

Leo Burnett

POP pulse

British Life in Limbo

And how brands can help

The Ambition



At Leo Burnett, we believe Populist Creativity helps brands grow.

So, in collaboration with The Outsiders, we have created PopPulse - a proprietary nationwide research platform, designed to pop the marketing bubble and plug brands into what the people of Britain are really feeling.

How? PopPulse listens to the listeners – the hairdressers, beauticians, bar staff, personal trainers, and decorators that hear what people are really talking about, each and every day. The result is an understanding of our nation's truest emotions and a rare resource for any brand looking to put their finger on the pulse of popular culture.

How we did it?

We Listened To The Listeners.

The Brits who, each and every day, have hundreds of emotionally honest discussions as part of their jobs. We tasked this panel to involve a list of pre-defined questions within their conversations and then report back at the end of each working day. These "active listeners" comprised 7 respondents from the north of England, and 6 from the south (see right for more detail).

We then corroborated these findings with five more traditional group discussions with respondents from across the UK, and depth interviews with five of our "people experts":

- A neuroscientist*
- An anthropologist*
- A cultural consultant*
- A personal finance journalist*
- A trends consultant*





**What we
found**

No doubt about it, times are hard

You'll have sensed it in the air. You'll have read about it in the news. And, you'll almost certainly have felt it in your pocket.

It's tough out there and people really didn't shy away from telling us. Everyone, from all walks of life, is feeling it. Inflation has impacted every aspect of daily life, from the food shop, to the commute, to the basic expectation of a warm home. As one of our active listeners put it:

"Everything's moving, apart from wages".

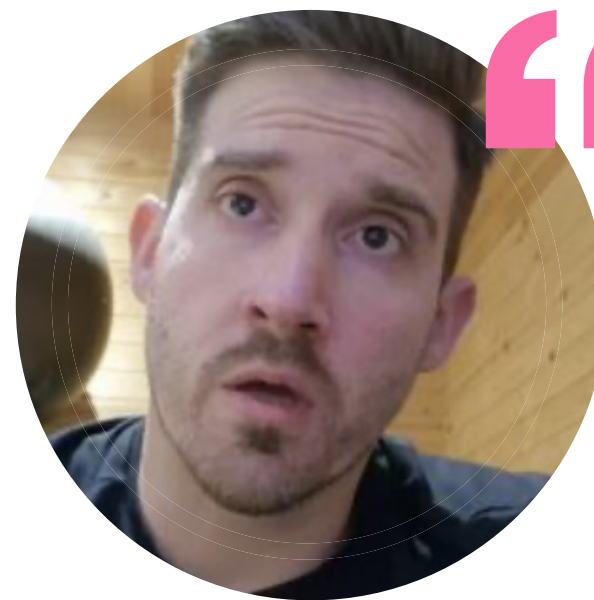
People are even starting to question the very meaning of work, with their wages barely covering their most basic needs, never mind their treats.

In short, the British public are up against it.

Cost of living crisis: where households will feel the pinch in the months ahead

Young people ditching ambitions over UK cost of living crisis, research finds

UK retail sales: Shoppers rein in spending as cost of living bites



“When you work a lot, it's like, “What do I work for?” You're spending so much on everything.”

- Lee, Personal Trainer



**But, things aren't
all f*cked.**

Yet...

**Instead, people
are coping with**



Life in Limbo.

**“The UK is stuck in a liminal stage.
It’s in some form of transition but doesn’t
quite know what it’s transitioning to.”**

- Dr John Curran, Anthropologist

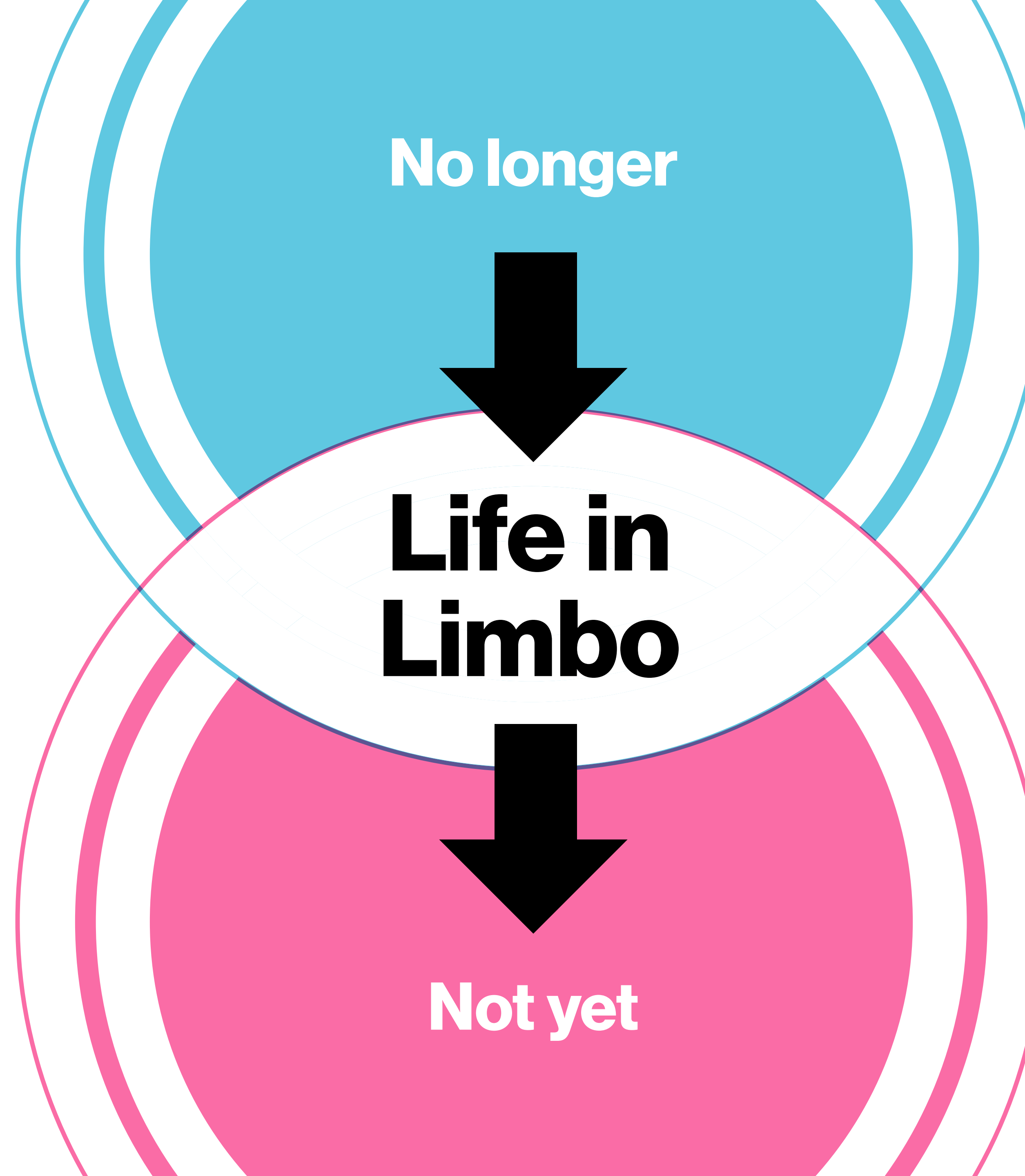
The predominant feeling is one of uncertainty.

Rather than feeling that their lives were over, we more regularly heard people wondering where their lives were going next.

There was a lack of faith that their political leaders knew where they were leading. That they wouldn't just be confronted with yet another world-changing event. That their hard work would actually pay off. That it made any sense at all to make plans and invest in the future.

With a brighter past a distant memory and a positive future a foggy uncertainty, the British public feels they are living in a state of "inbetween-ness".

We are all "Inbetweeners" now and we're living our Lives in Limbo.





**The
coping
strategy
the public
is using**

**Learning to live
in the moment**



The coping strategy the public is using

Faced with an uncertain future, simple mental activities like planning, aspiring, or even just delaying gratification are becoming increasingly difficult to engage in.

Instead, people are now learning to live in the moment. Just focussing on getting themselves and their families through the days and weeks as best they can. Learning to deal with the quirks of Limbo and turning them to their advantage. Coping in ways that make life right now feel that little bit simpler, closer, lighter or richer.



**So, what should
brands do?**

The one rule to rule them all

“There’s always a hidden motive when they give the spiel about how they care about people.”

- *Ali, Hairdresser*

Don't care.

Help!

People told us loud and clear: they don't want our sympathy. They don't believe it. They don't have time for it. And, frankly, they wouldn't know what to do with it.

Instead, we need to take our care and actually do something helpful with it. And that doesn't have to mean lowering prices. Instead, we just have to lend our brands' inherent scale and expertise to solving one of the many anxieties standing in the way, as our customers attempt to cope with a Life in Limbo...

**4 key challenges
brands can help with**



1. The Mental Tangle

Like human calculators, people now have to painstakingly weigh up all of life's decisions - big and small.

This brings with it a sense of cognitive overload and, when things inevitably go wrong, emotional overload too. Of course, this amount of emotion rarely helps us make good decisions, and so the mental tangle deepens...

"It's like a constant cycle of overthinking. Can I afford this, can I buy this, will I be able to get by next month?"
- 18-30, Kids in HH, UK

How brands can help?

Pick a Knot

Don't worry. No brand can be expected to unravel the whole tangle. Instead, just look for one knot. Specifically, one your brand already has expertise and credibility in solving. Then when you're happy you've found it, go out of your way to help your customers unpick it.

In doing this, you'll not only remove some of your customer's stress, but will also help to make them feel more empowered and ready to take on the next knot. And the next.

'Had enough of experts? Record levels of Brits now want them in charge.'

61%

- City AM



A stylized tree graphic composed of thick, rounded lines in shades of green and blue. The main trunk is a thick blue line that curves to the right and then down. Several branches extend from the trunk, some in shades of green and others in shades of blue. The branches are also thick and rounded, creating a simple, abstract representation of a tree.

2. Feeling Frozen out

For decades, British society has been made increasingly individualistic. A heady mix of university-fed aspirations, image-obsessed media, and consumerist hype-culture mean that our attentions have been trained on ourselves.

But with this pressure for self-improvement now sitting in direct tension with today's economic environment, it has become all too easy to feel frozen out and left behind...

How brands can help?

Break the Ice

Since the pandemic, people have yearned for collectivism and the cost-of-living crisis has only amplified this. Nurturing a support network of like-minded connections not only makes us feel less emotionally isolated, but can even make us less financially frozen out too, as community recommendations unpick the knots we can't tackle alone.

The only problem: us Brits aren't very good at making the first move, crossing the dance floor and breaking the ice. Instead, we need something external to share and bond over (TV shows, cups of tea and gossip have played this role for years!)

This is what brands can now provide for their customers – the services, experiences and content that help the public break the ice and come together.

**“I've got people
by my side, people
going through
the same stuff”**

*- 40+, No kids in the HH/empty
nesters, UK*



A stylized graphic of a roller coaster track and cars. The track is orange and yellow, curving upwards and then downwards. Three orange roller coaster cars are shown on the upward-sloping part of the track. The cars are simple shapes with two hands sticking out of each. The background is white.

3. The Emotional Rollercoaster

There's been much said about how bad everything is. And it ain't great.

But it's also not *all* bad. Many people - especially those from lower income households - proudly talked about their resilience and how they were getting on with things.

And it's also not all bad, *all* the time. Instead, Life in Limbo is better characterised as being quite "up and down" - an emotional rollercoaster with more frequent lows, still punctuated by happier highs.

It's more intense and far more challenging, but the nation has had to learn to ride it...

How brands can help?

Share a smile



Here's the hard bit: brands can't make this all better. Things are genuinely difficult right now and no amount of cheerful content is going to fundamentally solve that. However, we can help make it feel slightly better in the moment, helping to soften the lows and heighten the highs.

And, whilst this might seem like a modest role for brands, it also couldn't be a more important one. Right now, enjoying a little escapism, a bit of "blitz spirit", or just a good old laugh are the things getting the nation through their days. So, if your brand can be the partner that provides the nation with just a little of this, then there really is no higher calling.

“Enjoying simple things like going to the park and playing a group game of rounders”

- Parents of Young Families, Kids Aged 0-7, UK



The 2 most popular TV shows in the UK at the moment - *Thinkbox*

4. An Uncertain Future

“Noooooo future. Noooooo future. Noooooo future for youuuuuu!”

In 1977, Johnny Rotten couldn't have captured the public's feelings of uncertainty any more concisely or coruscatingly. And, unfortunately, those emotions have now returned in full force.

Between endless financial disruption, climate change, global conflict (e.g. Ukraine, Israel, the South China Sea), and declining trust in the government, it has become impossible for people to foresee what now lies just around the corner.



How brands can help?

Build their Emotional Rainy Day Fund

With an uncertain future ahead, the British public are looking to make today count. People are fed up of waiting for the good times to arrive and, instead, want to make their life in the present as meaningful and full of experiences as possible. This, at least in part, comes from a strong desire to create memories – ones that prove these “Limbo years” weren’t wasted and that insulate us against the possibility of less fun days ahead.

So, how can your brand help them build these emotional rainy day funds? The trick will be to be worry less about scale of production and more about scale of emotion, looking simply to facilitate those moments that - whether big, small, everyday or impromptu – bring people together to make life in Limbo, a life worth living.

“We took the kids away at the weekend”

*- Parents of Young Families,
Kids Aged 0-7, UK*



Leo Burnett

Thank you!

You can now get your brand involved in the next phase of PopPulse.

Participating brands benefit from bespoke questions, category specific insights and tailored recommendations. *Sounds good, right?*

To find out more just email info@leoburnett.co.uk