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The Fundamental Templates of Quality Ads

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Abstract

Creative ideation is a highly complex process, which is difficult to formalize and control. Evidently, even in a complex thinking context certain patterns of creativity may emerge. Relying on such observed patterns may help in "organizing" the creative process by promoting routes that have been proven to lead to productive ideas and avoiding those that do not.

The present research suggests that successful advertisements share and are characterized by such abstract patterns termed *creativity templates*. The theoretical rationale for the emergence of such templates and the empirical studies that detect the key creativity templates underlying quality ads indicate that the templates are identifiable, objectively verifiable, and generalizable across multiple categories. Studies 1 and 2 were designed to identify and describe the templates. Six major creativity templates were derived by inference from a sample of 200 highly evaluated print ads drawn from award-winning ad contests such as The One Show (Study 1). Judges found that 89% of the ads could be explained by the six creativity templates. Following a formal description of the templates and their versions, a study comparing 200 award-winning and 200 nonwinning ads (Study 2) is reported. It was found that the two groups differed systematically in the number and distribution of creativity templates: 50% of the award-winning ads as opposed to only 2.5% of the nonwinning ads could be explained by the templates. Further validation of the template approach was obtained by manipulating presence or absence of templates in an experimental setting. In Study 3 groups of individuals were trained in template-based idea generation, an association technique, or not trained at all, prior to an ad-ideation task. Another group subsequently rated the ideas. Findings indicate that a priori knowledge of the templates was associated with the generation of higher quality ads in terms of creativity, brand attitude judgments, and recall (Study 4), with some variation in terms of feeling responses which included humor, emotion, and annoyance.

The findings of the reported studies and several real-life applications conducted in leading ad agencies, indicate that the template taxonomy is a trainable, resource-saving, and effective tool. It simplifies and improves the decision-making

process involved in designing advertising strategies. It can be applied either by hiring trained personnel employed by consulting firms, or by training the agency's own personnel to routinely evaluate past and current ads, and engage in creative activity.

The template approach represents a step forward in defining a comprehensive model of the antecedents of outcome reactions to advertising stimuli. Improved understanding of the wide spectrum of reactions connecting the basic templates with end-user reactions is likely to be beneficial both for academicians and for practitioners. Such a framework can serve as a basis for a synthesis between the activity of creative professionals whose focal interest is the generation of ads, managers, whose main responsibility is strategy formulation, and academic activity, which focuses mainly on the consumer reaction-end of the advertising process. Hence, in addition to academicians, the relevant target audience is likely to include a wide array of communication-related personnel such as creative professionals and planners in advertising agencies, consultants, and brand managers.

In addition, it is postulated that the template taxonomy provides the means to achieve "creativity expertise". Unlike the divergent thinking approaches, in which the required expertise is not necessarily related to the creativity process itself (e.g. individuals can be trained to be better moderators in brainstorming), the creativity template approach is trainable and has the capacity to measure and directly improve creativity outcomes. The template taxonomy facilitates the focused cognitive effort involved in generating new ideas, the capacity to access relevant information, and enables high memorability of the reduced set of information needed to perform the tasks.

The fact that templates are less transient than the ideas produced does not mean that templates are permanent or that they are insensitive to changes over long term frameworks. Indeed, advertising reflects social norms and trends, and as such, long term social trends are expected to reshape the templates and provide conditions for the evolution of new templates. Nonetheless, the dynamics of template changes are expected to be much slower than the dynamics of changes in ad hoc idea generation.

(Advertising Creativity; Advertising Strategy; Creativity in Marketing; Marketing Ideation Processes)