A Framework for Harnessing Big Data in Creative Ideation

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We propose a five-part framework for marketers and advertisers looking to harness the potential of data and creativity in healthcare communications in this era of big data and artificial intelligence.

Data and Creativity

Big data and its related components, such as AI and deep learning, are big topics today and need no introduction. These capabilities are disrupting several industries and functions, including our healthcare vertical, changing our approaches, raising our expectation, and challenging the ways we work and create. In healthcare, many discussions focus on big data's potential and impact on drug discovery, health service delivery, and outcomes management. But the area of healthcare advertising, especially creative creation and development, could use some structured approaches for harnessing big data's potential.

Phrases, such as left and right brain, creativity and effectiveness, and intuition and empiricism, are used in marketing to capture the different yet complimentary areas of creative and analytical orientation. When harnessed well, they complement one another brilliantly — creating ideas, messages, campaigns, and programs that are credible, relevant, different, and effective. As marketers, we have made progress in recognizing and exploring ways to bring data and creativity together, and the rise of analytics, digital, and data science has helped amplify this collaborative need.

Advertisers have paid attention — or at least given good lip service — to the advantage their complement brings and have attempted to differentiate themselves and their craft from the crowded space by making bold statements, slogans, and core philosophies about how we can combine the data and creativity dichotomy. Much ink has been spilled — I contributed to the WARC 2015 contest on Data and Creativity — many words spoken, and many awards granted in this regard. All said, we have made good progress.

Big Data Caused a Wrinkle

But just when we thought we had a good handle on making data and creativity work together, the big data era came and threw things into a flux. We are indeed in a period of major change and uncertainly that some say warrants going back to the drawing board.

So where do we stand today on big data

The Big Data-Creative Framework

Type	Description	Examples	What You Can Consider
Big Data as a guide	• Big Data can provide important information in the creative brief to guide the creative process	• Market opportunity size and predicted changes over time, customer sizes along a conversion continuum, customer segments and quantitative profiles, customer sentiments and word use	• Edit or update creative briefs to include room for quantitative context and performance expectations
Big Data as inspiration	• Big Data can provide nuggets of evidence, data points, or hypotheses that can trigger creative ideas that would not have been possible otherwise	• A decision tree of hypotheses on behavior change hurdles • Data points and evidence on moments, places, or times when audiences make decisions • The relative size of effects or triggers of different factors along the pathway of customer decisions	• Provide a data and analysis compendium along with the creative briefs • Invite creative talents to creative or marketing performance analysis presentations
Big Data as content	• Big Data can be an effective content in creative outputs • Telling a human story from the number, making it passionate, personal, and empathetic	• Well known statistics, such as prevalence rates, incidence rates, or coverage rates may be seen in a different light if their dimension by audience segment, place, and moments are available and drives more resonance	• Request for at least one creative idea with a data-centric theme as part of the initial creative concept options
Big Data as optimization	• Big Data can help refine and improve the effectiveness of creative outputs. • Big Data can evaluate, select, or fine-tune creative	• Creative testing and scoring prior to full concept development • Dynamic display and suppression of creative content in a live medium	• Conduct creative testing • Create multiple creative options to enable in-market optimization • Develop options for dynamic content combination and delivery
Big Data as co-creator	• Chat and creative bots generating contents via co-creation and creative augmentation	• AI text generators could inspire creative copywriters even if the literal ideas generated by the bots do not make the cut	• Try one out. Experiment with text and AI idea generators. You may be genuinely surprised

and creativity? We believe big data presents the opportunity to reignite healthcare advertising, where the pace of experimentation and adoption of innovative approaches have been historically slower than observed in other verticals. But we do not need to start afresh. We can build on the earlier progress made on data and creativity integration. We have seen some progress as evidenced by some impressive creative healthcare campaigns showcased at the recent Cannes Lions International Festival.

We offer up a framework to move the big data and creativity integration forward. It provides a simple approach to assess how well you are harnessing the relationship between data and creative capabilities and hopefully reveals improvement opportunities. The recommendation is not restricted just to analysts and creatives but also to marketing strategists, planners, analysts, technologists, and developers who collaborate with creatives to produce effective healthcare communications.

The BD-C Framework: Five Areas of Big Data and Creativity Integration

After extensive evaluation of the various ways big data interacts with creative ideation, we condensed those outcomes into five key areas that are understandable, assessable, and actionable. By looking at the relationship through this lens, we believe marketers, advertisers, and their consultants can discern the areas of impact and relevance, see untapped opportunities, and explore new areas.

1. Big Data as a Guide

Big data can continue the traditional role of data, as it provides important information in the creative brief to guide the creative process. Data has traditionally played an important role, as input directly into the creative brief or indirectly as an input into the strategy and planning. A good creative brief outlines the business or marketing challenge, business context, overall goal and objective of the effort, understanding of the audience and their preferences, as well as performance evaluative metrics and targets. Big data can now enrich many of these inputs with more accurate opportunity size estimation, provide a deep insight into the patient journey (e.g., their motivations, their segments), as well as rightly identifiable performance drivers and reasonably measurable stretch goals. Therefore, big data can enhance the traditional role of data as a guide for creative development but with stronger conviction, timely insights, and robust evidence.

2. Big Data as Inspiration

Big data can provide nuggets of evidence, data points, or hypotheses to trigger creative ideas that would not have been possible otherwise. The access to large data sets has made it possible to analyze and reveal insights and hypotheses that were previously inaccessible. Big data now has the opportunity to explore and reveal some eureka moments. Not every finding will matter but could offer up new and interesting findings to validate prior intuitive hypotheses that may have been contested or shelved due to lack of evidence. For example, knowing the behavioral patterns or implied mindset that precedes a decision, or just the change in tonality on specific days, could be an inspiration that sparks a creative idea. The information does not necessarily have to be in briefs, but could be supporting addendum of analysis and insights that should be provided to or presented to creative and not filtered out by the planners or strategists. Creative talents also could actively request for information or evidence around some initial thoughts, thereby helping inspire the evolution of a percolating idea.

3. Big Data as Content

Big data could itself be an effective content in creative outputs. Compelling stories have been built around data, but big data increases the potential of this opportunity because of new insights being uncovered as well as the sheer volume of potentially interesting and surprising data and evidence. Telling the story behind an important statistic creatively and making it matter for the audience is still essential to ensure engagement and effectiveness and could bring it alive and make the brand or message matter to the audience. Examples of moving narratives around the numbers are evidenced in the campaign for opioid awareness or Volvo's E.V.A initiative video calling attention to the different impact accidents have on women, children, and men based on extensive real-world data.

4. Big Data as Optimization

Big data can help refine and improve the effectiveness of creative outputs. Regardless of our brilliance in coming up with creative concepts that promise to deliver the right brand messages and open up opportunities for impact and ultimately patient outcomes, these creative outputs remain at best, potentials. The real impact and effectiveness of creative is observed when intended audiences engage with the content in the real world. Big data is able to test, evaluate, and suggest optimizations for creative ideas and concepts early in the design phase or after it goes live. Creative

testing and optimization is not new, but the new datasets and analysis capabilities we now have via big data are more empirical in nature and can help prioritize or adapt the most effective creative based on actual behavior. For instance, we can now observe responses to streamed creative content right up to the point of audience attention shifts, providing feedback on content efficacy and opportunity to edit for better engagement and impact.

5. Big Data as Co-Creator

Yes, a creative bot. Probably the most controversial, scary, and disrupting role of big data on creativity yet. We are still in the early days, but history and the current trajectory suggests that big data will be able to self-generate credible creative ideas sooner rather than later. Based on a large collection of data and stimuli, big data will be able to suggest or outright create and prioritize creative that will deliver the desired audience impact and (heaven forbid it) go live with minimal human edits. This does not mean big data will replace the art of creativity but that it will most likely play a prominent role in actual creative development.

These five big data and creative integration opportunities are not strictly mutually exclusive. For instance, big data could co-create content (No. 5) that never sees the light of day but inspires (No. 2) a creative talent to develop some impactful creative. Or the same data that inspires a creative spark (No. 2) may become a central hero of a creative output (No. 3). Not all areas of collaboration need be tapped into for every creative assignment —the nature and context of the assignment will dictate the relevance.

The underlying essence is to recognize that big data and AI will continue to impact and possibly refine what we mean by creative. Ultimately, creative will be judged by how well it gets messages across, changes minds and behavior, enables desired health outcomes, and helps brands succeed in the marketplace responsibly. The creative talents who embrace the emerging big data capabilities will have an unfair advantage in the intensely competitive world where creatives are struggling to peel away from the pack while also expected to deliver more, compelling, and effective creative, and in shorter turnaround times.

Big data are coming to creative. Nothing much to fear. Let's embrace it. 🅿🆅

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