

CAN MEDIA NEUTRALITY LIMIT CREATIVE POTENTIAL?

UNDERSTANDING ADVERTISING'S

USE OF IDEATION TEMPLATES FARES ACROSS MEDIA

Abstract

This paper approaches the media neutrality question by investigating whether or not ideation techniques like *Templates* produce the same quality of advertisements on different media. 207 professional creatives responded to a hypothetical brief with one print and one television ad. Self-report results showed that ideas from media-dependent techniques, *Unification* and *Metaphor*, worked well across media while ideas from the message-dependent technique, *Extreme consequence*, and the control condition didn't. Yet by their nature, media-dependent techniques make for less consistent content across media, but message-dependent techniques have more consistent expressions across media. Therefore, campaign consistency and quality trade-off, limiting media neutrality.

A widespread belief is that media-neutral advertising is not only desirable from a strategic perspective, it can also be—even *should* be—highly creative. For example, Asscher (2003) argues that if agencies would forget about media for a moment and placed the consumer and brand relationship as central to advertising, agencies should be able to develop great creative ideas that can be expressed equally well in all media. Southgate (2009) acknowledges that traditionally creatives developed creative ideas with a specific media in mind, however contemporary advertising strategy requirements are such that agencies need to produce great ideas that are divorced from specific media. More recently, Elms (2017) emphasized the need for media-neutral thinking in dealing with multichannel media strategies for the current fragmented media world. Some have even argued that media neutrality is the next logical step beyond merely integrating across media to genuinely making highly creative ideas independent of specific media expressions (Zambardino and Goodfellow 2003).

Unfortunately, empirical research on media neutrality and its influence on creativity is limited to successful case studies like those WARC carefully documents. Although media neutrality is certainly desirable in terms of strategy, the question is whether it also limits creativity. However, underlying this question is an even more fundamental one: are highly creative ideas actually independent of media in the first place?

One type of answer comes from several academic researchers who have found that creative media use influences advertising effectiveness positively (Dahlen, Friberg and Nilsson 2009; Jurca and Madlberger 2015; Hutter 2015; Rosengren, Modig and Dahlen 2015). This appears to address the independence of media and creativity—except that these studies fail to recognise *creative media use* itself as ideation techniques in operation. That is, virtually all ambient advertising or creative media use are a function of the *Unification* ideation technique (Goldenberg, Mazursky and Solomon 1999). Sometimes, when creative media use or ambient advertising takes on an added characteristic of interactivity, it is usually

a combination of *Unification* and *Activation*, another ideation technique (Goldenberg et al 2009). Still other ideation techniques, however, like *Extreme consequences*, *Absurd alternative* or *Inversion* tend to be message-based (Goldenberg et al 2009), with a much greater likelihood of developing executions that will ultimately prove media-neutral. Thus, a media-neutral creative concept is one that usually draws from message-based templates, but those using media-based templates may struggle to move across media platforms.

This thesis proposes that media neutrality can sometimes impede on creativity in that the source of creative ideas can be message-dependent but also can be media-dependent. We start from basic thinking about advertising creativity and the typologies of creative ideation techniques proposed by both practitioners (Prickens 2008) and academics (Goldenberg, Mazursky and Solomon 1999). That is, highly creative advertising usually follows specific patterns or templates like *Unification*, *Metaphor* and *Extreme consequences* which relate to ideation techniques one can follow to develop new ideas.

These ideas are tested on a sample of 207 professional creatives, who produce advertising in both television and print media. About half the sample hails from the highly awarded advertising market of South Africa (The Gunn Report 2017) and the other half from Nigeria, a cultural similar market. Although Nigeria is not as internationally celebrated as South Africa, the long tradition of Nollywood films—the world's third largest film industry—suggests Nigeria may be highly creative as well.

This thesis shows that some creative ideation techniques can be independent of media, but other techniques are highly dependent on their media. The implication is that those who want to pursue media-neutral strategies must also focus on message-dependant templates like *extreme consequences*. The constraint here is that the client needs to first have a persuasive message worth expressing in multiple media. That is, the client first needs a brand differentiating message (Stewart and Furse 1986; Stewart and Koslow 1989) or unique selling

proposition (Reeves 1961). But if the message is neither powerful nor unique, then it may be better to follow media-dependent templates—and eschew media-neutral strategies.

THEORY

Account Planning, Creativity and the Media-Neutral Ideal

The account planning revolution of the late 20th century changed the ways advertising professionals develop strategy. By combining consumer research with strategic thinking, the goal of good planning is to bring consumers into the creative process (Steele 1998).

Therefore, planners work closely with creatives, often briefing them directly to set direction in the creative process—with some planners even saying that they work ‘for’ creatives (Hackley 2003a). Indeed, so closely do planners serve creatives, planners see feedback from them is also the most important measure of planning quality (Morrison and Haley 2003).

One key contribution of account planning is understanding how consumer insight shapes great creative executions (Hackley 2003b). Finding, articulating and disseminating consumer insight into the creative process is the dominant account planning function (Hackley 2003a). These insights are important in informing a brand-differentiated message critical to the success of the brand (Stewart and Furse 1984; Stewart and Koslow 1989). If account planners have provided creatives a strong, original insight, often they can literally execute that insight to come up with a campaign that is brilliantly creative (Koslow 2015). Thus, account planning plays a critical role in the creative process by focusing the advertising message strategy most likely to solve the advertising problem.

Media neutrality is another contribution of the account planning process concerning both media and creative agencies, and it suggests that an advertising idea can be independent of the media in which it is placed (White 2008). The integrated marketing communications (IMC) concept has focused the planning function toward the development of integrated ideas

that can transcend multiple media to create synergy in the brand message (Schultz, Tannenbaum and Lauerborn 1993). In a fragmented media environment where consumers choose what media they will engage with, there seems to be little choice except to seek campaign ideas that can be applied to any media, whether that be traditional print, television, radio, or more recent choices like social media, product placement or consumer reviews. But is media neutrality wishful thinking or hard-nosed reality?

Although the value of media neutrality seems to be almost universally acknowledged among anyone with a strategy orientation in advertising, empirical evidence of the effectiveness of media-neutral planning seems sparse. Although the WARC webpage lists over 20 successful case studies related to media neutrality, this only shows that media neutrality *can* work, as opposed to whether it *does* work in some, most or all cases.

For their part, creatives have been unusually silent on the media neutrality issue. To date, most advocates writing on the benefits of media neutrality still come from the planning department—and not the creative department. Media neutrality may just be an ideology that works well for account planners who are responsible for strategy, however creatives who are responsible for ideas need to consider the medium itself as part of the execution. Grant and McLeod (2007) also suggest that neutrality is still more a matter of an ideal that is rarely reached rather than one regularly achieved in creative executions.

Instead, what we know about a creative's point of view on neutrality goes back to the skill specializations that seem to dominate how creatives produce advertising: it takes a long time to become a creative expert in the use of any media. Sasser, Koslow and Riordan (2007) show this to be the main limitation to more integrated, neutral work. Like it or not, most creatives still tend to do best in a limited set of media.

In Gronstedt and Thorson (1996), there was a distinct trade-off between having deep, specialized creative skill in a particular media and the generalist creative skills that could

more easily work across media. Our current understanding of creative skills is that it is fairly domain specific (Baer 1998), so it should hardly be surprising that few creatives can do their best work outside one, two or at most three media.

If most creatives tend to do their best work in few media, does that place limits on the goal of media neutrality? Although parts of advertising development involve large teams, thinking up creative ideas themselves are usually virtuoso affair (Sasser and Koslow 2008) that happens either solo, or in two-person teams—often when cross media skills are lacking.

However, despite these creative *skill* differentials, an even more limiting problem is that some types of creative *ideas* naturally have legs that can move across media while others do not and are restricted in their execution potential in some media. Therefore, looking to (or complaining about) media creative skills *per se* is possibly not the best way to understand how to achieve media neutrality.

Instead, we suggest neutrality has more to do with the kinds of templates creatives unconsciously apply, with some templates performing better than others across media. That is, depending on the nature of the idea sometimes creative ideas can be independent of their mode of expression, but sometimes they are not. To explain these differences, this study must first go back to fundamentals of how creative ideas are developed.

Ideation and Creativity

Most academics and practitioners have come to agree that creativity consists of two factors—originality and appropriateness (Runco and Jaeger 2012; Kover 2016)—although they may describe the factors with different words. Recently, the two factors were found to trade-off each other (Kilgour and Koslow 2009; O'Connor et al 2016). Appropriateness in advertising is more or less defined by strategy contained in the creative brief, while

originality tends to be a function of ideation techniques (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan 2003; O'Connor et al. 2016).

Many times used interchangeably, the terms *ideation techniques* and *creative techniques* are different in a number of ways. One, creative techniques involve the whole creative process—problem definition, idea generation, idea refinement and idea expression; while ideation techniques are all about idea generation, a well-delineated stage in the creative process. Two, idea generation is an individual exercise (Sasser and Koslow 2008). An idea can spark off another in a group creative process, but the ideas first come up as individual suggestions (Kilgour 2006). Nevertheless, the whole creative process is hardly completely an individual effort (Vanden Bergh and Stuhlfaut 2006; Csikszentmihalyi 1988). Three, creative techniques require both divergent and convergent thinking (Guilford 1967) as opposed to ideation techniques that use mainly divergent thinking (Kilgour and Koslow 2009). Ideation techniques are ways and means of idea-generation. This clarification is necessary for research into ideation techniques and creative outcome (Clapham 1997).

Ideation and Advertising Creativity

For idea generation, advertising creatives employ a number of ideation techniques unconsciously acquired and developed over time (Kilgour and Koslow 2009). Pricken (2008) corroborates that position and goes further to depict twenty-five different ideation techniques harvested from over ten thousand brilliant campaigns. These techniques were grouped on the basis of similar thought patterns that underpin them. In a similar, but more condensed categorization of ideation techniques, Goldenberg, Mazursky and Solomon (1999) schematized 200 award-winning print advertisements and identified eight ideation techniques referred to as templates. They further divided their templates into four message-dependent techniques: *Extreme consequence*, *Absurd alternative*, *Inversion* and *Extreme effort*. There is

also another set of four media-dependent techniques: *Unification, Activation, Metaphor* and *Subtraction*. By definition, the second set of four techniques employ each advertising medium as an integral part of ideation.

Domains, Advertising and Media

Domain-relevant skill is one of the key antecedents of creativity (Amabile 1996). To know the skills that are relevant to a domain, we have to first know and define that domain. However, scholars are yet to provide an agreed definition of what constitutes a domain (Baer 2010). This is perhaps the cause of the never-ending debate between researchers who posit that creativity is domain-specific and those who hold that it is domain-general. The findings of some studies support domain-generality (Barron 1988; Cramond 1994; Guilford 1967; Hocevar 1980; Milgram and Milgram 1976; Plucker, Beghetto and Dow 2004; Root-Bernstein and Root-Bernstein 2004; Runco 1987; Runco and Albert 1986; Sternberg and Davidson 2005; Torrance 1966,1988), while others show evidence of domain-specificity (Baer 2010, 2012 1998, 1994, 1993, 1991; Eisner 1965; Han 2003; Silvia, Kaufman and Pretz 2009; Simonton 2009; Gardner 1983; Runco 1989). Yet studies from a third category confirm a bit of both domain-generality and domain-specificity findings (Lubart and Guignard 2004; Perkins and Salomon 1989; Kaufman and Baer 2004).

A theory that has endeavoured to reconcile domain-general and domain-specific researchers is the Amusement Park Theoretical Model (Baer and Kaufmann 2005). It postulates that domains are in hierarchies. According to this theory, a variable field like advertising is considered a macro-domain which consists of other contributing level fields that are regarded as micro-domains (Paisley 1972; Baer and Kaufman 2005).

The advertising brief has been identified as representing domain-knowledge (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan 2003, 2006; Kilgour and Koslow 2009). Although the brief is appropriate

as strategy for the whole macro-domain that is advertising, it still has to be applied in each medium which is a micro-domain in its own right. How well the strategy in the brief works in each medium depends on the ability of creatives to make that happen. In turn, creatives depend on their domain-general ideation techniques to work it out.

Ideation and Media

Creativity has been found to correlate with wider media use in IMC campaigns (Sasser, Koslow and Riordan 2007). That is, better creative outcomes tend to be used across several media channels. Given that IMC campaigns ride on just one big idea that is executed across media channels (Ang 2014), it is safe to think that IMC campaigns use one technique to create advertisements across media. This is the whole idea of integration in the first place.

Advertising media channels differ with regards to their peculiar characteristics (Fill, Hughes, De Francesco 2013; Burtenshaw, Mahon and Barfoot 2011; Landa 2016; Hoffmann and Novak 1996). Radio is uni-modal in the sense that it communicates meaning through only the sonic medium; print is more often than not bi-modal, combining letters and static visuals; while television is multi-modal, combining sound, letters, figures, and static visuals, whilst being a motion medium. The internet is a confluence of all these media and combines all their characteristics, plus more (Hoffman and Novak 1996). It is therefore reasonable to expect differences in the quality of creative outcomes from these different media even when only one technique is used.

However, media-dependent techniques like *Unification*, *Activation*, *Metaphor* and *Subtraction* are expected to work equally well on all media because they can make use of each medium in idea-generation. But while they can be executed in different media, the aspect of that medium the technique takes advantage of will usually differ from medium to medium. However, message-dependent techniques like *Extreme consequence*, *Absurd*

alternative, *Inversion* and *Extreme effort* may not be as frequently effective in print as they are expected to be on television because they are for story-telling (Goldeberg et al 2009), which the television medium favours. Capturing stories for a static medium like print may be executed in a similar way across media, but may not always appear as creative as the full-length stories themselves.

H1: Media-dependent techniques will have similar creative outcomes across media.

H2: Message-dependent technique will have significantly better creative outcomes on television than print.

Media-dependent techniques like *Unification* and *Metaphor* can work as either an all-copy medium or virtually an all-visual medium. But more often than not, both techniques exist in advertisements in their visual forms. In that form, *Metaphor* is usually one visual expressing a merged, common attribute of two visuals, while *Unification* gives one medium an attribute of another medium in which the first medium now exists. For example, in an advertisement, butter takes the form of a rolling sea wave, just to show that the butter shares the sea-salt attribute with waters of the sea, as well as the spread-ability and smoothness of the sea waves (see Goldenberg et al 2009). This is an outcome of the *Metaphor* technique. When the statue of a man comes alive on television and begins to act and move around like a real human being that is the *Unification* technique.

Unification and metaphor are opposites in two ways. In one way, the former contrasts while the latter unites; in another, the former is about form whereas the other is about content (Durand, 1987). As story-telling tools, they simply say, “it looks like” or “it differs from”. This style of story-telling that is frozen in comparisons or contrasts seems to be more suited to the one-shot, static medium. They play well in Elizabethan drama in which many such

shots are tied together with another element like music (Stern 1994). But message-dependent techniques like *Extreme consequence* or *Extreme effort* produce outcomes that show, “what is being done” or “what is happening as a result of what has been done”. They require many shot actions to tell stories. They seem to be more suited to story-telling on television. They play better in Aristotelian drama (Stern 1994).

H3: Media-dependent techniques have better outcomes than message-dependent techniques in print.

H4: Message-dependent techniques have better creative outcomes than media-dependent techniques on television.

Whereas the first set of two hypotheses compare the performance of each ideation technique across media, the second set of two hypotheses contrasts the performance of different ideation techniques within the same medium. Sometimes, a marketer may demand a media-neutral across-media campaign in response to a brief. The outcome of hypotheses like the first set of two will help creatives know the appropriate technique for that kind of situation. At other times a campaign may be requested for within only one medium. Which means that creatives are required to generate an idea that can be repeated with different exciting executions on the same medium. The second set of two hypotheses then apply.

METHOD

An experiment was conducted to test the hypotheses. A 2 X 4 design (media X ideation technique) was used. The media manipulation was within-subject had two levels: television and print. Ideation techniques were between-subject and had four levels: *Unification*, *Metaphor* and *Extreme consequence*, plus a control condition which did not

specify any technique or template. 207 creatives worked on the same brief. Each cell had at least 20 subjects. The brief required a launch campaign for a hypothetical utility van.

Sample

Advertising agency creatives in South Africa and Nigeria participated in the study. This ensures that the results are applicable in both developing and developed markets. Other scholars like Oyedele and Minor (2012) have also used data from Nigeria and South Africa for their work in advertising. “Nigeria and South Africa account for about 50% of the two-way trade (\$513 billion) between Sub-Saharan Africa and the United States” (p. X). Although their article referred to these two countries as “emerging”, South Africa has since gained global recognition as a global force in advertising creativity (The Gunn Report). As a highly creative country, Nigeria on the other hand, boasts of global award-winning writers, poets, artists, musicians and actors. Nigeria’s creative ability is also evidenced by Nollywood, the fastest-growing movie industry in the world (Lobato, 2010).

Procedure and Manipulations

Real world account planners were engaged in the development of the brief for the experiment. This was done to follow industry standard procedures and to forestall external validity problems (Nickerson 1999). The creative task was patterned after Kilgour and Koslow (2009), however we substituted household insect spray for an un-named utility van. Creatives are usually well-exposed to the automotive category and products in that category tend to have a well-defined attributes on which to hinge a selling point. The automotive category was chosen because it is prevalent in both markets.

Instructions for subjects were contained on the cover page of the response booklet. Further explanations on ideation techniques were provided for subjects. Brand differentiation

is crucial in briefing and production of winning brands (Stewart and Furse, 1986; Stewart and Koslow, 1989; de Chernatony, 2006). Superior capacity for work was the product's point of differentiation. Each subject spent the first ten minutes writing down ideas, then had the thirty minutes left to develop two favoured ideas into full advertisements, spending fifteen minutes only on each execution. The experiment had to be within the given time-frame because advertising creatives are time-poor.

Each creative was asked to create advertisements for television and print media. Subjects were randomly assigned ideation techniques. The technique for each subject was clearly well-defined in the instructions on the cover page of response booklets. Media-dependent ideation templates used were *Unification* and *Metaphor*; while the message-dependent technique was *Extreme consequence*. The control group were not told to use any particular technique and there therefore at liberty to use any technique they chose. The experiment took place in a meeting room in each agency. Creatives started and ended the exercise at the same time, sitting around a big table.

Pre-tests

The experiment underwent two pre-tests, one for the procedure and another for the instrument. The timing for the procedure had to be adjusted. Instructions were made simpler and clearer for subjects to get the same meaning. The number of executions for each idea was also reduced from two to one per medium. After pre-test with agency account planners, the “consumer insight”, “unique selling proposition” and “reason to believe”—important elements in the brief used for the experiment—were tweaked for accuracy of content and consequent external validity.

Measures Confirmation and Manipulation Checks

To analyze the data, the scales and manipulation checks were first confirmed, followed by models to predict dependant variables. The scales used to measure the two constructs used in this study, originality and appropriateness, followed the suggestions of Koslow, Sasser and Riordan (2006). For manipulation checks, questions were asked to confirm that each creative knew the technique he or she used and whether or not he or she had used it in the past. They were also asked to rate their ability on each medium.

Using two scales from Koslow, Sasser and Riordan (2003), two constructs, originality and strategy, were measured. A sample size of 207 subjects produced 414 advertisements, which was used for the factor analysis. Confirmed by both the scree-plot and the eigenvalues-greater-than-1 rules were two factors which account for 65% of the total variance. Based on VARIMAX rotation, the items “novel”, “original”, “different” and “unexpected” all load on one factor while the items “built on good strategy”, “an appropriate strategy for the client”, “on strategy” and “a good fit with the client’s strategy” load on the other. As expected the loadings were all .70 and above. To form each measure, its items were summed up and then centred and scaled to a mean of zero and standard deviation of 1. Correlation between the two measures was .43. Cronbach’s alphas for strategy and originality were .80 and .84 respectively.

To form the scale for creativity, originality and strategy were combined as a Cobb-Douglas production function (see O’Connor et al 2016). This function ensured that campaign ideas were identified as creative when they were both original and on strategy. The resulting creativity scale was again centred and scaled.

After subjects completed the experiment, the three templates used were described and examples were provided. To confirm that the ideation techniques were different in terms of knowledge, subjects were asked, “Did you know these techniques before now (possibly not by these names)?” Responses were “Definitely” (+2), “Probably” (+1), “Possibly” (0),

“Probably not” (-1) and “Definitely not” (-1). And to confirm how often subjects used the templates, they were asked, “How often do you employ each of these techniques in practice?” Responses provided were “Never” (1), “Rarely” (2), “Occasionally” (3), “Regularly” (4) and “Always” (5). Mean levels for their prior knowledge of the techniques were 1.30, .92 and .49 for metaphor, extreme consequences and unification respectively. Mean level for use of the techniques were 3.39, 3.12 and 2.78 for metaphor, extreme consequences and unification respectively. In both cases, ANOVA showed significant differences at $p < .0001$. This confirms the quality of the manipulations.

Models

Originality, strategy and creativity were all modelled using Generalized Linear Model (GLM). The models for originality, strategy and creativity all uses 414 observations, or two advertisements per respondent. These are listed in the Table. In all three models, the order in which subjects use the media, whether television-first or print-first, was also estimated and found to be significant. The first advertisement produced was rated the highest in all models, but in no case did it interact with other variables in the model. Also, Nigerian creatives rated their work higher than South Africans ($p < 0.0001$) possibly because South Africa’s greater exposure to international awards moderated their judgments. Yet, like the order variable, the creatives’ location never interacted with other variables. There was considerably more individual- and idea-level variation in idea ratings than just location, so a mean level for each subject (nested within treatment) was used in each model because there were two observations for each subject. The means of each treatment are shown in Figures 4.1-3.

Table: 4.1 GLM Solutions for Fixed Effects for Strategy, Originality, and Creativity

Dependent variables	
	Creativity

Independent variables	Strategy		Originality		(Originality X Strategy)	
	Mean		Mean		Mean	
	Square	<i>p</i> -value	Square	<i>p</i> -value	Square	<i>p</i> -value
Subjects	1.540	<0.0001	1.356	<0.0001	1.383	<0.0001
Order	3.095	0.010	1.954	0.078	4.133	0.008
Techniques	0.233	0.678	1.863	0.032	1.260	0.093
Media	1.751	0.052	1.167	0.172	2.028	0.063
Techniques X Media	0.834	0.145	1.254	0.113	1.920	0.021

Figure 4.1
Level of Strategy by Template

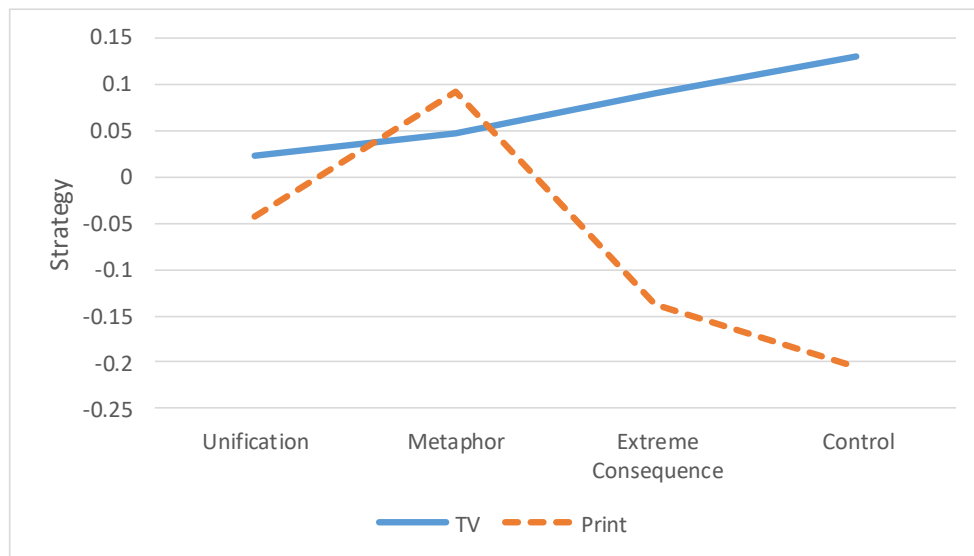


Figure 4.2
Level of Originality by Template

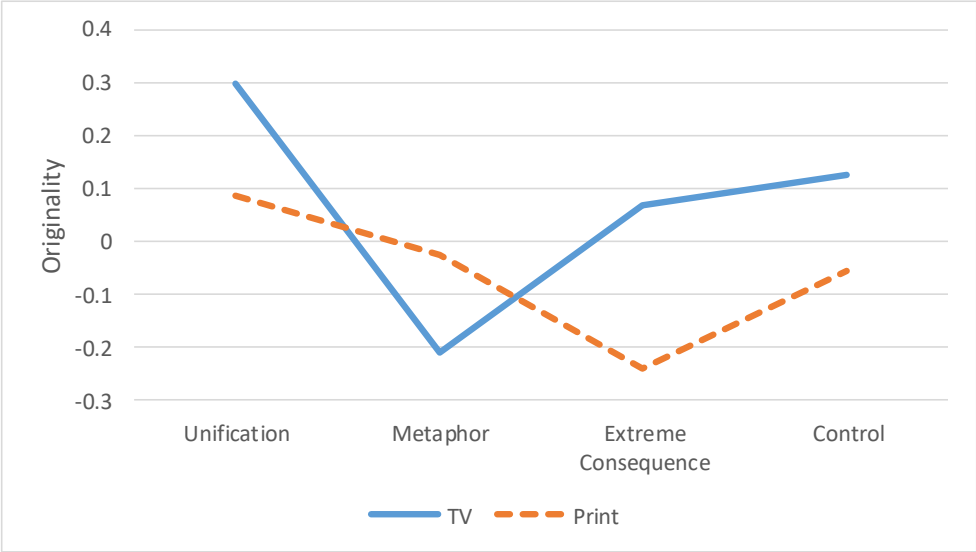
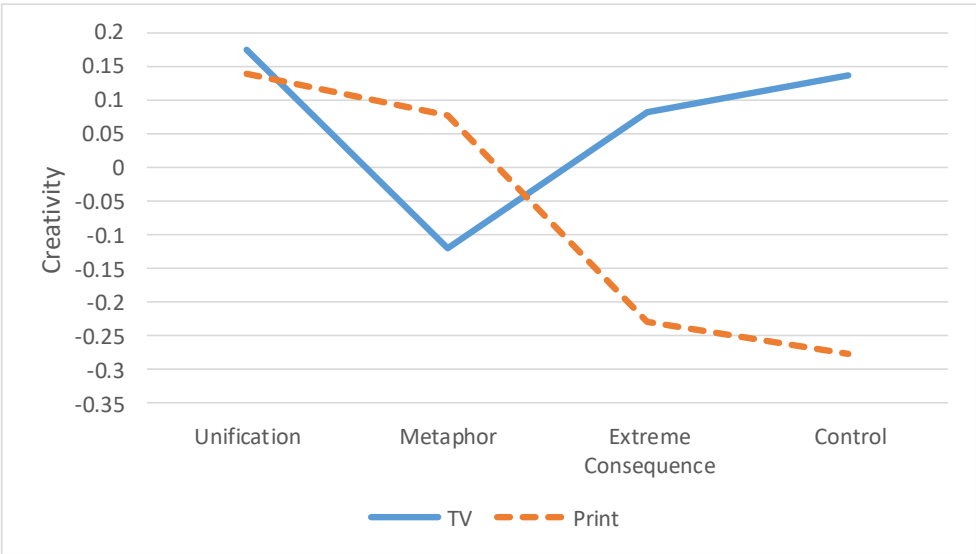


Figure 4.3
Level of Creativity by Template



Results

For strategy, media almost met the traditional cut-off for a significant difference ($p = 0.052$); outcome on the television medium was found to be more on-strategy than the print medium. None of the techniques used was significantly more on-strategy than the other or the control technique. That is, how on-strategy an outcome will be does not depend on the technique used. With regards to strategy, there was no significant overall interaction effect between technique and media. That is, for *Unification* and *Metaphor* their mean levels were similar for both television and print. However, *Extreme consequence* and the control condition had marginally ($p = 0.083$) and statistically significant difference ($p = 0.019$) respectively between television and print.

For originality, technique was significantly different ($p = 0.032$); *Unification* produced significantly more original work than *Metaphor* ($p = 0.008$) and *Extreme consequence* ($p = 0.016$). No significant difference was found between the control and any of the techniques. Neither the use of print nor television made the outcome significantly more original on one medium than the other. There was a difference between print and television for *Extreme consequence*; its outcome on television was significantly more original than print ($p = 0.043$). Between techniques, the use of *Unification* produced significantly more original work in print than the *Extreme consequence* technique ($p = 0.027$), and significantly more original work on television than the *Metaphor* technique ($p = 0.003$). The control technique also produced significantly more original outcome on television than the *Metaphor* technique ($p = 0.032$).

For creativity, media was found to have a marginally significant effect on creativity ($p = 0.063$), unlike ideation techniques that surprisingly had no significant effects. Between techniques, there were again marginally significant differences ($p = .093$). The mean of *Unification* was found to be significantly more creative than those of *Extreme consequence* (p

= 0.026) and the control technique ($p = 0.036$). There was only a marginally significant difference in the creative outcome of *Unification* and *Metaphor* ($p = .088$) and thus H1 is only partially supported.

However, there was a significant interaction effect between technique and media ($p = 0.021$). Within technique, the creative outcome of *Extreme consequence* and the control technique were significantly higher on television than in print ($p = 0.033$ and $p = 0.010$ respectively), supporting H2. Between techniques, the creative outcome of *Unification* in print was significantly higher than that of the control and *Extreme consequence* techniques ($p = 0.012$ and $p = 0.007$ respectively). Also, the creative outcome of *Metaphor* in print was significantly higher than that of the control and *Extreme consequence* techniques ($p = 0.023$ and $p = 0.039$ respectively) which supports H3. A surprise was that for television, *Unification*, *Extreme consequence* and the control treatment were all high. *Metaphor* was lower than *Unification* ($p = 0.047$), and marginally lower than the control treatment ($p = 0.098$), which lent only partial support to H4.

DISCUSSION

Often planners, clients and other strategists set a goal of producing media-neutral creative executions that can work around and adjust to media strategic needs across a variety of disparate, fragmented media. This is the reverse of a traditional preference—some say *bias*—often seen among creatives who appear fixated on particular, predetermined media to execute highly creative ideas. If the strategy focused members of the agency team just insist on media neutrality, can creatives routinely deliver? We argued that there are limits to media neutrality that are not merely *skill*-based (e.g., Sasser, Koslow and Riordan 2007), but what must be even more frustrating, *idea*-based.

The results in this study tend to follow expected patterns. Not surprisingly, the level of strategy is predicted by media. Each advertising medium is a domain and strategy is an example of domain-knowledge. The medium that allows for the expression of strategy better than the other is likely to be more appropriate. The television medium allows for the demonstration of brand attributes better than print even if there is no big idea or concept in a commercial—an automobile brand is better expressed through a motion medium, because mobility is one of its defining characteristics. Media-dependent techniques like *Unification* and *Metaphor* show no significant difference in strategy and creativity because they can be easily used on any medium. They use each medium as an integral part of concept development, therefore they work equally well, but may draw from different media elements to manipulate them so they may not work together in a coherent campaign. In contrast, the story-telling techniques like *Extreme consequence* show difference in strategy because they are not easily adaptable to all media. They are more suited to television than print, but can be expressed in a more limited way through print. Such trade-offs must be frustrating, but are part of everyday life in creative departments.

Again, as expected, technique has a significant effect on originality. Techniques are known to trigger divergent thinking which results in original ideas, irrespective of the medium of ideation. All the techniques show the ability to produce original ideas, but unification is clearly the best of the three techniques for the utility van (automobile category). This suggests that some techniques may be more suited to particular product categories than others. Furthermore, the fact that there is no significant difference in originality between the control and all other techniques suggests that, contrary to the findings of Kilgour and Koslow (2009), advertising creatives actually show that ideation techniques can work, and that creatives have no reason to deride them. The lack of performance which was suggested as the reason creatives derided

ideation techniques in Kilgour and Koslow (2009) may be because of the “ideation technique” that was used in that study.

Virtually all ideation techniques, including the ones used in this study, are word associations in one form or another. Advertising copy and visuals have been shown to be figures of rhetoric which have their origin in words. However, there is need for definiteness about the operations involved in word associations before they can really be called a specific ideation technique. Word association alone as ideation technique is elementary and indeterminate. Advertising creatives really do have reason to avoid them. The ones used in this study are definite about word associations, and they still are in currency as evidenced by the advertisements we see around.

The pattern of ideation technique differences in media for creativity shows that not only is the performance of some ideation techniques better than others on a specific medium, some ideation techniques on their own are better on one medium than another medium. Knowing what ideation technique works better on which medium will go a long way in meeting the demands of clients.

For creativity, media-dependent techniques—*Unification* and *Metaphor*—tend to work equally well. Representing the media dependent techniques, *Unification* works significantly better than the message-dependent technique, *Extreme consequence*, and the control technique, which seemed to operate similarly. The television medium allows for more creativity than the print in automobile advertising. This suggests that to create advertisements for brands in the automobile category, there is need to specify the medium. Print only campaigns would benefit more from the use of media-dependent techniques than from the use of message-dependent ones.

Going by the results, the strength of creativity is from strategy rather than originality, and media predicts creativity. Unlike strategy and originality, the interaction between

technique and media actually predicts creativity. Media-dependent techniques—*Unification* and *Metaphor*—are better at producing print ads than both control and metaphor techniques. And the control and *Extreme consequence* techniques produce significantly better television outcome than print. The control technique is expected to have a preponderance of message-dependent, story-telling techniques which creatives would use normally to develop ideas for television, and they are also expected to have a similar degree of complexity as the *Extreme consequence* technique. This could be the reason both techniques did better on television.

Refreshing as the results of this study may be, there are limitations. The experiment focused on only one product category. Ideation techniques may perform differently in other categories, particularly low involvement ones. What is more, the techniques may also perform differently on other media like radio and the internet. A comparison between their performance in traditional and digital media will give a better understanding of how they work for integration across media. This study used only one message-dependent technique although it found the control treatment acted similarly. Including other message-dependent techniques like *Absurd alternative* would have made the study more balanced. Getting independent creatives to assess the outcomes of this study rather than the subjects of the study themselves can also reveal a different dimension that may not have surfaced in the present study. A replication of this study in other climes than South Africa and Nigeria may further confirm the results obtained or present other challenges.

Future research should confirm whether media-dependent ideation techniques really do travel poorly across disparate media. It also is important to explore if the decline in performance for message-dependent ideation techniques disappears if the strategy is persuasive enough to be carried well in print. Or that print can serve as an effective reminder for the television version.

CONCLUSION

Again, this study underscores the need to always separate the components of creativity for better understanding of how the antecedents of creativity work. It revealed that the strength of *Metaphor*'s creative outcome rests on appropriateness while that of *Unification* rests on both appropriateness and originality. In addition, story-telling, message dependent techniques tend to yield outcomes that are more on-strategy on the television medium than the outcomes of media-dependent techniques.

Results like the ones in this study suggest that in assigning briefs to creative teams, creative managers should consider team members with regards to the appropriateness of their cognitive styles for different media that are mostly used by the client of products in a specific brand category. This way, creatives will be happy doing what they know best, clients will get better responses to their briefs, creative managers will deal with fewer issues and agencies' keep billings flowing.

Contrary to Kilgour and Koslow (2009), ideation techniques work can well for advertising creatives. *Unification* and *Metaphor* were significantly higher in creative outcome than the control treatment which represents how advertising creatives would normally approach a brief. In creativity, media matters. And this has significant implications for the ideal of media neutrality.

One cannot just specify media-neutral creative and expect it to happen. Creatives are not just being argumentative when they appear to favor some media over others when the brief tends to call for either media- or message-dependent oriented ideas. The development of creatives' skills in recognizing the limitation of templates and media will help the process of developing genuinely media-neutral ideas. But even more important is that the creative ideas represented by templates impose real limits and introduce trade-offs.

It may be that one goes with media-dependant approaches and accepts a lack of coherency across media. It may be that one goes with more coherent executions as would be expected with message-dependent approaches, but not all executions will be equally as creative. Or one may just need to emphasize certain media because the story is best told that way. In the end, those seeking media neutrality in advertising need to understand that often “something’s gotta give”—even in the magical realm of creativity.

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