

The Big Idea is dead; long live the Big Idea (Part 1)

 By [Joey Khuvutlu](#)

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For over 50 years, delivering the 'Big Idea' for a brand has been the ultimate goal for creative agencies. As David Ogilvy put it, "You will never win fame and fortune unless you invent big ideas."

Big Ideas were those omnipresent campaigns that redefined a category, changed popular culture and often endured for years, achieving impact and recognition beyond the intended consumer base.

Some of the most memorable Big Ideas have also been the foundation that great companies have been built on, from technology companies, to sports brands to everyday household consumables. Apple challenged us to 'Think Different' and won the hearts and imagination of the creatively inclined. Nike told us to 'Just do it', then Michael Jordan did it, and as a result so did we. The California Milk Board asked the American people if they 'Got Milk?' so they went out and got it.

Bringing it home, we said 'Yebo Gogo' to Vodacom and mobile telephony and some years later MTN ensured that it was all 'Ayoba!' for the MTV generation. The public broadcaster did its bit to bring the nation together with 'Simunye - we are one'.

Death of the Big Idea as we know it

The Big Idea was a tag-line, a story or singular concept which served many purposes. It either captured a universal human truth or inspired. At times it shocked its audience or it delivered memorable images and one-liners. The Big Idea could make brands iconic through the creation of mascots or through association with celebrities.

Big Ideas have never been easy to uncover, but it was certainly easier for an idea to become BIG in an era with limited media and limited access to information and content - a pre-internet and pre-social media era.

In today's environment can Big Ideas still be achieved? The proliferation of media channels and consumers' ability to create and comment on content has debunked the notion of homogeneous truths, concepts and images that Big Ideas were once built on. Megan Garber explains it well, "...Big Media is becoming, steadily, less big...in this framework, more media choice for consumers means a more fractured media environment for everyone, [which] means a more idea-hostile media environment for the culture at large."

Lots of Small Ideas

Edward Boches writes a great article on the Big Idea where he also discusses the virtues of the Small Idea. In this article he quotes Kevin Roberts, Saatchi & Saatchi CEO, as stating that "The big idea is dead. There are no more big ideas."

Creative leaders should go for getting lots and lots of small ideas out there."

Boches, as do I, disagrees with the declaration that Big Ideas are dead and argues, "...perhaps it's not so much that the Big Idea is no longer needed, it's that we need many more different kinds of ideas because we can't reach the masses with one, in one place, not even in a Super Bowl commercial."

Long live the Big Idea

Although there is increasing media fragmentation, there are also rapid advances in technology that have allowed for the conceptualisation of BIGGER, more dynamic and more interactive ideas than those of David Ogilvy's era.

And while I also agree with the virtues of the lots of Small Ideas, Big Ideas will be those that live up to the possibility that has been ushered in by the progress of technology and social media. Success won't be measured by a Big Idea's ability to be all things to everyone, but rather by how they allow brands to do more and be more for consumers and societies within which they exist. Big Ideas need to be creative and engaging as they have always been but now, also interactive and accountable. Big Ideas will have to do more than sell products; they must give something back to the public that buy into them.

Big Ideas will also be those that allow themselves to be built in collaboration with the public and not those that are pushed onto to consumers. Part two of the article will look at accountable and interactive ideas in more detail.

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