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Briefing
From the
Field:

Strategy in Economic Uncertainty:

→ Staying focused
on **insights**
that matter.

POV by



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Uncertainty isn't just an economic buzzword; it's a force shaping behavior in real time. As August 2025 unfolds, the impact of tariffs on international trade & consumer prices, along with uncertainty about the U.S. Central Bank's timeline for lowering interest rates, has left executives in the U.S. & abroad reportedly fearful & cautious (1)👉. Similarly, consumers are uncertain about what this means for the cost of everyday items—and many report restricting their spending or delaying purchases of discretionary items.

This palpable caution is a new reality - one we see reflected daily in conversations with both clients and consumers.

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Even as companies reduce budgets for strategic insights, we firmly believe that those insights are critically important.

Insights are (often disproportionately important) inputs into critical strategic decisions and, as such, must remain a priority. This perspective is echoed by leaders across industries, including Deloitte U.S. CEO Jason Girzadas. As he recently noted:



"Recent shifts in policy, evolving trade dynamics, and heightened economic uncertainty have significantly dampened CEO optimism. In this environment, the key takeaway is the critical need for adaptability and forward-thinking leadership. By embracing change and innovation, there is an opportunity to transform uncertainty into a catalyst for sustainable long-term growth." (2)👉

The economic landscape has made it clear: **the old playbook for gathering insights isn't sufficient.** With budgets tightening & priorities shifting, a new approach is needed to continue connecting with consumers. Based on our experience through other periods of economic uncertainty, here are **five critical factors for making sure that you can capture the strategic insights needed to succeed through this challenging time.**



Stay focused on consumer needs - not behaviors.

In periods of uncertainty, buying strategies change. Consumers may downgrade a purchase to take advantage of a lower-price alternative. They may delay a large purchase until absolutely necessary. They may reduce discretionary spending (such as eating out at fast-casual restaurants) and take greater advantage of promotional pricing on essential items.

While behaviors change, needs rarely do.

Rather than chasing changing consumer behaviors, we recommend staying focused on understanding—and meeting—those stable needs that underlie the relationships consumers have with products, brands, and services.



Weigh the merits of strategic vs tactical insights programs.

It's worth re-evaluating your research priorities during times of economic uncertainty.

Finding the ideal balance between strategic & tactical insights can reveal opportunities for both immediate gains & long-term growth.

And companies may find that these learnings reinforce that values, brands, and strategies should remain strong & steady - in effect, prompting brands to double down on what's working rather than respond reactively to an uncertain market.



Re-think timelines.

As any reading of the news will show, the market is changing rapidly. The resulting **question isn't only how to manage reduced budgets, but also how to get learnings quickly**. This has implications for project scope, methodologies, and deliverables.

You may find that nimble, agile research initiatives provide the needed flexibility to learn quickly & iteratively build on what has been learned to obtain increasingly relevant & insightful learnings. We recommend working with trusted partners to optimize timelines in order to keep insights relevant - and demonstrate wins internally.



Lean on trusted partners & providers.



In periods of uncertainty, your relationships with trusted research partners become more important than ever. Instead of viewing them as vendors, consider them partners in navigating this economic climate.

Insights providers often work across multiple industries and have a pulse on how consumers are adapting to the current environment. They can be invaluable partners in helping you design or refine research approaches that fit within constrained budgets.

By sharing transparent information about your needs and the constraints you're facing, you can work together to ensure that critical insights continue to flow, even when resources are tight.

This kind of collaborative approach can help you tap into a broader network of learnings and expertise.

As an aside, it's critical that the **project briefing** include a discussion for how the current environment is driving or affecting the engagement so that insight providers can pivot where needed to help deliver.

Finally, as we've **said before**, insights benefit from continued consumer empathy. Corporations and consumers alike are feeling the effects of economic uncertainty, and brands that acknowledge the reality of the market - things feel unstable, consumers aren't sure what the future holds, etc. - have an opportunity to connect meaningfully with their audience. And this has direct implications for the quality of insights. Honesty yields more truthful responses from consumers as they feel heard & understood.

Empathy is an investment in quality insights.



ABE (Always Be Empathetic).

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At Ahzul, we are passionate about insights that inform, provoke, and inspire clients to make informed decisions. And we care deeply about helping clients better understand (and make meaningful connections with) consumers - especially in times of uncertainty.

Please get in touch if you'd like to discuss how we can assist you and your insights team in navigating this current moment.