

How AI will Transform Research and Insight for Businesses in 2026

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[Bolt Insight](#), the market research company helping brands unlock consumer insights through AI-moderated research, provides its top five predictions on how the landscape of research and insights will develop and unlock new opportunities for businesses in 2026.

Ester Marchetti, Co-Founder and Chief Innovation Officer at Bolt Insight believes we are entering a new phase where insight is no longer a supporting function, but a living capability that will shape decisions every day. Here she highlights the five shifts she sees defining the next chapter of AI led research in 2026.

Real-time insight becomes an everyday capability

Insight is already moving away from solo, project-based work, towards always-on intelligence system. Instead of waiting weeks for answers, teams are increasingly able to ask a question and receive decision-ready insight in minutes.

This changes how organisations operate. Marketing, product and UX teams no longer need to pause progress while research catches up. Leadership teams can explore scenarios, test assumptions and pressure-test decisions as they happen.

That flexibility is the real breakthrough. Insight becomes something teams use every day, not something they schedule around.

Dynamic Personas replace static snapshots

Traditional personas were never wrong...but they were frozen in time. Built from a moment in data, they quickly lost relevance as markets and behaviours changed. In 2026, personas are evolving into living models.

Dynamic Personas update continuously as new conversations and behaviours are added. They reflect how people actually move through attitudes, motivations and trade-offs over time.

This matters because decisions rarely wait for the next research cycle. When personas evolve in real time, teams can adapt messaging, products and experiences with confidence, knowing their understanding of the audience is current. It also enables consistency across markets. Global teams can compare how the same persona behaves in different regions without losing nuance or local context.

Ethics and data integrity become a defining differentiator

As AI becomes embedded across research workflows, trust has to be at the centre of any implementation. In 2026, ethical AI and data integrity will not be optional features, they will be core differentiators.

This goes beyond compliance. It is about clarity around how data is sourced, how AI is trained, how decisions are made and where human oversight sits. Platforms that cannot explain their outputs or demonstrate responsible data practices will struggle to earn long-term trust.

At Bolt Insight, ethical design is becoming a competitive advantage, not a constraint.

Researchers evolve into AI-enabled insight strategists

One of the most important changes ahead will be not technological, it will be human.

AI is already automating many of the mechanics of research. Recruiting, moderation, analysing and summarisation are becoming faster and more consistent. But this does not reduce the role of researchers...it will push it to another level. Researchers become insight strategists who help organisations understand what the data means, not just what it says.

AI handles scale and speed. Humans bring curiosity, judgement and meaning.

Insight connects day-to-day teams with the C-suite

Perhaps the most powerful shift is how insight connects organisations vertically as well as horizontally.

When insight is accessible, intuitive and trusted, it becomes embedded into daily workflows for marketing, product and UX teams. At the same time, it gains visibility and influence at executive level. This trend will become even more established in 2026.

This creates alignment. Teams across the organisation are working from the same understanding of the consumer, while leadership can explore strategic questions without abstraction or delay.

In summary

2026 will be the year where technology and human insight will transform research. The partnership

between technology and human expertise is what will define successful insight functions in 2026.

The organisations that thrive will be those that treat insight as a living system, not a static output. One that evolves with people, earns trust through transparency and empowers humans to focus on what they do best...understanding other humans.