



# Intuition under threat: Rise of the data brain

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# Table of Contents

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| <b>Introduction</b>  | <b>03</b> |
| <b>What is intuition?</b>  | <b>04</b> |
| <b>Why is intuition important, especially in a creative landscape?</b> | <b>05</b> |
| <b>Are we heading for 'Intuition Armageddon'?</b>                      | <b>08</b> |
| <b>What you can do about it</b>  | <b>10</b> |

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# Introduction: Intuition under threat

We live in a world where data is more important, and more available, every day. Superficially, this feels like a good thing – everything is more measurable, more quantifiable, and more accurate.

**More than 75 percent** of marketing leaders attest to being more data-driven than ever before, and the vast majority suggest this will only increase over the next five years. Data brains are on the rise.

But it isn't collecting data that makes human beings unique – it's our ability to imagine something new and make it a reality. We call this creativity, and it's a fundamental driver of human progress in everything from art and science to business and technology.

## **Creativity is integral to success in the businesses of advertising and communications.**

From PR to direct marketing, creative work: attracts more attention; is more interesting; creates greater brand awareness; engenders more favourable and longer-lasting attitudes; and generates stronger behavioural intentions amongst target audiences than non-creative work.

But what is the impact of an increasing prevalence of data and our reliance upon it? Does it diminish the creativity in marketing and communications? Is everyone following the same path because 'the data says so'? Are we ignoring the key components of intuition and instinct? And, as a result, are we slowly but surely all turning into 'data heads' instead of independent, creative thinkers?

We conducted research, spoke to industry experts, and uncovered trends (some of them particularly worrying) that answer these questions; showing where we are today, and where we're heading.

The simple conclusion is that intuition is being side-lined from the creative process in favour of data.

Using this analysis, we've created a tool for you to test yourself and your teams, enabling you to map propensity to favour intuition or analytics on a newly-developed 'intuition scale'.

We've worked with an expert in the field of intuition, Professor Eugene Sadler-Smith, to offer some helpful advice depending on the result you get on how you might think about making changes to the way you work or the structure of your teams to better balance your cognitive styles.

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# What is intuition?

According to psychologists, we should think of intuition as bridging the gap between the conscious and subconscious minds; between instinct and reason. It gives us the ability to know something directly without analytic reasoning, and is a strong enough impetus that it can be acted upon – despite us not being fully aware of the reasons behind it.

Intuition is established in many ways but, most commonly, it's formed by analyses that have become ingrained by repeated experiences. These then become habits, which give the decision-maker the capacity for a fast, instinctive response based on the automatic recognition of complex patterns – especially ones that may be concealed from the conscious mind.



**It's knowing, without knowing how or why you know.**

- Prof Sadler-Smith



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# Why is intuition important, especially in a creative landscape?

In industries like advertising, marketing and communications, creativity is central to success. It matters.

According to research by Reinartz and Saffert, of the University of Cologne, a pound spent on a creative campaign had nearly double the sales impact of a pound spent on a non-creative campaign, and our own research showed that senior marketers believe 'originality' is the most important hallmark of good creative. Why is that important? Because **the production of original work is almost 50% more likely to be intuition-led than data-driven.**

Intuition has a vital role to play in creativity – because there are a lot of similarities between the two concepts. Firstly, creative – like intuition – defies formularising. It has intangible, hard-to-quantify aspects that evoke instinctive responses.

Secondly, it's virtually impossible to scientifically engineer creativity, whether through artificial intelligence or other data-driven approaches, based on a formulaic interpretation of data or research.

We spoke to hundreds of marketing leaders, and they were clear that risks lie in becoming too reliant on data and data analysis at the expense of intuition and instinct. The most significant observation is that being data driven doesn't easily imbue emotional appeal but it certainly can constrain the creative process, whereas intuition generally runs hand-in-hand with creativity and, more often than not, helps to guide it.



**At the beating heart of many of the most truly effective campaigns is that wonderfully unquantifiable thing: creativity.**

- Dan Brooke, CMO, Channel 4 UK



Original ideas are typically Ideas that are rare/surprising/move away from the ordinary

Intuition-led

**47.7%**

Data-driven

**33.2%**



The above illustration shows the process by which an intuitive response is implemented and, arguably, demonstrates its strength; as a shortcut to bridge the need for data in analysing creative propositions.

It's an approach that communications and marketing experts might glean from peers in the field of New Product Development, where research has shown that starting with an intuitive assessment before moving into a more analytical mode speeds up the overall decision-making process and reduces project cycle times.

Intuition is effectively 'unconscious processing'. By definition, it gives us a much greater capacity to make holistic assessments and judgements instead of undertaking painstaking analysis of large data sets.



**I trust my intuition...  
My batting record is  
good enough that I  
keep swinging every  
time the ball is thrown.**

- Bill Gates, Co-founder of Microsoft



It also allows one to access tacit and implicit knowledge rooted in prior learning and experiences; to automatically recognise patterns for more efficient and effective judgement of propositions; and to make broader connections for more novel, innovative and creative ideas – forever the zenith of propositions across the advertising, marketing and communications sectors.

What this means is that, often, intuition is more accurate than data can be when it comes to measuring the efficacy of creative – because the two concepts are similarly intangible, yet no less effective in their own right.

Even in some areas where you would expect data analysis to be head and shoulders above intuition, it isn't. For example, intuition can play an important role in researching and understanding target audiences.

Often, there is as much (if not more) benefit in meeting members of a target audience and drawing on one's personal experience of similar groups and understanding their likes and dislikes.

We just have to concede that empathy can trump even huge amounts of data, sometimes.



**Great ideas get talked about, change behaviour and ultimately build brands.**

- Cannes Lions participant



There is more detail on the relative importance of intuition within creative industries in our full report. To receive a copy, please email [intuition@theagencypartnership.com](mailto:intuition@theagencypartnership.com).

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# Are we heading for 'Intuition Armageddon'?

Data isn't just an emerging trend – that world is already upon us. And, when you look at insider opinions, recent and expected industry developments, and our current direction of travel, it's clear intuition is already declining – both in the way it is used and how it is perceived compared to data.

According to many industry experts we spoke to, it's only set to get worse too. So are we heading toward 'Intuition Armageddon'? It's certainly possible, but there's hope.

**In order to ensure intuition retains an important role in the industry, we need to understand the threats to intuition. We identified several trends that may point to its declining use:**

- Marketing leaders, when polled, expressed views that there are fewer 'good' communications and advertising campaigns than there used to be
- The reason there are fewer 'good' campaigns is likely because money can be spent in a way that's measurable and scientific, instead of on 'riskier' proposals that might allow for better and more engaging creative
- Measurement has taken over from intuition (**44%** of marketers use data to evaluate creative vs only **26%** being intuition-led). This means communications and marketing is increasingly being led by the data which has the potential to promote reliance on 'what works' rather than delivering standout creative campaigns
- People who use intuition are more likely to be pushed out of the decision-making process in favour of 'what the data says', evidenced by 59% of those polled saying clients and colleagues expect their justifications to be based on data

# 44%



However, perhaps the most concerning industry shift is that intuition has already been almost entirely removed from all analytical and planning tasks. In itself, this may not seem like a direct threat to intuition within the creative aspects of advertising, marketing and communications. But this erosion of intuition is now seeping into creative tasks, as these statistics show:

**56%**

**01**

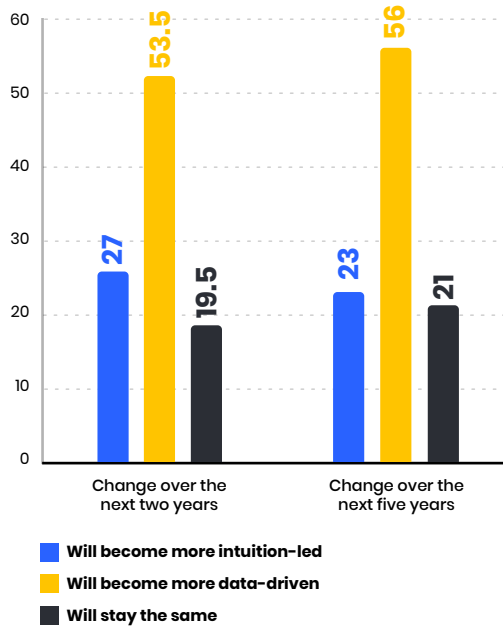
**76%**

A majority of creatives feel intuition is being used less year-on-year, and will be used significantly less in the next five years.

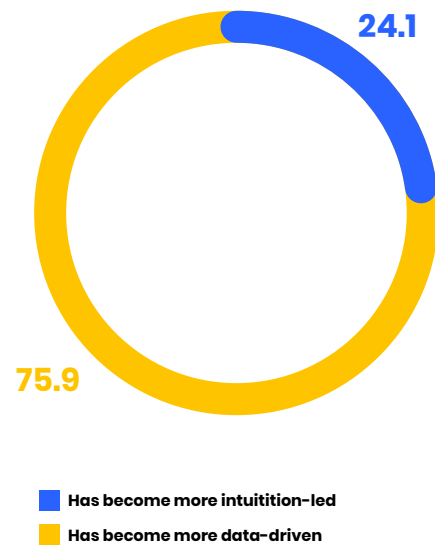
The number of common industry tasks that are left where intuition is preferred to data (identifying creative opportunities). Every single other task sees the use of data trump intuition (executing creative work' is a 50:50 split between the two).

An overwhelming majority of industry insiders say it is becoming more data-driven, with intuition's 'unmeasurable' nature impacting its use.

**Future balance between being intuition-led and data-driven**



**Overall shift between being intuition-led and data-driven over time**



Overall our findings point to clients, as well as many senior leaders in the industry, leaning more on data. This is because it is perceived as tangible and trustworthy, but it comes at the expense of our own instincts – and the instincts of others.

Yet, it's not about removing data from the process; it's about ensuring data isn't automatically defaulted to, forcing intuition out of the equation. None of us want identikit concepts and campaigns that result from blindly adhering to what the data tells us we should do, otherwise the future of the creative industries themselves may be under threat.

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# What you can do about it...

The first thing to say is that intuition – contrary to popular belief – is not something that is naturally innate for most people. It's a learned skill and usually comes with experience. We need to achieve an equilibrium within ourselves and our teams.

## Here's how:

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### #1: Build your own intuition

The first step towards expanding your own intuitive mind is to immerse yourself in all that is new – and try out what you learn from the industry surrounding you with your own brands.

Alongside building your own experience, there are numerous other ways we've identified that can help you to become more intuitive – and to trust your intuition when it reveals itself:

- Develop an affinity for the brands you work with, and others like them
  - Expand your knowledge of your target audiences and develop an empathy for them and what drives or motivates them
  - Keep up to date with trends, and what success looks like for others
  - Be aware of, and overcome, the common barriers to being more intuitive: Do you have a lack of freedom to take intuitive decisions? Are client expectations data-driven? Are there negative career implications for you if you are seen as intuitive? Are there institutionalised personal implications that prevent you trusting your intuition?
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### #2: Be aware of 'data distraction' – but don't ignore it

A common fallacy is that data is somehow more dependable than intuition but, actually, both have their benefits and drawbacks.

For example, there are several aspects of data, especially big data, that make it fallible: the variables and the limits involved in the collection and analysis of the data; the data that is (and is not) collected; and the way that data is interpreted alongside the conclusions that are drawn from it.

However, data should never be ignored. It is such a key part of the industry now and will remain so in the future, so you need to be equally aware of the common barriers that may prevent you from being more data-driven, just as much as those to being led by your intuition.

These include: having a lack of data to consult; the potentially prohibitive cost of acquiring data when compared to the low cost of applying intuition; any conflicts in the data you have; and your inability, for whatever reason, to make full use of the data at your disposal.

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### **#3: Build and become balanced**

The key to combating the shortcomings of either an intuition-led or data-driven approach is simple: treat both as equals. Find balance.

Intuition shouldn't take a back seat to data and data analysis just because it feels less measurable or less tangible; and in the same way it would be foolish to ignore the value of what data may be telling you. The way forward lies in using both in tandem and embracing the complementary strengths of analytics, data, intuition and instinct, especially when judging and measuring the quality of your creative.

However, being balanced just within yourself isn't enough – you need to bring others with you, and work with them in the most effective way.

The best teams do this by mirroring a 'balanced' approach in the way they are constructed – ensuring a combination of cognitive styles, from those inclined towards intuition; individuals who are inclined towards data; and others whose approach is more of a balance between of the two.

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### **#4: Know your colleagues**

Before you can implement this balance, though, it's critical to understand the different types of people and how to engage them.

We've developed four categories for you to be aware of when working in teams, or building them, so you can identify the traits and characteristics to look for:

#### **Intuition-led**

If someone is intuition-led, they tend to be spontaneous rather than meticulous and trust their gut-feeling when it comes to decision-making. They look at the big picture when devising solutions, which often tend to be inventive instead of tried-and-tested.

### **Data-driven**

A data-driven individual prefers to deal in tangible facts and figures and gives greater weight to data sets when it comes to any kind of analysis or problem-solving. They will meticulously analyse issues from various angles, and question and test their gut-feelings before choosing to apply them.

### **Adaptable**

If someone is adaptable, they will balance spontaneity with weighing up the pros and cons of an approach to any given problem. They place equal emphasis on the big picture and finer details, and on hunches and facts, and will tend to propose various solutions, ranging from industry standard to new and inventive.

### **Indifferent**

Indifferent people are neither data-driven, nor intuition-led and tend to employ a minimalist approach. They will have their own method they employ when problem-solving and are also easily guided by others' opinions.

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## **#5: Test yourself**

Lastly, how can you use the above information effectively? The answer is to self-reflect, and to identify these traits in your colleagues, agency teams, or clients.

To help you do this, we've created a special tool to give you an insight into which of the four categories you fall into – giving you the perfect starting point for self-development, and identifying how you can best work with others.

Find out what it says about you. Then, why not share the tool with your colleagues, and compare your results? You'll get an idea of the blend within your team and identify anything you may need to do to rebalance it.

Click the button below to take our short test and find out how intuitive or data-driven you are.

**Take the test**

Or, if viewing this on a print-out visit [theagencypartnership.com/intuition](https://theagencypartnership.com/intuition)



## We'd love to hear from you

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