



# FROM OVERWHELM TO OPPORTUNITY

Five steps to scale social  
creative impact, not just volume



# How AI Amplifies Human Intelligence to Scale Creative Effectiveness

Social media is now the single biggest media channel in the world and it's projected to attract a quarter of all advertising spend by the close of 2025.<sup>1</sup>

With this increase in share of total media spend, social has officially become one of the "grown-up" channels. That shift changed expectations. What began as a performance engine built to convert demand and drive lower-funnel outcomes soon set the creative standard for digital more broadly. But as creative scales across channels and contexts, it introduces a new set of challenges for marketers operating in an increasingly fragmented ecosystem.

These shifts in media have brought us to a creative inflection point. As platforms multiply and targeting capabilities grow more precise, digital investment now demands exponentially more creative to perform effectively. The result is that marketers are producing assets at unprecedented scale, with some global brands increasing output tenfold.

This surge isn't just about volume for volume's sake. In an integrated ecosystem, brands are learning that scaling asset production, when paired with stronger creative guidelines, drives significantly better performance.

Against this backdrop of marketers demanding more of their social ad investments, and in parallel creating more ads than ever before, how can brands effectively increase performance and brand effects in social?

The answer lies in creative evaluation and optimization data, powered by AI models and capabilities. Addressing this, Ipsos and Smartly have joined forces to share their collective Human Intelligence (HI) + Artificial Intelligence (AI) expertise to help advertisers maximize their social impact. Drawing on Ipsos' global creative meta-analyses and new findings from Smartly's AI platform data, this paper provides:

## ■ A five-step blueprint

Proven steps to scale creative effectiveness without sacrificing quality.

## ■ Real-World Success

Actionable insights backed by use cases from Spotify, Eventbrite, and Zalando.

## ■ Future-Proof Strategies

A systematic approach to maximizing campaign impact in today's integrated ecosystem.

Today, digital video must work seamlessly across platforms, directly influencing ROI while also fostering brand discovery. That transition is being accelerated as platforms once built for programmatic delivery evolve into integrated, full-funnel engines, where performance and brand impact happen simultaneously. Google's emergence in this space, using YouTube Shorts and Demand Gen, mirrors the engagement patterns of social feeds, requiring marketers to treat these

placements not as secondary digital video, but as primary social-style touchpoints that demand high-volume, resonant storytelling.

The performance data validates this multi-surface approach:

Customers leveraging Smartly's unified Media and Creative capabilities across both Social and Google see a **28%** year-over-year improvement in ROAS (return on ad spend), compared to an **18%** median lift across Smartly customers overall, after adjusting for scaled spend.

This gap shows that when brands commit to the higher creative volumes required for cross-channel scale, they don't just gain presence, they maximize impact.

So, amidst this new landscape, the fundamental question is no longer if marketers should scale, but how. How can they build a system that produces creative at scale while also ensuring every asset is data-driven, strategically sound, empathetic to the audience, and part of a feedback loop for optimization? How do they avoid sacrificing creative quality for quantity? The answer isn't more effort. It's smarter amplification. By pairing human insight with AI-powered production and data, brands can adopt a new operating mode, one grounded in better workflows, audience-first strategy, and continuous experimentation.

That's how you scale creative without sacrificing quality, delivering stronger audience experiences and more effective full-funnel results.

## To get there, we propose five actions

The future of creative excellence requires a commitment to new systems and workflows.

# 1

Amplify human intelligence with AI-powered systems.

# 2

Define best practices using foundational AI datasets.

# 3

Maximize upside by moving creative research upstream.

# 4

Engage audiences with empathetic, brand-distinct content.

# 5

Refine tactics through constant platform-specific experimentation.

# 1 Using AI to Connect Measurement, Creative and Media Decisions

Marketers still grapple with fragmented workflows, where creative assets are produced in one system, media set in another, and performance reported elsewhere. Smartly consolidates these steps, using AI to guide creative production and media placement across platforms and formats.

Aiming to streamline creative and media workflows, Smartly enables faster deployment and easier versioning when running multi-market campaigns. Its platform combines templated asset creation, automated trafficking and cross-platform campaign setup.

Clients say the appeal lies in **speed, scalability and consistency**: work that once took days can be deployed in hours, via direct API integrations, with creative variants spun up to match placements and audiences.

Templates and AI-assisted video assembly extend this approach, enabling higher-quality video production without increasing cost. Brands can repurpose long-form content into bite-sized, platform-native clips, generate new assets from raw footage using dynamic text and intelligent editing, and personalize each video for unique audiences. With AI orchestrating these steps, marketers can instantly create measurable and meaningful content at scale.



With real-time production tools guided by AI models and creative frameworks, marketers can scale human insight and decision-making without sacrificing creative quality or effectiveness. By unifying creative, media, and measurement, Smartly ensures that ads are thoughtfully optimized before going live - avoiding wasted media dollars before campaigns begin. The premise is straightforward: automating routine tasks supports the efficient production of creative variants, freeing teams to focus on strategy and storytelling rather than manual work.



**Using a combination of automated ads, predictive budget allocation, and creative optimization across multiple platforms and markets, Smartly helps us drive incremental conversions with less manual work, saving our team countless hours each week.**

Jacqueline Coppola, Head of Performance Marketing, Spotify

Another brand, Eventbrite, wanted to run a performance-driven campaign to boost ticket sales using Google's Performance Max (PMax). However, this required creating multiple asset variations and managing campaigns across seven markets, posing a challenge for their lean team.

AI-powered automation allowed the team to focus on strategy while ensuring their creative output remained relevant and high-impact, essential for driving PMax campaign performance.



**Automating creative production and campaign setup saved us time and allowed us to focus on strategy.**

Laura Benayas, Head of Growth, Eventbrite

Overall, Eventbrite was able to dramatically reduce manual effort, activating seven markets with 150 ads per market, creating assets three times faster and driving an impressive 247% uplift in click through rate (CTR).

These results highlight a core challenge for marketers today: how to balance scale with creative quality across multiple platforms and formats. Smartly's templates offer a simple solution. By defining the layout for a collection of ads, templates let brands seamlessly incorporate UGC and brand assets in a consistent way, helping tell a cohesive story throughout a campaign.

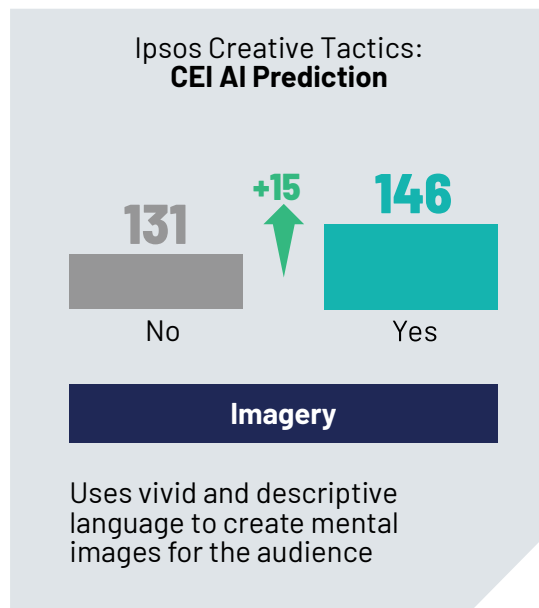
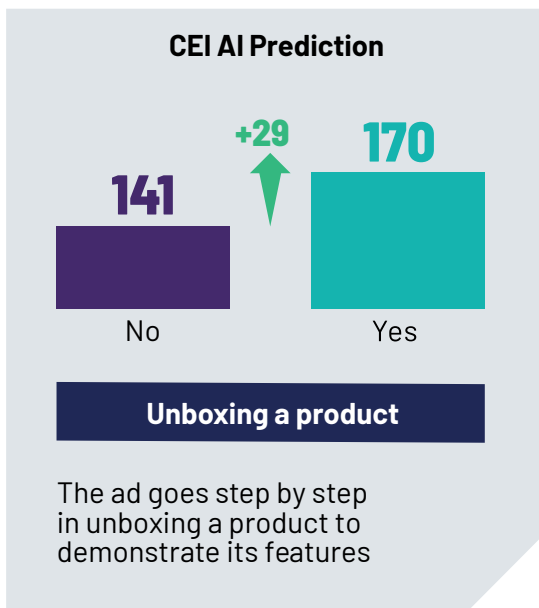
## 2 AI-Powered Data to Define Creative Best Practice

Whether a creative is aimed at driving performance or building long-term brand impact, marketing and agency teams typically define principles, tactics, and playbooks to improve the odds of future campaign success. Traditionally, these guidelines relied on small-scale research, anecdotal case studies, or even gut instinct. While human intelligence remains essential, AI models now offer a step-change opportunity, providing new ways to complement that expertise and boost effectiveness across the entire funnel.

Smartly integrates directly with platforms like Google, integrating their YouTube ABCDs creative best practices to evaluate creatives before going live. By doing this, Smartly helps marketers ensure their creative assets are platform ready to reduce ad-skipping behavior and increase

time viewed, which in turn increases performance. This creative intelligence accelerates the creative optimization flywheel, enabling marketers to optimize their ads more rapidly across the funnel.

Ipsos expands this platform best practice understanding with AI-powered models trained on in-context, human response data from creative research evaluations. For example, the Ipsos Creative|Spark AI solution delivers asset-level evaluations using metrics that have been validated via 1,000+ marketing mix modeling observations to understand short and longer-term brand impact at scale. This model adapts to social ads on YouTube, In-feed Meta platforms and short-form Video across TikTok, YouTube Shorts and Instagram Reels in near real-time.



At the heart of these predictive models are creative tactics engineered using Vision and Generative AI LLMs. AI now lets advertisers and agencies analyze a brand's, or even a category's, entire ad portfolio to pinpoint the approaches and tactics most strongly linked to desired outcomes. Take a recent case study in short-form Video for the

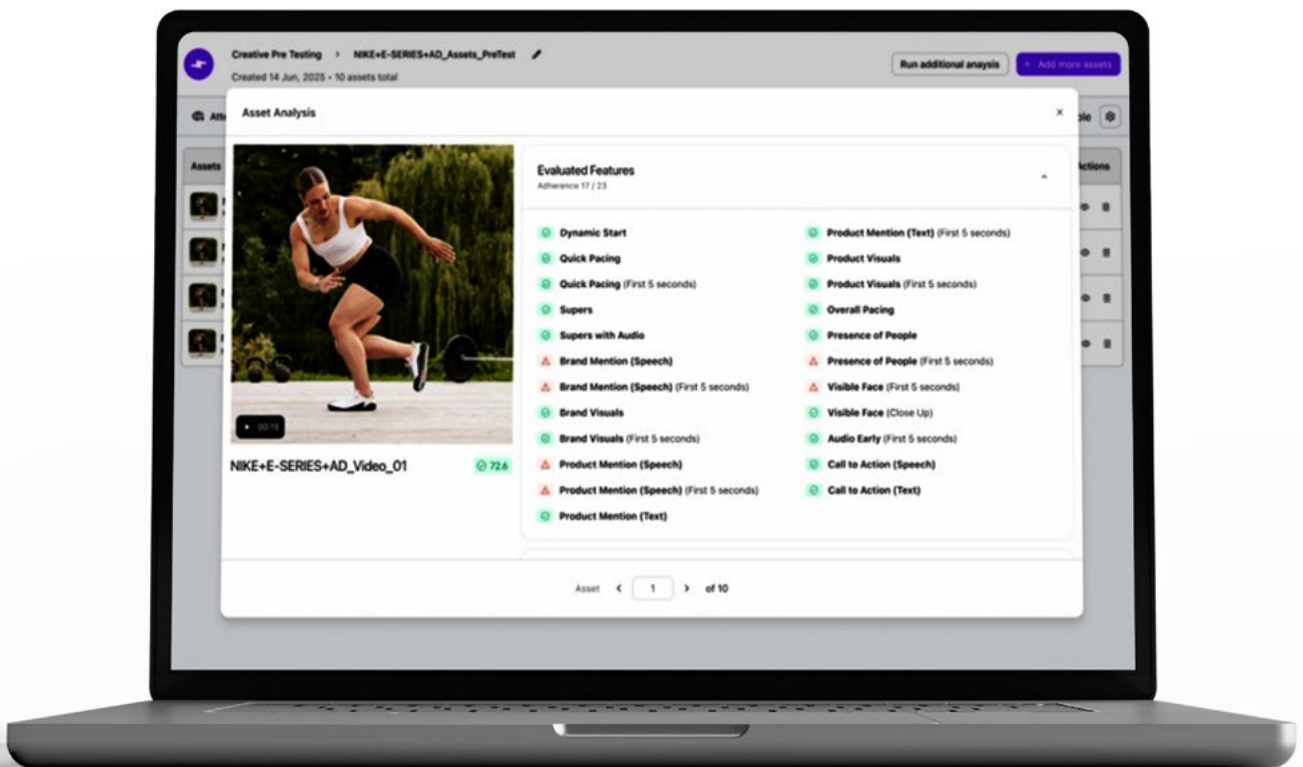
Makeup and Cosmetics category: with companies like L'Oréal collaborating with over 50,000 content creators, there's a clear need to surface tactics that actually drive results. Ipsos' AI models revealed that approaches like unboxing and vivid imagery correlate more closely with creative sales lift<sup>4</sup>, than simply showing the product and its features.



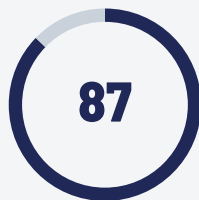
# 3 Real-Time AI Evaluation and Optimization

As markets are shifting beyond performance to impact results, attention metrics have gained currency as a proxy for effectiveness. Smartly integrates scoring systems, such as those from attention measurement experts Amplified’s visual attention metrics, to identify likely drop off points, suggest edits (shorter intros, clearer CTAs), and rank variants. Marketers can use this information to understand which moments drive engagement or cause drop-offs through scene-level breakdowns, best practices for visual hierarchy, colors, and movement, and optimization suggestions, such as cutting slow intros, reducing media waste, or making CTAs more prominent.

Ipsos Creative|Spark AI lets advertisers evaluate creative versions almost in real time against the goal of capturing Brand Attention. Its AI prediction models estimate how likely people are to remember both the ad and the brand after exposure. Beyond measuring memorability, the AI highlights which creative tactics tend to appear in high-performing assets. For example, a Meta in-feed video for the Scottish soda Irn Bru, submitted for the Cannes Lions 2025, stood out for driving sales lift. It outperformed the Ipsos database thanks to a strong on-screen human presence, well-paced storytelling, and creative elements that were distinctive within the category, as outlined on the next page.



Click the image to watch the advertisement



Average face time



Category uniqueness



Pacing

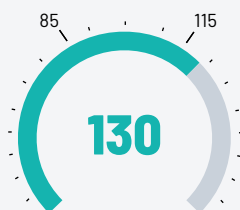


Creative Effect AI Prediction

Through short-form social videos, this US campaign for the French cheese brand, Boursin, demonstrates how consistent use of creative elements can capture brand attention over time. By maintaining consistent colors and prominently featuring the logo, the ads make it easier for audiences to instantly associate the creative with the brand, reinforcing recognition and memorability.



Brand Consistency



Brand Attention AI Prediction



## 4 AI Data and Tools Guided by Audience Needs

With AI-driven data, models, and production tools, brands can boost campaign effectiveness while also creating higher-quality audience experiences, faster than ever before.



**Launching localized campaigns across 24 markets used to be a huge lift for our small team. With Smartly's automation and templates, we were able to scale creative effortlessly and cut launch times from 11 hours to just 3 for Google Apps and Demand Generation campaigns – without compromising quality or impact.**

– Karin Herbsthofer, Performance Marketing Lead, Zalando

Ipsos research shows that ads seen as both highly creative and empathetic drive 30% more effectiveness than ads that are creative but lack empathy. While every brand aims for that "sweet spot," an analysis of nearly 5,000 ads in the Ipsos US testing database found that only 10% actually reach it.

In a world of mass creative production and endless versioning, having a strong strategic foundation rooted in genuine human insight gives every asset a better chance to succeed. It all starts with a clear, empathetic creative brief. Ipsos research shows that ideas connecting with "people like me" are 79% more likely to drive brand choice. Incorporating human response and empathy isn't just crucial for the creative itself, it's equally vital for the AI models we use to guide and optimize that creativity.

These findings support heavier investment in briefs grounded in human insight and in AI systems trained on robust, representative response data. Zalando, for example, credits Smartly for cutting launch times for localized campaigns across 24 markets from 11 hours to three using automation and templates - evidence that speed is attainable, provided quality controls travel with it.

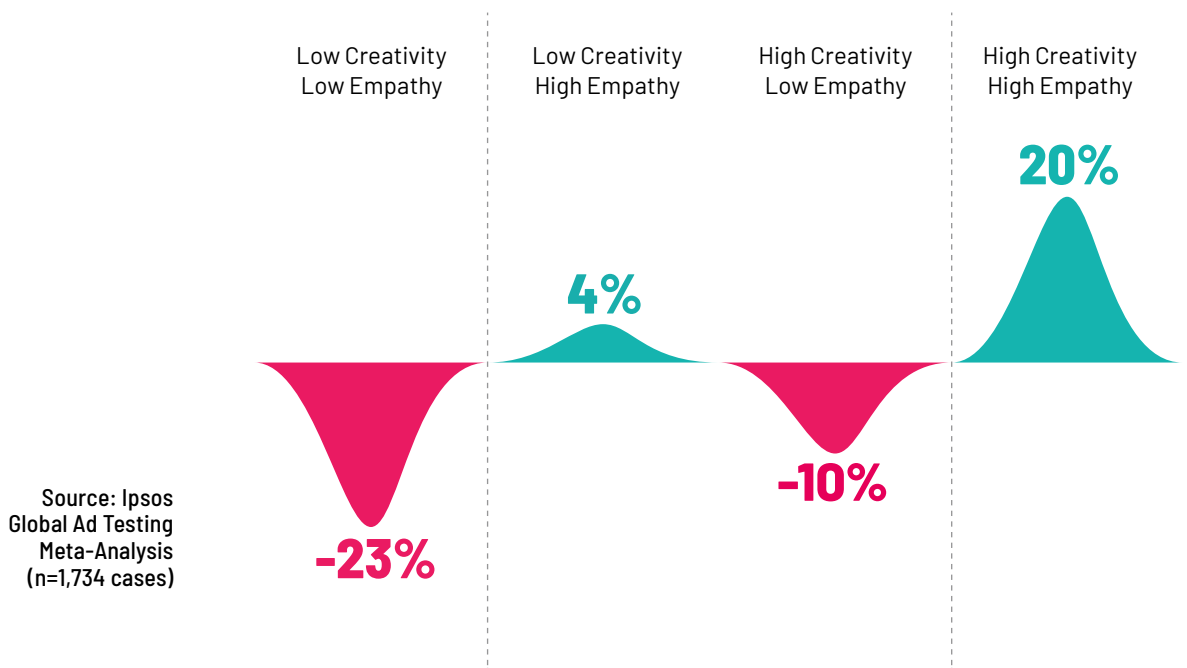
**Idea:**  
Starting with empathy to think in a new way



Source: Ipsos Global meta analysis from Early Ideas routes database tested with InstantLabs (200+ cases) Early advertising routes database tested in InstantLabs (1,465 cases) Ad test database (1,734 cases)

**Ads that are seen as highly creative AND empathetic deliver 30% greater effectiveness vs. ads that are highly creative, but lack empathy**

% difference vs. average performance on Creative Effect Index



## 5 A Bright Social Ad Future, with Human Practitioners at the Center

With AI-driven data, models, and production tools, the future of social creative looks brighter than ever. What used to be a struggle - creating, placing, and adapting large volumes of creative at a scale teams could realistically manage, is now an opportunity to amplify human insight and boost creative effectiveness. The best part is the lack of compromise. Audiences get a more engaging ad experience, while marketers are able to scale meaningful connections instantly.

The future of social creative is bright, but it won't happen on its own. Realizing it requires commitment: investing in the right systems, workflows, resources, and measurement to streamline creative production, selection, and optimization. That investment pays off not just in efficiency, but in creative effectiveness. AI-generated data and models from Smartly and Ipsos are already showing us how to make creative work smarter and drive stronger results.

To capitalize on this opportunity and strengthen both immediate and medium-term outcomes, marketers and agencies should consider the following steps to advance their effectiveness agenda:

- 1** Invest in AI-Powered production, measurement and optimization systems and workflows to amplify human intelligence.
- 2** Generate large foundational AI-Powered datasets to define creative best practice for your brand and category.
- 3** Set a foundational idea and campaign strategy with early-stage creative research upstream to maximize upside in effectiveness for your downstream creative assets.
- 4** Create assets for the audience first and foremost in mind. By delivering a relevant, empathetic experience and one that is distinct and consistent to your brand in the category.
- 5** Take the opportunity to experiment with producing multiple versions by platform and format to define and refine best practice and increase effectiveness at campaign level. This process can identify specific strategies and tactics to drive your effectiveness agenda.

## References

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- 04 As measured by the Ipsos Creative|Spark Creative Effect Index (CEI). <https://www.smartly.io/resources/ai-and-advertising-today-what-consumers-expect>

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