

From Customers to Advocates,
from Employees to Brand Ambassadors

Building trust, adaptability and engagement in a BANI environment

Roundtable reflections – Retail Street Talent 2026

Retail is no longer defined solely by product, price, location or service. Increasingly, the brands that stand out are those that build genuine connections with people. Customers want to trust the brands they choose, feel part of something meaningful and know there are genuine people behind every interaction. More often than not, that connection begins internally — with the people who bring the business to life every day.

In this roundtable discussion, Carmen Afán (Business Development Director, Grupo Pedro Jaén), Rocío Capel (People & Organisation Director, Casa del Libro) and Carolina García (Founder, HUG&CLAU) shared their views on how organisations can place people at the centre while navigating an increasingly unpredictable world.

Trust is something you *earn*

For a long time, price was often the deciding factor. Today, customers make choices based on credibility, whether a brand has earned their trust. In sectors built on personal relationships, from skincare and wellbeing to retail and culture, trust grows through consistency, transparency and genuine expertise.

“Excellence doesn't speak for itself. You have to explain it, communicate it and help people understand it. That's what ultimately creates trust.”

-Carmen Afán, Grupo Pedro Jaén.

Being fast and being agile are *not the same thing*

We're operating in what's increasingly being called a BANI world - brittle, anxious, non-linear, incomprehensible. In such an environment, the instinct is often to move faster. Yet organisations that navigate uncertainty successfully are not necessarily the quickest. They are the ones built on strong foundations: teams with expertise, autonomy and access to the information they need to make solid decisions when it matters most.

“The best algorithm we have in our shops are our booksellers - they're the reason people come back. What better algorithm could there be?”

-Rocío Capel, Casa del Libro.

Employee engagement comes first. *Customer experience follows*

Outstanding customer experiences are built on outstanding employee experiences. Culture cannot exist only in presentations or company values; it has to be lived consistently throughout the organisation. When people feel connected to a meaningful purpose and recognise their own values in the company they work for, that authenticity naturally carries through to every customer interaction.

“Customer experience will never surpass employee experience. Both are driven by the same fundamental needs: belonging, shared purpose, common values and feeling recognised.”

-Carolina García, HUG&CLAU.

Engagement is built through everyday actions

Purpose, culture and engagement are easy concepts to discuss. The real challenge - and the factor that distinguishes exceptional brands - is ensuring that every interaction strengthens that culture rather than weakening it. This requires deliberate effort: meaningful conversations, continuous development, approachable leadership and tangible actions that keep the organisation's identity alive at every level.



"Motivating people isn't about delivering an inspiring speech. It's about giving them a reason to come back every day - and meaning it."

-Carmen Afán,
Grupo Pedro Jaén.

Development opportunities make the difference

Younger talent are turning away from workplaces where they see limited opportunities to grow. Continuous learning, cross-functional development and genuine autonomy are essential for building long-term commitment. The strongest cultures are not imposed from the top down; they spread organically through everyday behaviours and relationships.



"Continuous learning keeps people engaged and committed. It becomes part of the culture and is passed from one employee to the next."

-Rocío Capel,
Casa del Libro.

Younger generations expect authenticity

Today's consumers are highly connected, exceptionally informed and quick to spot inconsistencies. Traditional marketing campaigns are no longer enough. What resonates is authenticity: real experiences, genuine communities and transparency - socially, environmentally and above all, on a human level.



"New generations will keep needing to connect. With all the information they have, they'll see through anything that isn't real. That's why we come back to the same thing: essence and coherence."

-Carolina García, HUG&CLAU

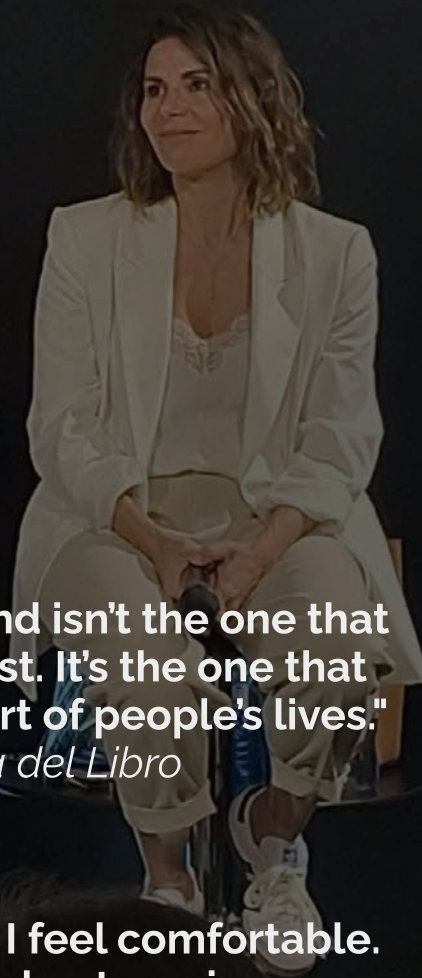
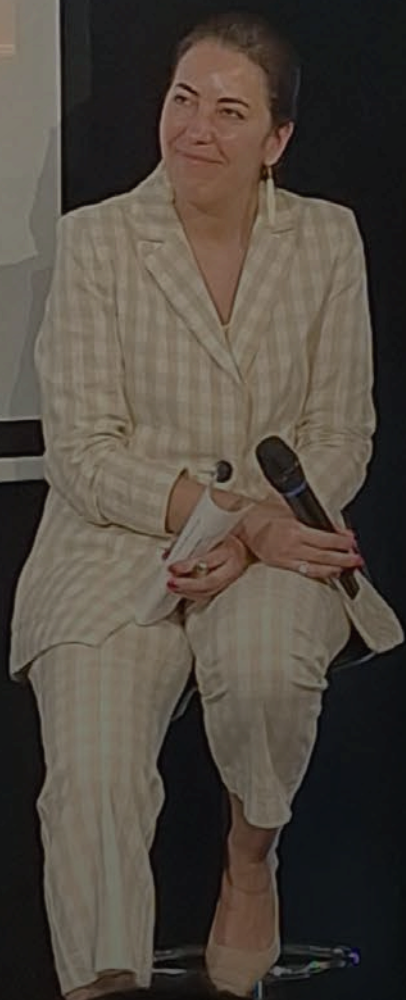
What do we want people to feel when they think about our brands?



CAROLINA GARCIA

FOUNDER HUG & CLAU Y
CEO PEOPLE & RETAIL

HUG & CLAU



"A great brand isn't the one that sells the most. It's the one that becomes part of people's lives."

– Rocío, Casa del Libro

"I feel good. I feel comfortable. I feel like the best version of myself."

– Carmen Afán, Grupo Pedro Jaén.

"I feel valued, cared for and confident in what this brand stands for."

– Carolina García, HUG&CLAU



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