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CASE STUDY · MARLUC SYNOPSIS

Nomad Foods synthetic consumer research pilot

IMPLEMENTED 2026 · AGRICULTURE AND FOOD · UNITED KINGDOM · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY

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Europe's largest frozen food company tested AI personas as synthetic respondents to position a new pizza brand. It reports faster, cheaper early research but found the personas missed nuance, and it keeps real consumers as the final check.

ABOUT THIS SYNOPSIS

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Facts and figures are as reported by the sources listed below, which may be incomplete, self-reported or out of date. Check the original source before relying on any figure.

The impact band, proof marker and SEAM view are MarLuc's opinion. The organisation is not a MarLuc client and has not reviewed or endorsed this synopsis. Names and trademarks belong to their owners.

NOTICE WORDING LAST UPDATED 16 NOVEMBER 2026

AT A GLANCE

AI used: AI personas used as synthetic research respondents, on a platform built by the agency Symbionic.

Implemented: 2026. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Brand positioning in under six weeks at about half the research cost, by Nomad Foods' account, with real-consumer validation kept

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 4 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Nomad Foods. Frozen food manufacturer headquartered in the United Kingdom, selling in 22 European markets, with brands including Birds Eye, iglo and Findus. 7,800 people and over €3 billion in annual revenue, by its own website. Canvas block: 3. Customers and proposition. Also 4. Operations and process, 6. Data and technology.

Business challenge

The challenge. The insight team had under six weeks to build a positioning for a new European pizza brand, work that normally takes six months to two years, by its head of insight's account.

How it was addressed. Nomad Foods worked with the agency Symbionic, which built a platform of AI personas that answer research questions as consumers would. The team used them for exploratory questions about how people eat pizza and to test reactions to brand positionings, packaging and communications. It ran the personas alongside research it already trusted and compared the two. Nomad Foods says it never uses synthetic research as the final stage, always validates with real people and still runs ethnography and qualitative groups. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Who implemented it

Symbionic (Consultancy): Research agency that built the synthetic respondent platform.
In-house (In-house): Nomad Foods' insight team ran the pilot and compared it with existing research.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Symbionic.

Where it was built in: Used by the insight team for exploratory consumer questions and to test brand positionings, packaging and communications, alongside traditional qualitative research.

What changed

Before: early-stage positioning research with real consumers only, taking six months to two years. After, in this pilot: a synthetic stage early in the research, followed by validation with real people, by Nomad Foods' account. [1] [2] [3] [4]

What it cost

Not reported. Building the synthetic panel costs extra, by the head of insight's account.

What it saved

About half the research cost per project once the synthetic consumers were built, and reporting three times faster than a traditional qualitative group, by Nomad Foods' account. [1] [2] [3] [4]

Governance and control

Nomad Foods says synthetic research is never the final stage and is always validated with real people, and that it will not quote synthetic numbers to retailers or investors. Accountable owner and checks on the agency's platform: Not reported.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
Nomad Foods' Head of Insight & Portfolio Strategy presented the pilot and its results; a formal owner is not reported. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
Nomad Foods will not quote synthetic numbers to retailers or investors, by its account. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
Synthetic research is never the final stage and is always validated with real people, by Nomad Foods' account. [1]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
The team ran AI personas alongside research it already trusted and compared the two, by its account. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
The agency Symbionic built the platform; checks on the agency's models are not reported. [1]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Not reported
Not reported.

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– Speed: positioning in under six weeks, by Nomad Foods' account.

– Cost: about half per project once the panel was built, by Nomad Foods' account.

– Repeat access: the team could return to the same respondents round after round.

DID NOT

– The AI personas spoke in language no shopper would use, by the head of insight's account.

– They were so polite they praised even fake designs.

– Answers pulled to the average and missed outliers; unexpected ideas such as chunky fish fingers have produced some of Nomad Foods' best sellers.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the brand positioning developed in the pilot performed in market.

– Total cost including building and refreshing the panel.

– Whether the approach becomes standard in Nomad Foods' research.

Timeline

2026 Insight team pilots synthetic respondents built by Symbionic to position a new European pizza brand [1]

Oct 2026 Head of Insight & Portfolio Strategy presents the results at aiblLIVE London [1]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). One pilot in which the insight team added AI personas to early research; real-consumer research remains the final stage.

Task support in one pilot: the insight team added AI personas to the early stages of its research and kept real-consumer validation. No standing change to the research process is reported.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The reported gains came from using AI personas on a brief the team knew well, alongside research it already trusted, so it could judge where the AI was right and wrong. The speed and cost figures are Nomad Foods' own and come from one pilot under a short deadline. Before copying, a leadership team should ask where synthetic answers stop and real-consumer validation starts, and what the panel costs to build and keep current.

1. Test synthetic research against results you already trust.
2. Keep real consumers as the final check before decisions.
3. Count the cost of building and refreshing panels as well as the per-project saving.

Evidence

Score 1 of 4. Self-reported: the company's head of insight speaking at a conference, written up by the organiser.

Evaluation method. Self-reported pilot comparison: AI personas run alongside existing research and compared, by the company's account.

Status. Pilot reported in October 2026; Nomad Foods plans to keep feeding fresh first-party research into its panels.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/nomad-foods-synthetic-consumer-research

[1] aibl: AI market research: Nomad Foods' synthetic pilot (talk at aiblLIVE London, October 2026)
https://aiblmedia.com/downloads/ai-market-research-nomad-foods/

[2] Nomad Foods: About us
https://www.nomadfoods.com/about-us/

[3] Nomad Foods: Careers
https://www.nomadfoods.com/careers/

[4] Nomad Foods: third quarter 2026 financial results (November 2026)
https://www.nomadfoods.com/article/nomad-foods-reports-third-quarter-2026-financial-results/

Nomad Foods website: https://www.nomadfoods.com

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