to a certain topic, but research objectives are generally undefined. Formal research and conclusive decisions should be left to the Insights professionals. Empathy programs are designed to build empathy that will result in more passion from your team, understanding for the consumer, and to insight better strategic thinking and decision-making.

For a full list of the guidelines that define a Discuss.io's Pulse Program, please consult this [document](#).

Don't





CASES Studies



Developing A Consumer-Centric Organization With Limited Resources



THE CHALLENGE:

Telenet is the leading provider of converged connected entertainment and business solutions in Belgium. However, they face a common challenge: they have a small market research team (3 people), despite having a rather large marketing team (150+ people). As a result, the market research team was left doing a lot of project management, leading to less time for strategic, insights-driven guidance and actual activation of insights.

Telenet's market research team is deeply familiar with their consumers, but they aren't the team actually responsible for producing products, go-to-market and ad campaigns. Their challenge is to continuously update marketing teams on the changing trends and thinking of consumers. With a small team, this is often hard to scale.



The small market research team at Telenet reports to a much larger marketing team of 150 people

They had limited resources to provide insights-driven guidance

THE SOLUTION:

The market research team spearheaded an initiative that would enable marketers to speak directly with consumers. The conversations served multiple purposes: from validating assumptions, to pain and gain analysis, and pure exploration.

Wanting to change the cultural fabric of the organization to be more consumer-centric, it was critical for the initiative to be scalable in a way that would encourage marketers to ask questions as soon as they had them. They leveraged their pre-existing network of subscribers around Belgium and used Discuss.io to have conversations around the country. In having the conversations online, the marketing team could ask questions quickly and casually, from their desks or homes, without losing time to travel.

THE RESULTS:

When marketers were empowered to connect with consumers directly, they quickly developed a deeper understanding of consumers' opinions, needs, and preferences. The initiative had a powerful multiplier effect. The conversations made the marketing team enthusiastic about the impact of their work, encouraging many to share their learnings with others on their team.

Ultimately, these conversations allowed the team to sharpen their creative assets and product positioning, test marketing communications, better understand the category, and become inspired by consumers.



Using Discuss.io, the Telenet market research team empowered marketers to speak directly with consumers in a way that was:

- Scalable
- Repeatable
- Allowed them to answer questions as soon as they arose

Having discussions directly with consumers had a greater impact for the people on the marketing team than reading a report from an agency.

Developing a relationship was impactful and energizing, leading to a deeper understanding and appreciation for consumers.

Enabling Unilever's Consumer-Centric Strategy



THE CHALLENGE:

Unilever has a long-standing commitment to keeping consumers at the core of their business and decision-making. However, budget limitations make it challenging to build one-on-one connections with consumers who live outside of their teams' immediate geographies. Thus, teams across Unilever were looking for solutions that enable them to be consumer-centric, while avoiding the cost and hassle associated with frequent travel.

Exploring a new retail channel, a CMI team at Unilever needed to gain a better understanding of the shopping behaviours of consumers in the UK who purchased a particular Unilever product. These conversations needed to happen within a short time-frame, as they would be leveraged during an upcoming strategy workshop. And it was critical for the team members to engage in these conversations first-hand in order to build their own understanding of the consumer so they could participate in the discussions in a more informed way.



Consumer connection is critical, but budget and travel limitations make it challenging. Unilever teams needed to find an innovative work around

Consumer perspectives can be used in the front-end of innovation to inform future strategies

THE SOLUTION:

Unilever used Discuss.io to recruit and host these conversations on their live video platform. Over the course of two weeks, 30 members of the CMI team engaged in one-on-one conversations online with consumers. Since these conversations were conducted from consumers' homes and not central locations, Discuss.io was able to recruit from a more representative swath of consumers dispersed around the UK, not only those located in metropolitan areas. Discuss.io's end-to-end solution enabled the team to engage directly with consumers themselves in order to hear first-hand how consumers went about the shopping process. Following the workshop, the team compiled a highlight video of the findings, allowing the insights to be shared and rewatched repeatedly.

THE RESULTS:

Having connected directly with consumers beforehand, the brand managers joined the workshop equipped with relevant perspectives, personal stories and insights, which they shared throughout the day. It made for a workshop that was energized and externally focused, rather than corporate and insular, and made it feel as if the consumers were right there in the room.

They were able to further infuse this energy throughout the organization by clipping together highlights from the sessions in a reel. Leveraging the video recordings allowed them to keep the voice of the consumer alive long after the workshop and influencing future decision-making. Unilever's long-standing mission of developing consumer-centric strategy was accelerated, simplified, and made scalable by partnering with Discuss.io.



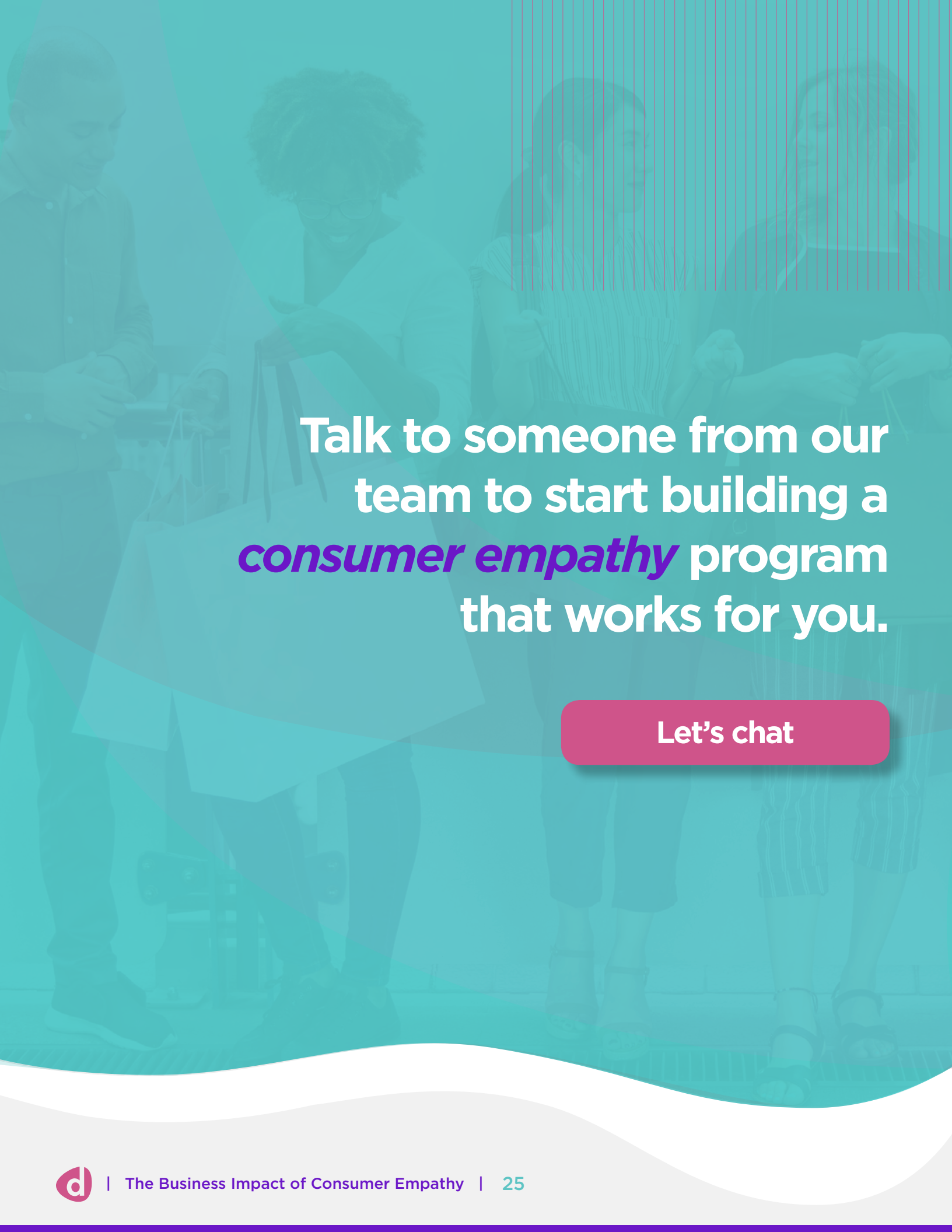
Discuss.io provided an end-to-end solution that allowed Unilever to talk to 30 consumers in the two weeks leading up to the strategic workshop

The team came to the workshop energized and with a consumer-centric perspective

Attendees cited and shared clips from their conversations with consumers

The workshop resulted in a strategy and direction influenced by an understanding of the consumer





Talk to someone from our
team to start building a
consumer empathy program
that works for you.

Let's chat



