

Impact of Creative Advertising – A Review

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Introduction

As an introduction to the theory base reviewed, the attempts by academics to define creativity in general are explored, followed by a review of their attempts to define and measure advertising creativity and impact specifically.

This paper discusses the key themes that emerged from a review of the relevant literature is firstly the need for more research on advertising creativity, secondly the difficulty in defining and measuring creativity, and thirdly the identification of both enablers and constraints on advertising creativity.

An extensive review of a wide range of journals has not found any academic literature investigating the impact of regulation on advertising creativity. This could be expected given the contention that creativity has not received the appropriate attention in the literature (Zinkham, 1993; Klebba and Tierney, 1995; Stewart, 1992).

The need for more research on creativity in advertising Klebba and Tierney (1995) and Stewart (1992) assert that creativity has not received research attention commensurate with its importance in the advertising process, and Zinkham (1993) and Hill and Johnson (2004) support this view, contending there is a need for more research on the advertising creative process. Reid *et al.* (1998) go further than just the creative process and call for further research focusing on agency creatives.

Whilst the Journal of Advertising has always emphasised the importance of creativity in advertising, the initial interest displayed (9% of articles over 4 years) diminished to 1.4% of articles over the following 15 years (Zinkham 1992; El-Murad and West 2004). Koslow *et al.* (2003) found that creativity had very low prominence in Muncy's (1991) twenty-year review of Journal of Advertising published papers

This could be explained by the inherent difference between academics and practitioners from a career pattern perspective (Kover, 1976). Reasons postulated are the difficulty of measuring creativity and analysing it through traditional social science techniques and the lack of incentives for agency practitioners to publish (Zinkhan 1993).

Koslow *et al.* (2003) also highlight the limitation of the numerous different interpretations of creativity, whilst Klebba and Tierney (1995) note reasons around diversity of creative output (Hocevar and Bachelor, 1989, cited in Klebba and Tierney, 1995) and the organisational environmental influences.

The difficulty defining advertising creativity

Defining creativity is described as "elusive", (Ewing *et al.*, 2001, p.161) a view echoed by distinguished academic researchers (Amabile, 1982; Runco and Sakamoto, 1999; cited in El-Murad and West, 2004). Some have even argued that

creativity cannot be defined or measured (Callahan, 1991; Khatena, 1982, cited in El-Murad and West, 2004).

Amabile (1996) identified the difficulties experienced by creativity researchers, given the high level of disagreement over the definition of creativity, and hence its measurement. In determining which method is best to assess creativity Amabile points out that the first attempts to define creativity focussed on the creative process on the premise that the end product of such a process would be creative. Subsequently, suggested definitions have focused on identifying persons through psychometric tests or identifying the unique characteristics of products through expert opinion (Amabile, 1996; El-Murad and West, 2004). Of these Amabile (1996) identifies those relating to the assessment of product as the most appropriate for empirical research.

Within advertising specifically, (Reid, King and Delorme, 1998, cited in El-Murad and West, 2004) contend that as important as creativity is, it appears to lack scientific rigour. Smith and Yang (2004) agree, citing the lack of systematic research that defines advertising creativity. As a result, key creativity literature such as Sternberg's "Handbook of Creativity" (1998, cited in Smith and Yang, 2004) or Amabile's (1996) "Creativity in Context" does not deal with advertising creativity to any significant degree.

Qualities of creativity described include forming or creation, originality, and communication to influence buyer behaviour (Ewing *et al.* , 2001). Ang, Lee and Leong (2007) identify that "novelty" has been the primary dimension of advertising creativity definitions and cite the words "fresh and unique" used by Belch and Belch (2004, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007, p. 221). Smith and Yang (2004), in their review of advertising creativity to develop a general framework, focus on the importance of divergence.

El-Murad and West (2004), Koslow *et al.* (2003) and Smith and Yang (2004) conclude from their review of literature that "originality" or "newness", although an area of agreement in literature in defining creativity, is an insufficient condition and that it should include "appropriateness" or "usefulness". Koslow *et al.* (2003, p.97) defines this as the "originality-appropriateness framework for creativity" as put forward by Runco and Charles (1993, cited in Koslow *et al.* , 2003). Whilst creativity is likely to have different individual interpretations, there are certain systematic patterns that emerge. A limitation of this framework to be taken into consideration is that originality is much more easily established than appropriateness, and that the latter is open to much more subjectivity (Koslow *et al.*, 2003). Reid *et al.* (1998, p.3) expand on Runco and Charles's framework by defining advertising creativity as "original and imaginative thought designed to produce goal-directed and problem-solving advertisements and commercials", thereby recognising both the importance of the client's communication objectives and the need for these to relate to the target audience.

In an attempt to build on the originality-appropriateness framework of creativity, Koslow *et al.* (2003) found, through their exploratory interviews conducted with advertising agency personnel, that the dimensions of originality, artistry and strategy emerged in response to the question to define advertising creativity.

Originality was found to have the highest occurrence, interchanged with words like "edgy, breakthrough, different, daring, visionary, innovative, risky, and extreme"

(Koslow *et al.*, 2003, p.100). The strategy component was described as "being on strategy", with the objective of having to sell the product in question being recognised with expressions such as "problem solving for the client," and "the

substantive benefit element of the advertisement" (Koslow *et al.* , 2003, p.100).

Whilst artistry or “craft” was consistently linked with creativity, it appeared to be a negative connotation, with words such as “I-candy” and “beauty pageant” used to describe it as a selfish act of Creatives (Koslow *et al.* , 2003, p.101). It would appear that this association is most prevalent when artistry is employed at the expense of strategy and originality. Perhaps explaining the consistent association of artistry with creativity despite the negative connotations expressed, Koslow *et al.* (2003, p.108) found in their quantitative analysis of creativity that where both strategy and originality dimensions were very prevalent, the presence of artistry could achieve exponential “breakthroughs in creative potential”.

Ang *et al.* (2007, p. 220) contribute to existing definitions of creativity by identifying three dimensions of creativity that they term the “ad creativity cube”.

These consist of “novelty, meaningfulness, and connectedness”, with novelty identified as very important in assisting “higher ad recall and more favourable ad attitudes”, something crucial in this ever “cluttered media environment”.

However, they point out that whilst novelty is important, if meaningfulness and connectedness are not achieved, the same success is often not achieved (Ang and Low, 2000, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007). It is therefore important to include both the consumer and advertiser perspective in creating an advertising message.

Achieving meaningfulness in advertising requires that the communication should “convey information relevant to the product”, a view supported by previous creativity authors such as Haberland and Dacin (1992, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007, p. 221) that refers to the need for a “meaningful central focus in advertising”. Andrew and Smith (1996, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007) describe that when this is achieved it manages to not only be novel, but to differentiate itself in a meaningful way,

Connectedness is described as advertisements connecting with its target viewers through being relevant (Belch and Belch, 2004, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007). In fact, “the Creative Council of Ogilvy & Mather Worldwide observed that great ads are those that consumers can easily relate to their experience”

(Bassar 1991, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007, p. 222), whilst Leo Burnett uses the “inherent drama” in a product to connect with “ordinary people” (Batra *et al.* 1996, cited in Ang *et al.* , 2007, p.222).

Miniard *et al.* (1991, cited in Ang *et al.*, 2007, p. 222) differentiate meaningfulness and connectedness through the use of the terms “relevance” and “appropriateness”. Relevance is the portrayal of “pertinent information”, whilst appropriateness represents how “acceptable’ the information conveyed is. Therefore the more acceptable the information is to the target audience, the higher the connection.

Measurement of Creativity

El-Murad and West (2004) group the ten categories of criteria for measuring creativity as identified by Hocevar (1981, cited in El-Murad and West, 2004) into psychometric tests and expert opinions. Psychometric tests focus on the individual, whilst expert opinion techniques focus on the creative product.

Key techniques that have been used to assess advertising creativity are Amabile’s (1982, cited in El-Murad and West 2004) Consensual Assessment Technique, White and Smith’s (2001) Creative Product Semantic Differential Scale (CPSS) and Koslow *et al.*’s (2003) factor model of originality, artistry and strategy.

The Consensual Assessment Technique uses a five point scale to determine if an

advertisement is creative. A group of expert judges are asked to use the scale and assess the advertisements using their own definitions of creativity (El-Murad and West 2004).

The CPSS technique involved analysing advertising creativity by a panel of top advertising creatives (White and Smith, 2001). In addition to the originality and appropriateness dimensions they introduce an additional dimension of how well the advertisement is created and implemented. The scale used was between 1 and 7 with bipolar adjectives on either side

Koslow *et al.* (2003) conducted in-depth interviews and focus groups with creatives, account management, media and strategy executives at various levels within advertising agencies using a factor model of originality, artistry and strategy to determine the level of creativity. The framework for this method was informed by Amabile's Consensual Assessment Technique.

The Enablers and Constraints of Creativity

The influences on creativity that emerged from a review of the literature are captured in a summary to this Chapter.

Stokes and Fisher (2005) argue that selecting constraints is fundamental to achieving creativity. Stokes (2006) proposes three constraints on creativity in advertising: overall goal constraint (selling), a constant task constraint (the product), and a specific goal constraint (the selling promise or strategy).

Ivan Sherman, an art director (2002, cited in Stokes, 2006 p.100) stated that "If we tried to create without constraints, the ads would just be noise". "Constraints facilitate problem-solving by directing and limiting search for solutions"

(Reitman, 1965, cited in Stokes, 2005, p.283). Interestingly, the "constraints" identified by Stokes (2006) and Stokes and Fisher (2005) actually enable creativity.

Klebba and Tierney (1995) contend that the factors that influence creative efforts should be reviewed, given their importance to the advertising industry.

A number of constraints on advertising creativity have been identified in the literature: ethics (Drumwright and Murphy, 2004), copy and evaluative research (Chong, 2006; Hill *et al.* 2007), commercial imperative, influences of industry regulators, clients and media owners (Hackley and Kover, 2007), the brief (Ewing, Napoli and West, 2001, and Hill *et al.*, 2007) deadlines, budgetary limitations (Klebba and Tierney, 1995 and Hill *et al.* , 2007, technology (Klebba and Tierney, 1995) and laws and regulations (Rotfeld and Stafford, 2007).

In a recent study Hill *et al.* (2007) determined what senior advertising Creatives in Australia, New Zealand and Malaysia viewed as enabling to advertising creativity and found that Australian advertisers disagreed more with each statement put forward than any of the Creatives across the three countries.

This difference is important to bear in mind in attempting to deal with client/agency relationships.

Whilst, overall, the Creatives agreed across countries on the same enablers and constraints on creativity, there was a difference in the degree of agreement by the Malaysian creatives, who viewed some factors as less critical (Hill *et al.*, 2007). This is an important consideration to take into account if one is dealing with agencies across countries.

Key factors identified as important to an enabling creative environment identified by Hill *et al.* (2007) are the correct brief, adequate time, the client/agency

relationship, intrinsic motivation of creatives, adequate budget and agency factors such as the work environment and trust between account management and creatives.

Koslow *et al.* (2003, p100) gives further insight into the issue of both budgetary limitations and risk aversion, quoting a respondent that "it is not the size of the budget that drives creativity; it is the willingness of the client to take a risk and believe in our work, if they hold back, we hold back!". Risk-aversion was also found to extend to the agencies to the extent that different agencies have varying degrees of appetite for risk to push creativity, with some often conforming to a client's risk-averse approach (Koslow *et al.*, 2003).

Ewing *et al.* (2001) found that advertising creatives were guided and constrained by the client's creative brief. "Creativity within strict parameters"

(Zinkham, 1993, p1) and the need for a well-defined strategy (Koslow *et al.* , 2003) illustrate that the greatest creativity is achieved when advertisements are both very strategic and unique. In an analysis of advertising creatives' views on creativity, Koslow *et al.* (2003, p101) described the existence of a "love-hate relationship" between the desire for freedom to explore novel concepts, whilst needing the challenge of a "tight strategy".

Further work by Koslow, Sasser and Riordan (2006) examines the important role of clients in influencing advertising creativity as viewed by advertising agency employees. They find that the client's influence lies in "setting direction, resource allocation, and evaluation" with the effectiveness of the client brief enhanced significantly if they are willing to "explore new strategic ideas with the agency" (Koslow *et al.*, 2006, p.81). From a resource perspective, the involvement of high level management is primarily an enabler, although in certain instances it can be a constraint if the relationship is cold.

Conclusion

This lack of research on the impact of advertising creativity is understandable, given the contention that advertising creativity itself has not received the appropriate attention in the literature (Zinkham, 1993; Klebba and Tierney, 1995; Stewart, 1992).

Following a review of the literature on advertising creativity, the dimensions of advertising creativity and the enablers and constraints on advertising creativity identified. This provides a useful framework to firstly determine if Creatives have a consistent view of advertising creativity and what they view as the key enablers and constraints on it. Secondly, the role of regulations can be explored within this context to determine if it is either an enabler or constraint and the impact of creativity can be identified.

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