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# The Role Of Research In A Big Data World

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In recent years much has been made of the increasing availability of big data, with conversations ranging from simply defining what big data means, to the business applications and the societal implications of living in a big data environment. Often big data is messy, on various legacy systems with incompatible formats, lots of missing values and so on. Within this context, unlocking deeper insights and bigger business opportunities is easier said than done.

One of the hottest topics in the research industry is whether big data will replace traditional market research and perhaps make primary research obsolete. After all, why should a business spend money collecting new data when they don't make good use of the data they already own? Before we consign survey research to the dustbin however it is worth remembering that it is not the existence of any specific data set that matters but our ability to answer questions. The interesting thing about the big data world is that it often throws up

more questions which tend to be best addressed by traditional research. In this way, as big data increases we see parallel growth in the need for 'small data' to answer the questions it raises.

The Market Research Society's 2016 report ['Towards an insight driven organisation'](#) highlights how important it is to assume an approach that integrates research data with other sources in order to drive business impact. Indeed, research is only valuable if it has impact. Regardless of which end of the qual/quant scale a researcher sits, in years to come they will need to have a more comprehensive understanding of data science than is common today if they are going to be able to continue to discover the 'why' behind what drives consumer behaviour.

Rather than see the increasing prevalence of data science and technological advancement as a threat, tomorrow's researchers should see it as an opportunity to set themselves apart with their uniquely human ability to focus on meaningful interpretation and emotional storytelling. In doing so they will most effectively be able to inspire the business, their clients and ultimately galvanise positive action.

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