



Future of the

A brief for
2025 and
beyond





Charlie Carpenter
CEO at Creativebrief

Welcome to the third iteration of our Future of the Pitch Survey (previously 2019 and 2022), in which we have surveyed over 100 brand CMOs and agency CEOs to take the temperature of industry sentiment around pitching today.

At Creativebrief we have been at the beating heart of this conversation now for nearly 8 years, leading the industry in a drive for modernisation around a process that has changed little in recent history despite an unprecedented time of disruption in all other areas.

There is much complexity around the topic, but we have worked hard to distill our stated aim in this context to provide simplicity and clarity for the industry at a time when leadership in this arena is desperately needed; amongst general confusion, disagreement in direction and often clouded thinking.

The resulting focus is single-minded: create modern-day processes that increase accuracy in decision making on the part of brands to select the right partners,

and that simultaneously also significantly decreases time and resource investment for agencies. Everyone wins if the industry can galvanise around this vision.

It's also fair to say that the results from this year's survey come in amongst a febrile climate, with 2025 proving one of the most challenging years in recent history for the marketing and communications industry.

The economy is stuttering at home and unnerved more widely by global instability, budgets are lean, AI is disrupting at pace, brand teams are in a seemingly constant state of organisational flux, and agencies are grappling with how to run profitably and retain talent.

Against this backdrop, there is intense discontent with the way the industry approaches pitching/ agency selection today. This has been the case for some time with agencies, but the picture is now more clear with brands too - 68% of CMOs feel the pitch is no longer fit-for-purpose (84% of agency

CEOs agree). In addition to this, 68% of brands and 72% of agencies don't believe the pitch provides a true picture of what the other party would be like to work with.

Just those stats alone beg fundamental questions about why change is so slow to materialise. Yet the challenge, as ever, is on reaching a unanimous agreement at an industry level for a future direction of travel - although the positive is that there are some clear alternatives emerging as potentially viable routes forward.

The most consistent themes returned to are either running full pitches but over significantly reduced timeframes, removing the requirement for creative solutions from the pitching equation entirely (leaning on strategic thinking and approach), or focusing the process on interrogating and defining the brief as client and agency team together - rather than racing to answer one that already exists.

However, points of view on the 'right' approach vary significantly

amongst vocal industry leaders, and there are clear differences of opinion between brands and agencies too - with brands seeming to favour less fundamental change, and agencies more interested in significant innovation in the arena of pitching. Evolution vs revolution is the raging debate as always.

All of the above doesn't even take into account how technology and the apparently unstoppable rise of AI might support significant change and streamlining in future, to the potential benefit of all parties. That's almost an entire topic in its own right, but the survey touches on it and expect to see more depth from Creativebrief on this soon.

What is clear from our report in 2025 is that if change in a meaningful and cohesive way is to happen, then further consensus must be reached. The industry should steel itself to galvanise, consult, align and build alliances intent on action rather than simply more words, debate, disagreement and discontent.

AN INDUSTRY VIEW ON THE PITCH

01

A feeling of discontent around pitching continues in the industry. That said, there are notable advances in specific areas and our reading of the figures this year is that brands and agencies have become more aligned in their feeling that meaningful change must now come about.

The feeling of discontent around pitching is not new, and in some senses the stats from our survey in 2025 do not fundamentally vary from those in 2019 and 2022.

That said, there are notable advances in specific areas and our reading of the figures this year is that brands and agencies have become more aligned in their feeling that meaningful change must now come about.

84% of agencies and 68% of brands (a significant majority of both parties) reported that they do not see the way the industry approaches pitching today to be 'fit-for-purpose'. This is a notable step-change with only 59% of brands stating the same in 2022.

Almost half of brands (47%) now feel that expecting agencies to provide 'creative' for free during pitches is a factor in the ongoing commoditisation and devaluation of creativity, versus just a third (33%)

in 2022 – with a recognition that both parties ultimately suffer.

More than half (51%) of agencies feel that the industry's approach to pitching today poses a long-term threat to the industry's successful future, which is a stark reminder to all of the existential nature of this issue if not handled deftly and decisively.

What is concerning is that the launch of the IPA & ISBA's Pitch Positive Pledge back in May 2022 appeared to herald the arrival of a more enlightened era in this regard, and there is no doubt that it did a solid job of raising awareness of some of the issues.

Whilst some around that time reported a period of better and more responsible pitching, sadly our survey in 2025 highlights a sense of a reversal of any positive behaviours amongst a tightening economic climate and growing financial pressures for all.

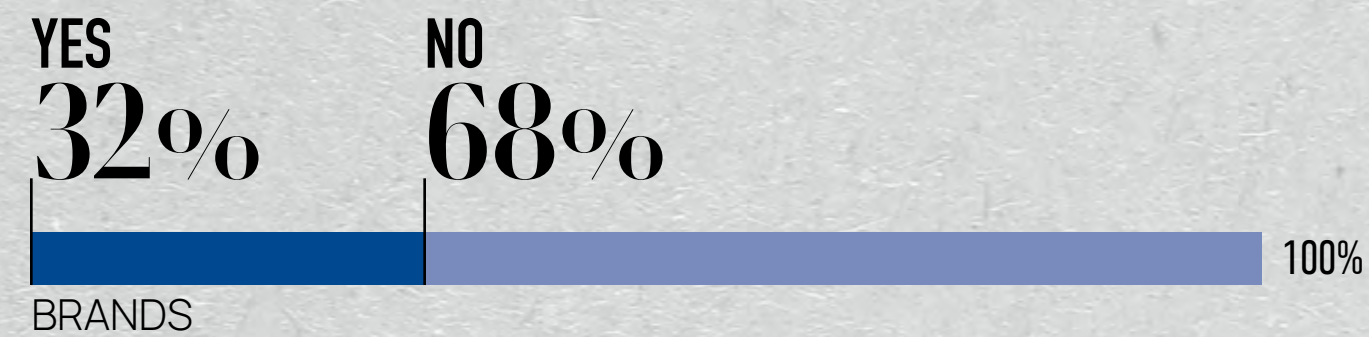
Many point to a lengthening of the timeframe over which pitches are run, an increase in the amount of free work requested from agencies during this window – and an extending of the timeline for ultimate decision making at the end of it all.

Reading between the lines of the results in 2025 it seems fair to say that there appears to be a growing disparity between the intentions and actual behaviours of many brands. Much is driven by business realities and internal scrutiny of course, but change is needed if we are to move forward.

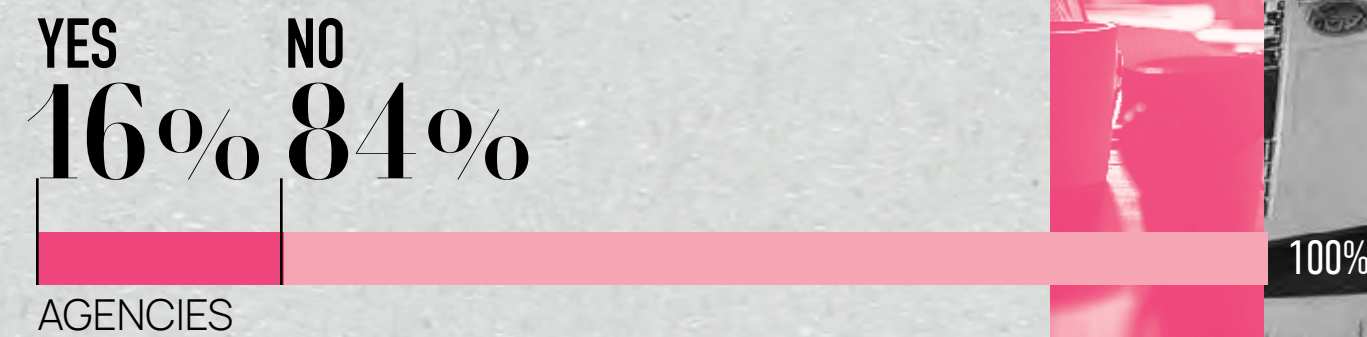
Many point to a lengthening of the timeframe over which pitches are run, an increase in the amount of free work requested from agencies during this window.



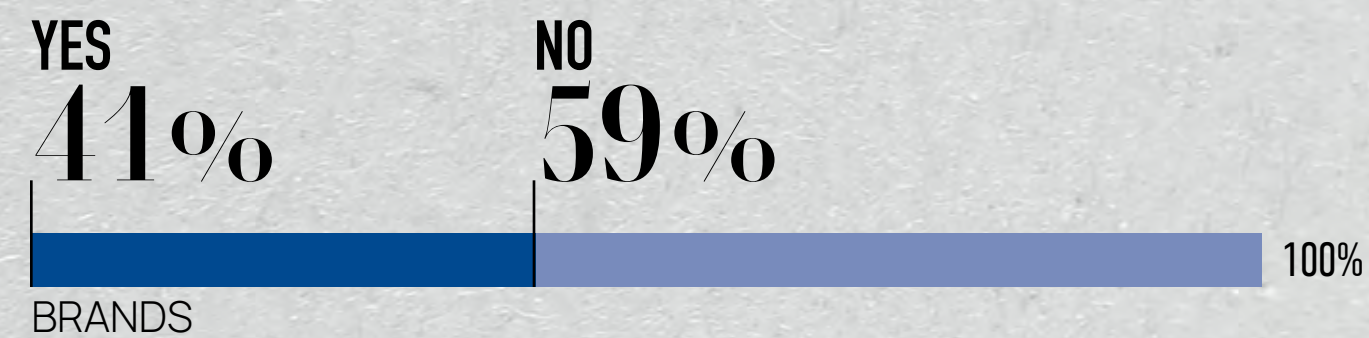
**20
25** In your opinion, is the way the industry approaches pitching today fit for purpose in 2025?



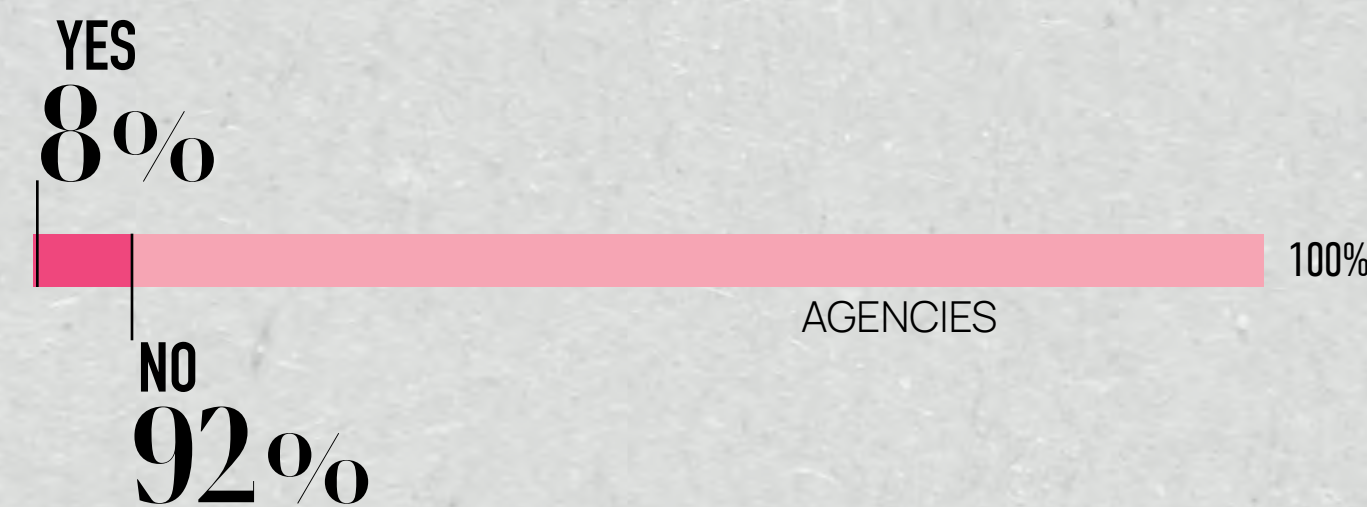
vs.



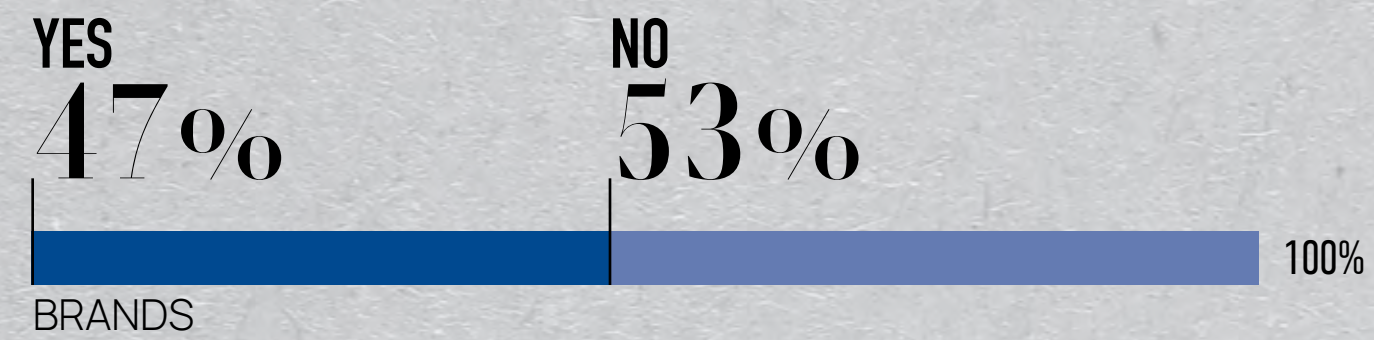
**20
22** The traditional pitch process is fit for purpose today.



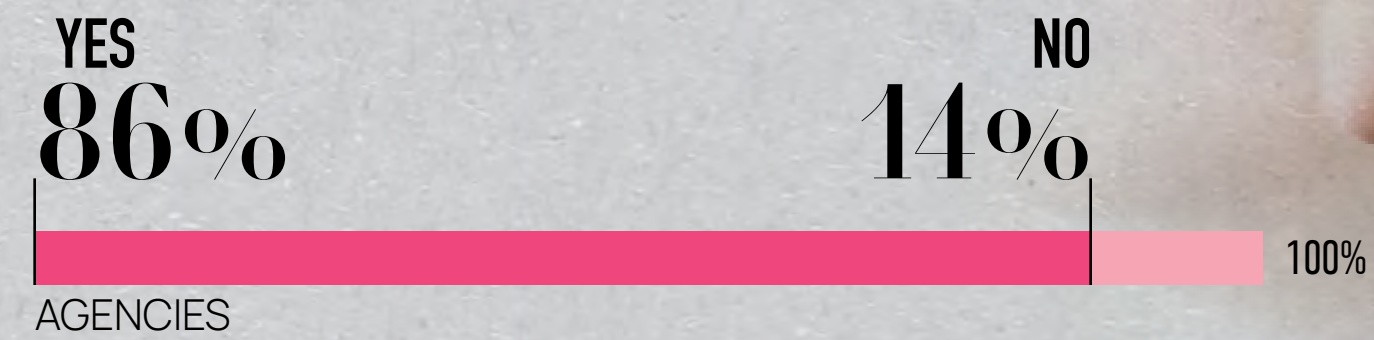
vs.



**20
25** In your opinion, is the expectation for agencies to give away ideas for free during pitches a factor in the commoditisation of creativity?



vs.



**20
22** The traditional pitch process is a culprit in the ongoing commoditisation of creativity.



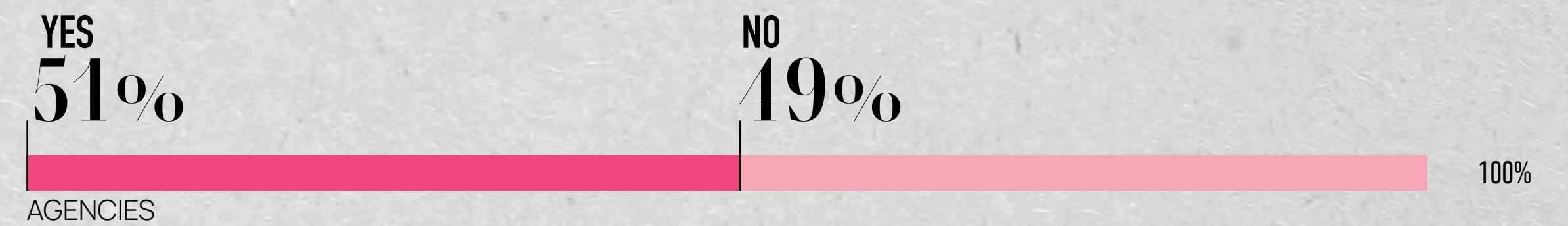
vs.



Do you believe the industry's approach to pitching today poses a long-term threat to the successful future of the industry?

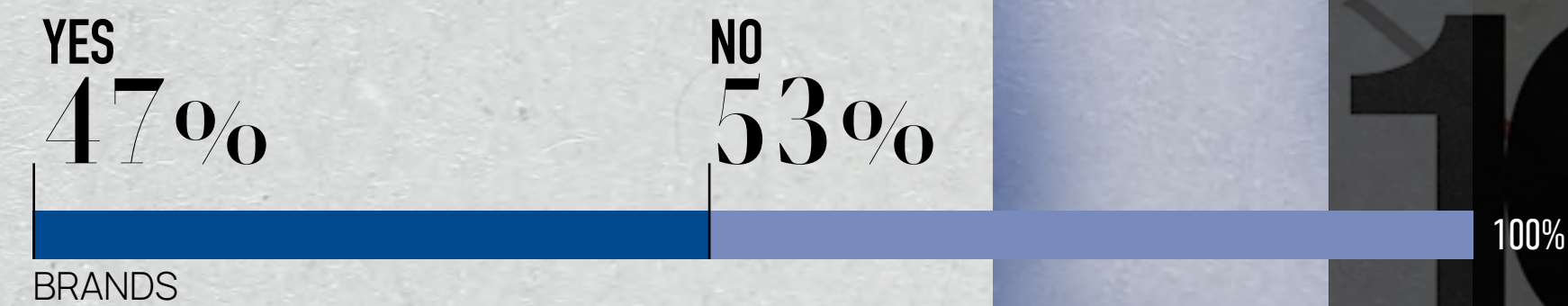


VS.

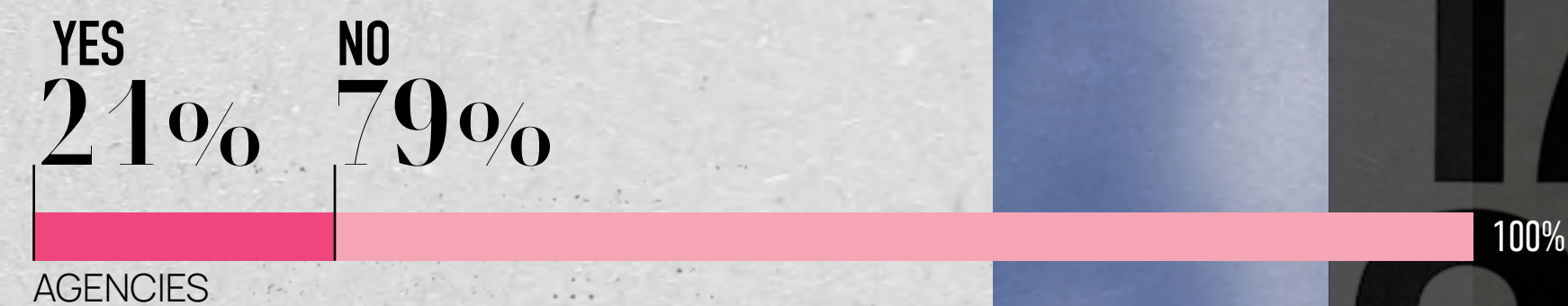


An industry view on the pitch

In your opinion,
is the way the
industry approaches
pitching today in
line with modern day
expectations around
responsible and ethical
business practice?



vs.



“

My experience is generally that if pitch processes rely too heavily on agencies producing creative work, then they are rarely successful in ultimately helping brands to reach the right decision on who the best partner is for them. As such, the industry's current approach to pitching feels outmoded and in need of a shake-up – especially operating within the intensified economic climate of today.

Where pitch processes are run with thought and care, designed to be collaborative and speedy (though not rushed), and focused more deeply on chemistry, culture, philosophy and strategic direction is where I personally have seen the greatest successes. This tends to be what leads to longevity and impact in both relationship and work.”

Cara Chambers

Chief Marketing Officer

c&c group plc



THE CURRENT STATE OF PITCHING

02

There is remarkable agreement between agency and brand leaders in some areas of the survey. Yet we also saw fascinating differences of opinion from both parties when asked what they have observed in general industry-wide pitch behaviours in recent times.



Again, there is actually remarkable agreement between agency and brand leaders in some areas of the survey.

When it comes to the question of whether the industry's approach to pitching today provides a true sense to each party of what the other would be like to work with - 72% and 68% respectively opined that it did not.

This points toward just how deeply ingrained industry 'muscle memory' is and how difficult it can be to bring about change in an environment captivated by entrenched and deeply rooted behaviours.

There is seemingly universal agreement that culture, ways of working, philosophy and ambition are major factors in how well brands and agencies are able to work together - yet whilst more than

Twice the number of agencies compared to brands (33% vs 16%) reported in the last 5 years that they believe pitches have become longer. With three times as many brands as agencies stating a belief that ALL pitches they have been involved in during that timeframe have led to successful and enduring partnerships (24% vs 7%).

Materially differing viewpoints that point to some degree of self-delusion on the part of both sides.

However, more alignment was seen again when both parties were asked how they would run/would like a pitch to be run if one was embarked upon in the near future.

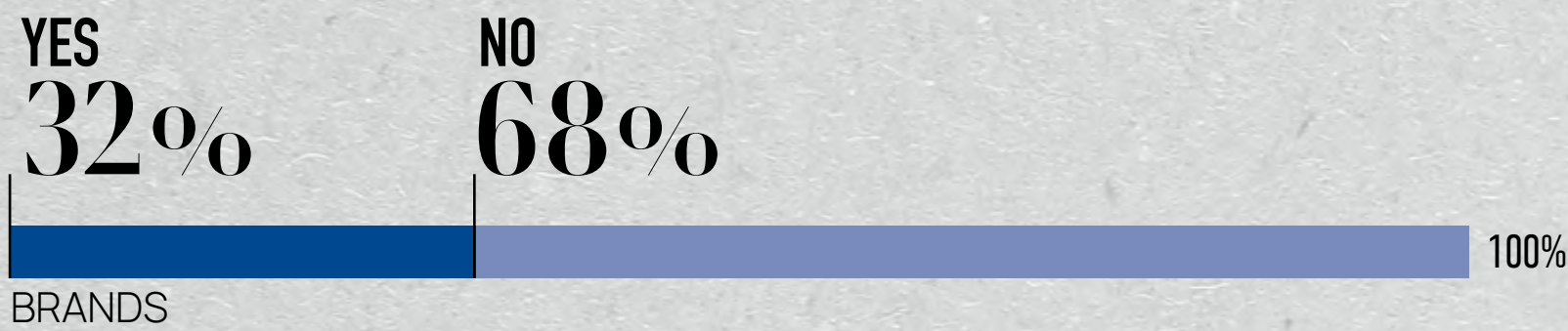
82% of agencies and 79% of brands claimed they would opt for an 'alternative' approach, signalling a clear acceptance of flaws in the more 'traditional' process. Yet the question remains, is there any agreement around what that 'alternative' looks like?

2/3 of both sides agree the current approach does not accurately identify this, real change is yet to come about.

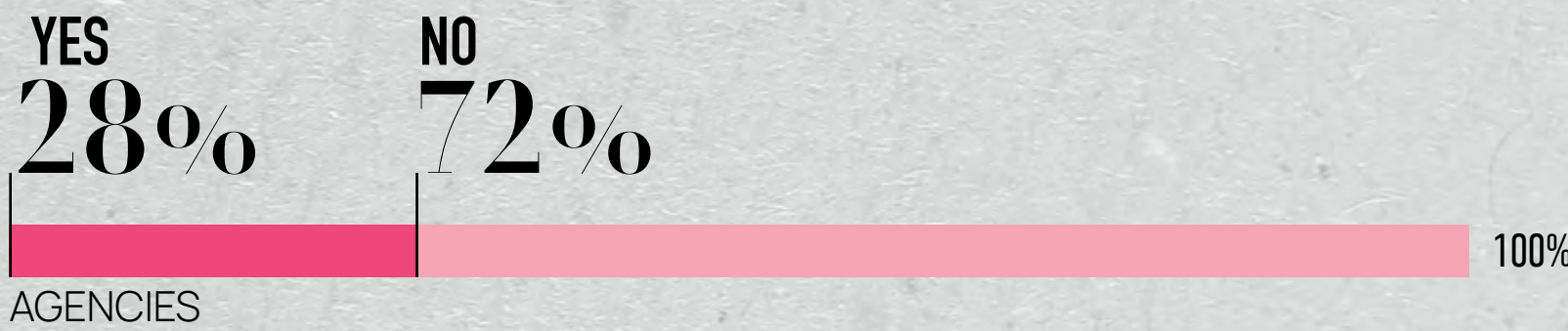
We also saw fascinating differences of opinion from both parties when asked what they have observed in general industry-wide pitch behaviours in recent times.



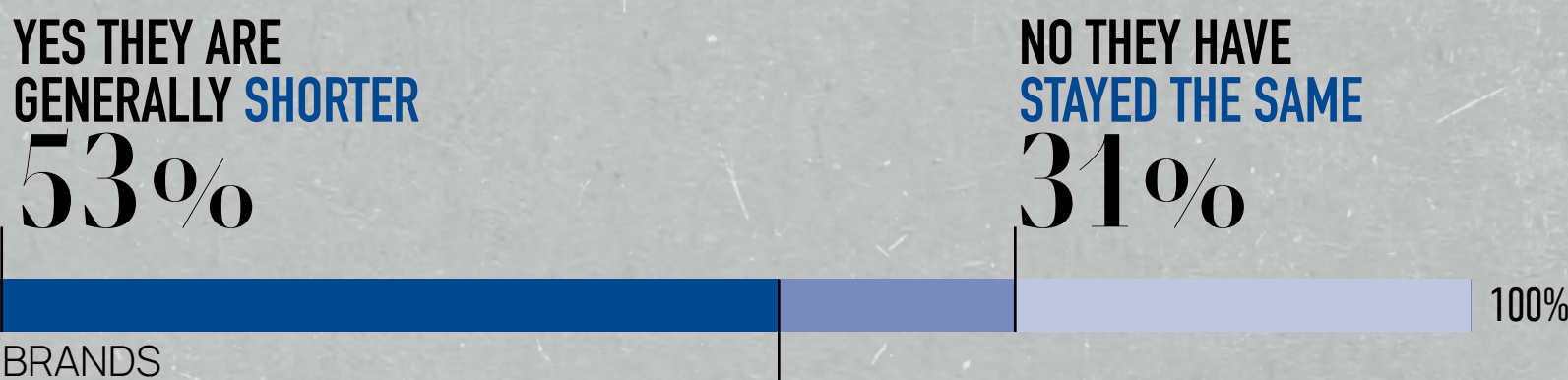
In your opinion, does the industry's approach to pitching today provide a true sense of what the agency/brand involved would be like to work with?



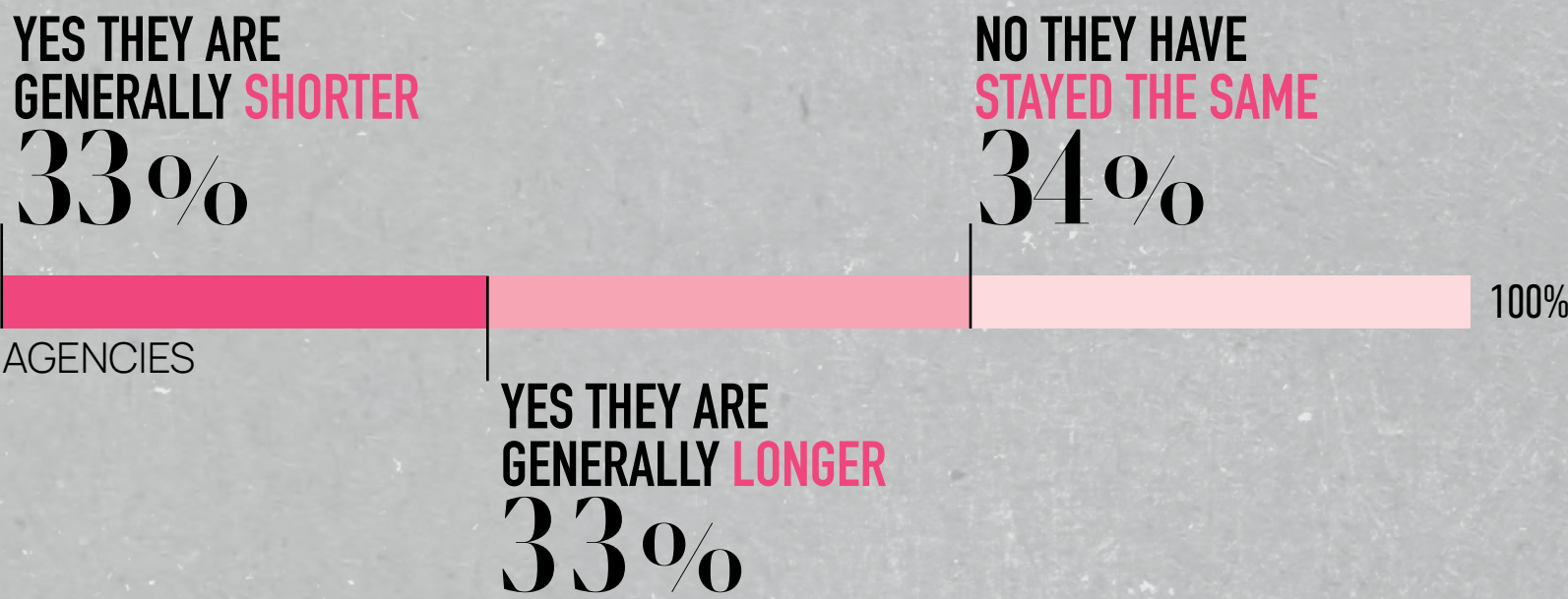
vs.



Has the timeframe to conclude pitches you've run or been involved in over the last 5 years changed in any meaningful way?

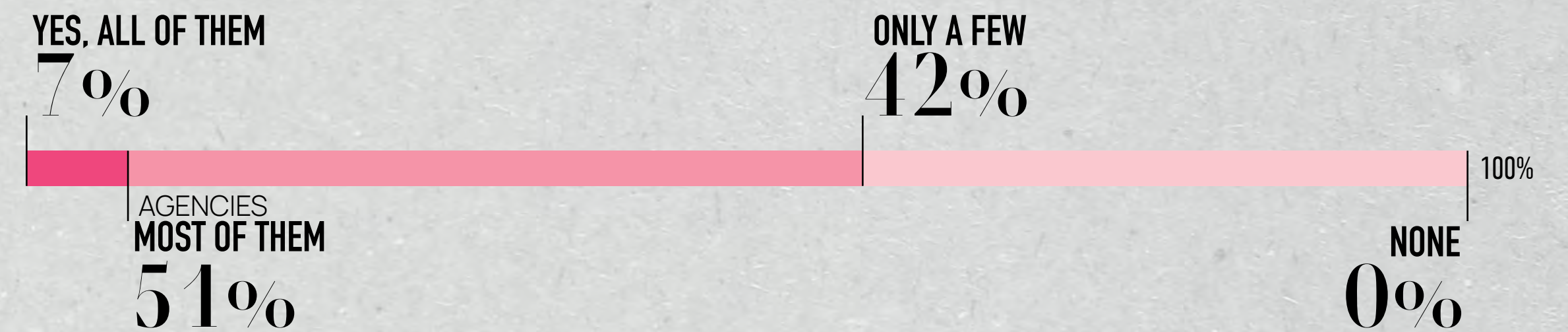


vs.

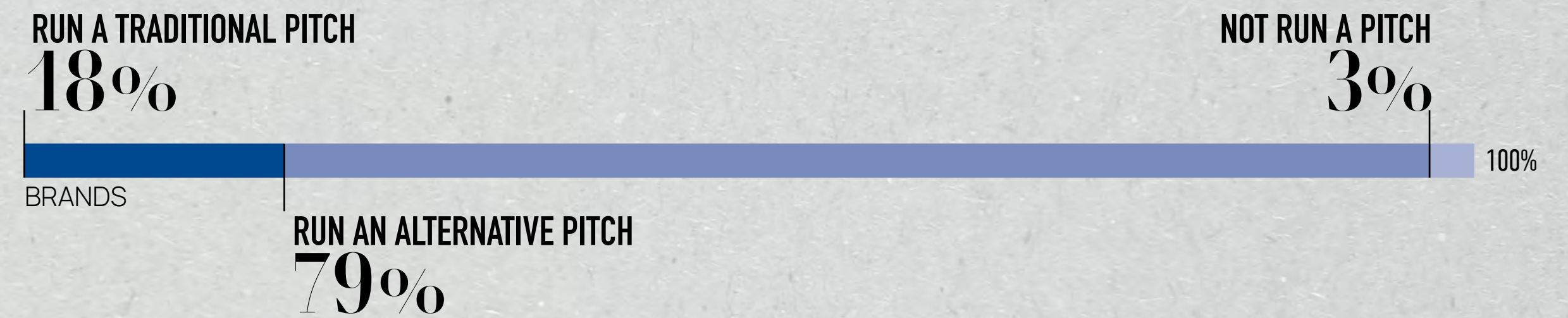




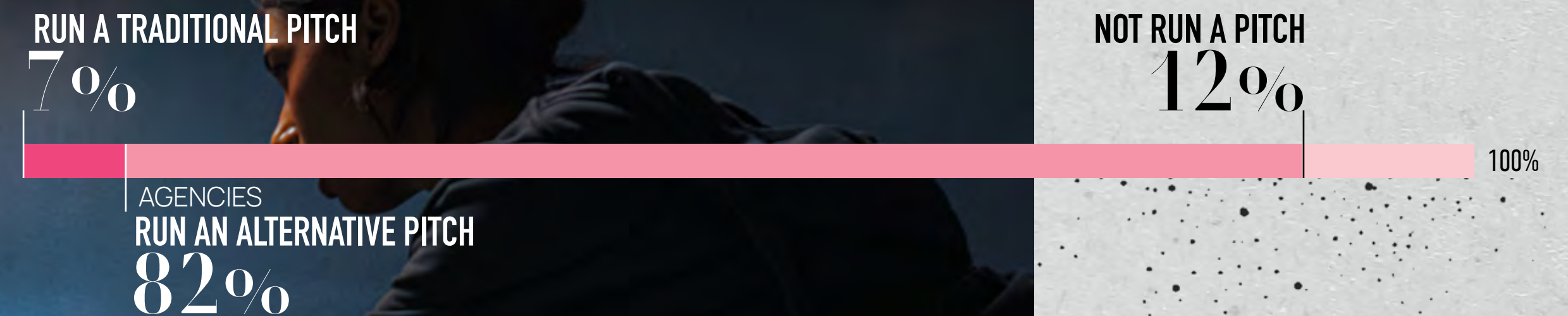
Have pitches you have run or been part of in the last 5 years led to successful and enduring partnerships?



Which of the following would you be most likely to do or what would be your preference if there were to be a pitch tomorrow?



vs.



“

More than ever, agencies are trying to do more, with less on pitches - and the challenging economic environment is both turning up the pressure to win AND the pressure on clients to make the right decision.

Despite all that though, the fundamentals of pitches (and winning them) are still the same -

great chemistry, showing a clear understanding of the client's ambitions, and creating excitement about how creativity can help them realise those ambitions.

Does this always need a 5 stage, three month process including a 30 page (usually unread) written response? And is this remotely sustainable? I'd argue probably not.

The pitch needs to be as agile as the partners clients are looking to work with. A focus on a key challenge (or challenges), moments where we can build the brief together and opportunities to collaborate on the creative work. That way everyone gets a feel for what a future working relationship might look and feel like.”

Claire Hollands
CEO

SAATCHI
&
SAATCHI

PITCH OR DITCH? THE FUTURE OF PITCHING

03

Brands and agencies then can agree that change is needed. But perhaps reaching any degree of absolute unanimity in opinion in the near future is an unrealistic vision at this stage.

Brands and agencies then can agree that change is needed, and there are also many similarities in opinion around what the current barriers to this change might be.

A lack of viable alternatives to the traditional pitch (and time to consider them), plus limited confidence in the result of alternative approaches are cited, alongside procurement rigidity too. Agencies are also remarkably self-aware about their own role here and a need to take more of a stand (the term 'backbone' was used more than once, recalling 1965's famous Y&R house ad!).

But the differences between the two parties are laid bare again when questions are posed about preferences for changing guide lines in the future. Whereas brands appear to favour more gentle evolution and take a more conservative view; agencies have their sights set on more fundamental behaviour shifts.

Almost 2/3 of brands favour a 'full pitch' conducted over a significantly shorter timeframe, yet fewer than 20% of agencies agree. Instead, the preferences of agency CEOs were more of a focus on interrogation - rather than answering - of the brief (58%) or strategic responses rather than 'creative' led pitches (51%).

Whilst almost 1/3 of CMOs were open to interrogating the brief as an alternative, just 18% favour dropping 'creative responses' from pitching - though 39% of the same CMO group did acknowledge feeling comfortable judging an agency's creative capability on previous work, which leaves the door ajar.

So perhaps reaching any degree of absolute unanimity in opinion in the near future is an unrealistic vision at this stage; and it is clear that more work over time needs to be done in this regard. But what if unanimity was not a pre-requisite for advancement?

If the industry could more readily agree that there is no 'one size fits all' approach and produce a small number of verified and accepted alternatives with clear guidelines for brands as to which route to select depending on their brief - this in its own right would be a notable step forward. Pitching menu anyone?

The final point to raise here is rooted in the only question we asked solely to brands. This saw us quiz CMOs on whether some form of financial incentive to them running alternative and more streamlined processes would be a likely driver of change - to which a significant 2/3 said yes. More to follow on this!

What are the barriers to change in the context of pitching?

BRANDS

LACK OF VISIBLE ALTERNATIVES

45%

LACK OF TIME TO CONSIDER
ALTERNATIVES

39%

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN FINAL
RESULT OF ALTERNATIVES

45%

PROCUREMENT AND
CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

50%

RESISTANCE / BEHAVIOUR
FROM AGENCIES

21%

NONE

13%

OTHER

5%

AGENCIES

LACK OF VISIBLE ALTERNATIVES

35%

LACK OF TIME TO CONSIDER ALTERNATIVES

33%

LACK OF CONFIDENCE IN FINAL
RESULT OF ALTERNATIVES

60%

PROCUREMENT AND CORPORATE GOVERNANCE

74%

RESISTANCE / BEHAVIOUR
FROM AGENCIES

37%

NONE

14%

OTHER

21%

If industry guidelines around pitching changed, which would you feel most comfortable with?

BRANDS

FULL PITCH IN SIGNIFICANTLY
SHORTER TIMEFRAME

63%

NO CREATIVE PRESENTED,
JUST STRATEGY

18%

A FOCUS ON INTERROGATING THE
BRIEF, NOT ANSWERING IT

29%

OTHER

16%

AGENCIES

FULL PITCH IN SIGNIFICANTLY
SHORTER TIMEFRAME

19%

NO CREATIVE PRESENTED,
JUST STRATEGY

51%

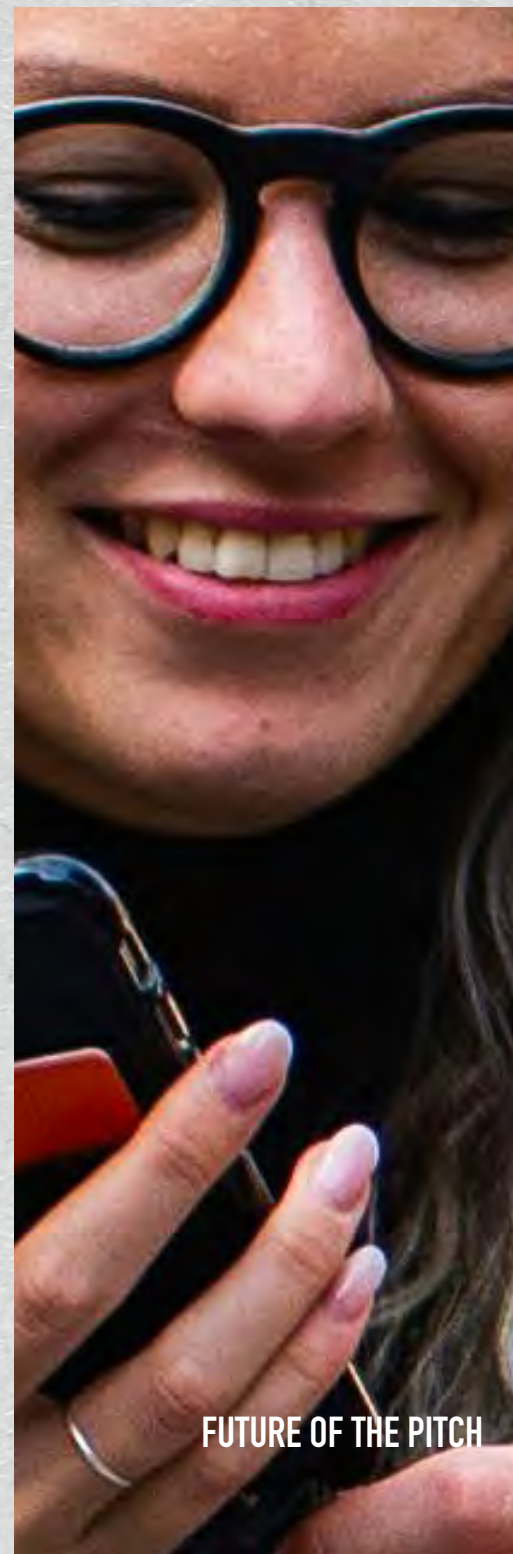
A FOCUS ON INTERROGATING THE
BRIEF, NOT ANSWERING IT

58%

OTHER

30%

Would you feel comfortable judging an agency's 'creative' capability on previous work
(with the pitch focused on strategy only)?



Pitch or Ditch? The Future of Pitching

“

It has no doubt been a challenging period for new business with fewer opportunities and increased competition leading to agencies going to great lengths to secure opportunities. This, alongside the trend away from retained contracts, puts a huge spotlight on the mismatch of effort-to-reward ratio when pitching for business today.

Rania Robinson
CEO and Partner

**QUET
STORM**

Whilst agencies continue to think far more carefully about what pitch opportunities they engage with, it would be great to see more brands consider the ask of agencies in a pitch process to reflect a more reasonable value return expectation. That way, ensuring they get the best agencies on their pitch list, not just the most willing.”

THE RISE OF AI

04

The lightning onset of AI has the potential to change the game even further, and although the survey comments showed a clear nervousness about risks that need to be carefully managed – more than half of both parties are open to exploring how AI can play a more helpful role in the process of agency selection in future.

Creativebrief has always been rooted in utilising technology to disrupt the classic consultant based 'agency selection' landscape; this is lodged deep in our founding DNA.

Our tech platform is ultimately there to disintermediate and to democratise intelligence on the agency landscape for brand marketers in an industry and a pitching process that has historically been tightly controlled and dominated by more traditional intermediary players.

For those brands with the confidence to self-serve, we have always viewed our technology as a conduit to simply augment their knowledge and ability to drive the process themselves (though of course we have always supported those who require guidance and consultancy too).

But the lightning onset of AI has the potential to change the game even further, and although the survey comments showed a clear nervousness about risks that need to be carefully managed – more than half of both parties are open to exploring how AI can play a more helpful role in the process of agency selection in future, with brands even more intentional on this than agencies.

Inevitably, there is a wide-range of interpretations as to where AI can be used to meaningfully improve and streamline the pitching process. Agencies are already deploying AI widely in the process of research or prototyping work during pitching of course.

But at Creativebrief we are more interested in the future role for AI in the accurate selecting of agencies and matching of their skills, abilities, experience, cultures, philosophies and ambitions against specific brand briefs.

There is of course room to get this very wrong, and the need for an experienced and deeply knowledgeable human filter over the top at this stage is a necessity that should not be lightly foregone.

But whilst there are obvious potential downfall areas such as biases to overcome, we also believe that there are huge opportunities in this regard ahead as long as used in the right way and pointed at the right 'corpus' of data and intelligence.

Watch this space is all we're prepared to say for now!

Would you feel comfortable using technology and AI in the process of shortlisting potential agency partners in future?





Stephanie Nattu
Managing Director
at Creativebrief

In this increasingly challenging climate, there has never been a better time than now for the industry to join forces on this issue. The future of the pitch as we know it cannot be changed by one party alone. It requires the whole industry to come together with clarity, urgency and willingness for change.

Brands must be brave and open to new ways of working, and lead with confidence when choosing a progressive, fairer process to select agency partners. Agencies must show strength, find the courage to say no and stick to the task at hand. And the industry at large must find a way to stop looking backwards and idealising the perfect pitch - instead start making real steps towards change.

The results of this survey point towards a degree of optimism but ultimately demonstrate a need to do more. Much more. We all exist in a different world now, some would say unprecedented times that are being navigated, so with that we must adapt and change the pitch accordingly.

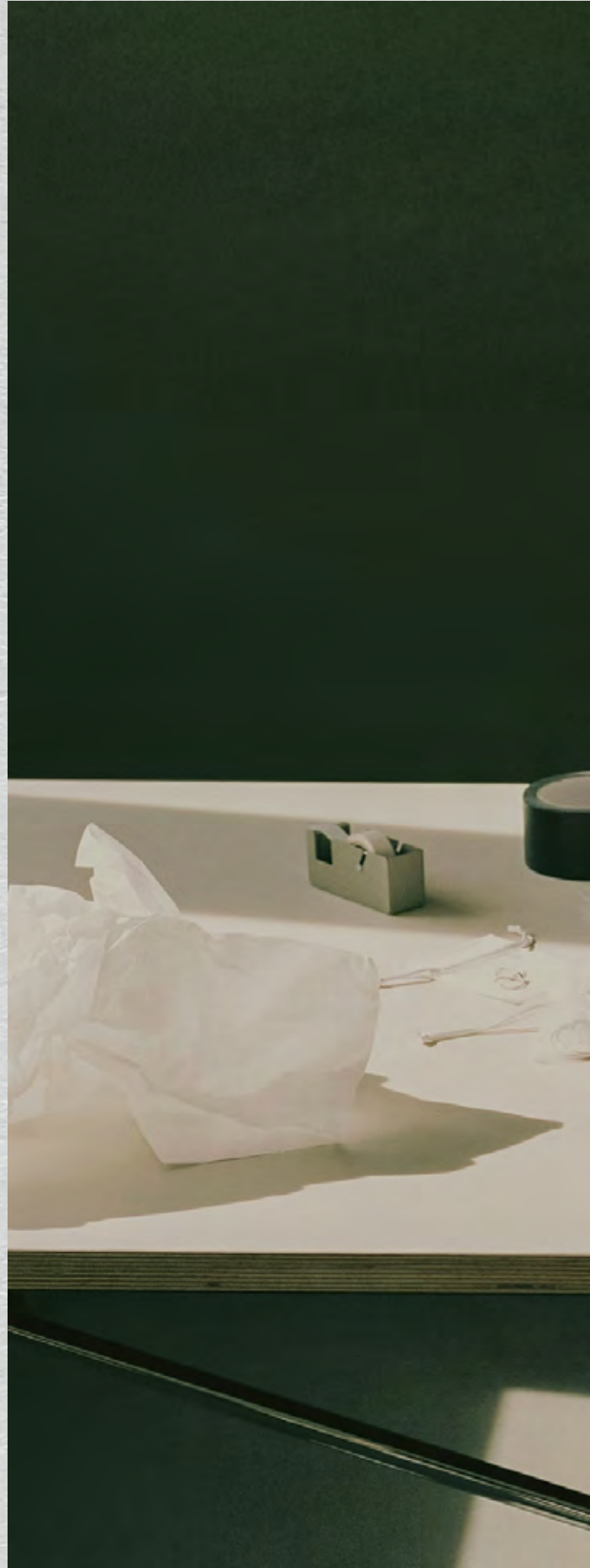
Creativebrief has made a commitment to the industry to ensure it will continue to increase accuracy in identifying the right agency partners for brands and decrease the time and resource investment for agencies when taking part in pitches. We have now developed viable solutions to do this, but it can't happen in isolation.

We're proud to say that in the last two years, 66% of pitches we ran were considered 'non-traditional' with 60% of them not requesting 'creative' or final output from agencies. Importantly these processes are also leading to brilliant and impactful work, and we hope will be proven to go on and lead to lasting and meaningful partnerships that will be held up as examples of enduring excellence in future.

However, we cannot and will not rest on our laurels and will continue to push hard on this, alongside the future-facing and progressive brands and agencies that we actively choose to partner with.

As an industry, we all need to collectively follow this path together. If we work with openness and with a focused goal in mind, we can reshape the pitch process to be fairer, more accurate, more sustainable and better aligned with the challenges of today's marketing and advertising industries.

If we don't, we're failing ourselves and the future of our industry. The time for change is now.



As an independent
and forward-thinking
pitch consultancy, we simplify
and increase the accuracy
of the agency search process.

Find your next agency partners
with our progressive, tech-driven
and efficient agency and selection
services for ambitious brands.



GET IN TOUCH

Helen Hall

Marketing and Growth Director

helen.h@creativebrief.com

↗ Future of the

www.creativebrief.com

 creativebrief