

CREATIVITY GENERATORS AND OUTCOMES: PATHS TO ADVERTISING EFFECTIVENESS

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to critically review the existing literature on advertising creativity. It summarizes academic research on the matter from a practitioner's point of view, offering current perspectives on how consumers assess advertising creativity. More specifically, to determine what is known about the creative process in advertising, its determinants and the effects deriving from this process. First, an outline of what creativity means to advertising researchers and practitioners, sets the differences between creativity in art and commercial environment. Creativity in ads cannot be pure freedom of imagination. It devotes itself to the expression of attributes and features of the product. An explanation of the creative process is followed by the main factors inducing creativity. Effects on audience attention, attitude and emotion are reviewed in the last part of this article. Conclusions suggest a cautious use of creativity in well-studied strategies, as random creativity may be harmful to ad and brand awareness.

Keywords: Creativity, creative advertising, effectiveness.

DEFINITION OF CREATIVITY

Creativity's concept covers different interpretations and definitions. Generally, creativity is linked with art and therefore its frequent definition is linked to uniqueness, artistry, imagination or even unexpectedness. These definitions are key players in a creative process, however defining creativity as a concept, is difficult. Meusbarger (2009) affirm that the main definition of creativity in academic literatures and researches is expressed as novel and original ideas, or even procedures that are related or useful to an organization or product.

Cassou and Coubley (1995) state that when you paint for process, you cannot decide what is and what is not acceptable. The spontaneous expression has been given beyond that decision, to expose you to what you don't know, what you can't foresee or even expect. Different from arts, the creativity in advertising has a total different goal. Creativity is used to pursue the sellout of products or services, empowering brand awareness (Hatfield, 1996). In other words, advertising creativity can be considered a targeted applied creativity. Creativity used in commercial environment has a different perspective, as it is not free as the work of an artist: a painter or a composer. Commercially used creativity is the one which is disciplined and where the self-expression of the artist is substituted by the specifications and qualities of the product.

The more developed the market is, the more structured the demand is. And therefore, in order to gain attention from the potential customers, correctly applied creativity is required. But, professionals who should know better have lost their targets. They are confusing pure creativity with applied creativity (Philips, 1996).

THE CREATIVE PROCESS

Creativity should not be the main goal in advertising. Therefore we need to go through the stages that generate creative ideas and that are used to give solutions to unpredicted and complex situations (Newell, Shaw, and Simon, 1962). According to Wallas (1962) the creative process passes through four stages, respectively named: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification. Through the Preparation phase, the creative person aims to understand the problem in hand. General information and data like consumer demographics, psychographics, consumer segment characteristics and additional information of this kind are collected.

During the Incubation stage, the creative person separates himself from the consciousness and will use his subconscious to get useful ideas. The third phase is called Illumination, which according to Wallas (1962) is the moment in which the creative person succeeds in finding appropriate ideas. The last phase in which the creative process passes through is the Verification phase. During this stage, the creative team, the client or the high management of the agency decide whether the developed idea, is the right one and should be approved for further development or application. During this stage of the process, the creative team examines the newly developed idea for meaningfulness and for any possible connection to its targeted customer segment.

Osborn (1963) suggests his own comprehensive process of creativity. According to Osborn, the creative process passes through seven stages. It begins with Orientation, then moving to Preparation, then to Analysis, Ideation, Incubation, Synthesis and concludes with Evaluation. During the Orientation, the creative person reads, searched, collects and learns everything about the actual marketing problem. This stage is equivalent to the Wallas' Preparation phase. The Ideation phase is similar to Wallas' Incubation phase, where the creative person searches for creative ideas which will solve the problem. The Synthesis stage of Osborn's model of creativity process resembles closely to the Illumination stage of Wallas' model. In this stage, different ideas are brought and combined together. It is during this stage that the creative person suddenly finds a creative idea that might solve the problem. The Evaluation and the Analysis state of the Osborn's creativity process model consists on the proceed/ not proceed decisions, either by the creative team or the client. These two phases are similar to the Verification phase proposed by Wallas (1926).

FACTORS OF ADVERTISING CREATIVITY

There are several crucial factors that assess a creative advertisement.

Suddenness

The literature suggests this factor of creativity replicates a deviation from the norm. It consists of a sudden turn that the information received earlier doesn't lead us to expect (Haberland and Dacin, 1992). Suddenness refers to difference with other advertisements in the same product category (Smith and Yang, 2004). According to Bruner (1962) creativity's main merit is the generation of an "effective surprise". Ang and Low (2000) posit that the surprise effect should be meaningful and unexpected to the viewer.

Relevance

Although Suddenness is generally considered as an essential criterion for a creative advertisement, other criteria must be also met (Smith et al., 2007). If the unpredictable element doesn't contain some meaning about the advertised product, Suddenness doesn't necessarily define creativity. Another factor that empowers Suddenness by turning creativity into a tool that links and emphasizes the advertised product or service to the customers' problem solution and goal achievement is Relevance. By Relevance, usually it is being referred to connectedness, logic or strategy, too (Ang et al., 2007). Relevance is the perceived weight the product or brand advertised might have on the viewer's needs fulfillment.

Execution

Several studies have found that artistry which might be found also labeled as Execution, contributes to advertising creativity among professionals and customers (White and Smith, 2001). Artistry is connected to creativity due to the fact that artists are related to the creative ability. Thus, a better executed advertisement is more likely to be related to higher levels of creativity (West, Kover, and Caruana, 2008).

Reformulation

The fourth factor of advertising creativity, which Haberland and Dacin (1992) refer to, is the Reformulation. In order for an advertisement to be viewed as a creative one, the viewers need to reformulate their attitudes towards the advertised product or service. It is important to state that current researches on advertising creativity categorize reformulation as a powerful effect of advertising creativity related to the change of attitudes among audience. Therefore in late studies Reformulation is not considered as a factor. Thus, it is related to the advertising creativity research as an effectiveness measure (Smith and Yang, 2004).

Originality

According to Haberland and Daci the viewers have their own expectations for advertisements, based on their own life experiences with advertisements. Originality of an advertisement, in different literatures also named as novelty, is the degree in which an advertisement differs from the viewers' expectations (Haberland and Dacin, 1992). The key meaning of novelty consists in the idea that no one else thought of it earlier. An idea that is new to the creator but not new to the world, is not a novelty (Wells, et al., 2010). The Goodstein's (1993) idea of an "atypical ad" consists in an advertisement that is original if it is different from a typical advertisement.

Meaningfulness

Another significant factor of creative advertisement is Meaningfulness (Ray, 1982). Originality is necessary but not a sufficient tool for creative advertising. Random creativity may be harmful at worst and inefficient at best (Goldenberg et al., 1999). The meaningfulness in advertisement eases the processing of advertising information in Consumers' cognitive processes. (Lee & Mason, 1999). Therefore the meaningfulness in advertisements is the main axis in which the story in the advertisement spins. It guides the viewers' thinking and leads the creation of an attitude towards the advertised brand, product or service.

Humor

Humor is a very broad concept that is affected by also a very broad variety of factors. According to Sternthal and Craig (1973) it attracts attention and enhances liking. The link between humor and liking is stronger than for any of the other factors. Related humor seems to be superior to unrelated humor, so brand linkage should take this into account. Humor does not appear to offer an advantage over non-humor at increasing persuasion. Humor is not and has never been a magic wand that assures successful advertising, however success is defined (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992).

OUTCOMES OF ADVERTISING CREATIVITY

How the audience perceives the advertisement, the product advertised or the brand, is one of the most researched issues regarding the processing of creative advertisements. General studies on the effects of advertising follow a hierarchy scale, where creative advertisements first attract the attention of the audience, then cognitive processes take place, leading in turn an emotional and attitudinal change (Yang and Smith, 2009). This scale of effects is a general expression of the hierarchy of effects models (Petty and Cacciopo 1981, Lavdige and Steiner, 1961). These attitudinal and models express the scaling effect of an advertising stimuli from exposure to purchase intent formation. Creative advertising's positive effect has been observed by many studies on ad attitude and brand attitude, brand salience, brand trust, ad recall and purchase intention. Most of these studies explain the positive effects of creativity by using information processing theory. That means that creativity is explained in terms of cognitive processes, which lead to increased attention, greater motivation, arousal, affect (Baack, Wilson, and Till, 2008). These hierarchic processes are responsible for the attitude creation toward the advertisement and the brand.

There are not many alternative theories on how creativity in advertising works. One exception comes from Heath, Naim, and Bottomley's (2009) study which suggests that creativity does not increase viewer's level of attention, but that the emotional stimuli in creative advertisement leads to increased arousal, which in turn leads to decreased attention and counter arguments, thus postponing the wear-out effect and prolonging the ad effectiveness. Even though they are using an information processing approach for their study, the argument goes against existing theories that creative stimuli leads to the viewer's arousal, increasing this way its affect predisposition.

Contrary to the information processing approach, Dahlen, Rosengren, and Törn (2008) make use of signal theory to explain the positive effect of creative advertisements. Their study show that increased brand interest and perceived brand quality as a result of creative advertising can be achieved by showing the viewer an added effort in marketing expenditures by the brand or the advertiser. What the studies show is that creativity appears to be present in each stage of the hierarchic models.

CONCLUSIONS

Creativity is usually linked with art suggesting that its definition should be linked to uniqueness, artistry, imagination or unexpectedness. These key definitions in a creative process are applied to the specifications and qualities of the product. In the advertising industry, creativity is used to pursuit the sellout of products or services as well as empowering brand awareness, thus being considered a targeted applied creativity.

Creativity appears to be explained by information processing theory, but research of alternative perspectives on creativity might expand its broad effects on the viewer attitudes and behavioral decisions. Researchers differ in structuring the stages creativity goes through but they are closely related. Creative processes can pass through the four stages of Wallas: preparation, incubation, illumination and verification, or through the seven stages of Osborn: preparation, then to analysis, ideation, incubation, synthesis and concludes with evaluation. Main creativity factors are suddenness, which refers to difference with other advertisements in the same product category and an unexpected solution or execution of the advertising narrative. Relevance is usually referred to as connectedness or ability of the advertised brand to impact the viewer's life. Execution refers to a better executed advertisement, which is more likely to be related to higher levels of creativity. Reformulation is a powerful effect of advertising creativity related to the change of attitudes among audience. Originality is the degree in which an advertisement differs from the viewers' expectations. Meaningfulness guides the viewers' thinking and leads the creation of an attitude towards the advertised brand, product or service.

A creative process in advertising should take in consideration that its main goal is the pursuing of a product sell out and increased brand awareness. The creatives should be aware of the creative stages their efforts go through. They should make use of suddenness, relevance, execution, reformulation, originality, meaningfulness and humor to achieve attitude and behavioral change. A hierarchic model of effects should be accounted for that change. Caution should be showed in extensive use of humor and random creativity.

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