Passion, Expertise, Politics, and Support

Creative Dynamics in Advertising Agencies

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This paper critiques Professor Scott Koslow and Sheila Sasser’s paper: Passion, Expertise, Politics, and Support. Creative Dynamics in Advertising Agencies (2012).

1. ABSTRACT

Leading Marketing academics, Professor Koslow and his co-author Associate Professor Sheila Sasser, explore how creativity is nurtured and cultivated in the fast-paced world of advertising. Based on earlier creativity research by Young (2003), Koslow identified 4 independent variables (passion, support, expertise and politics) which might impact the level of creativity in the USA advertising industry.

Following on from his previous research into advertising and creativity, Koslow investigated two hypotheses:
H1: A higher level of agency support enhances the positive influence of passion on advertising creativity, and

H2: The presence of organisational politics suppresses the positive influence of expertise on advertising creativity.

The research uses a sample of 1,188 advertising campaigns from major U.S. advertising agencies, reported by 413 respondents, which offered an insightful framework for advertising creativity.

The research findings found passion (individual intrinsic motivation) is the most important factor in predicting creativity, followed by industry expertise and knowledge. Management support serves to enhance passion’s influence on creativity, whilst the influence of expertise is suppressed by organisational politics.

2. INTRODUCTION

Koslow is passionate about creativity and advertising. He has researched extensively on advertising creativity, but has been frustrated by the lack of insightfulness in the academic research in this field.

At the beginning of his paper Koslow asked the question to the reader “What do we know about creativity”? His response is “very little” and then took the bold step and started talking to people who work in advertising agencies to discover more about this elusive topic. To Koslow’s surprise, it proved to be his pot of gold.
Koslow further asked the audience; if creativity is made up of two things, originality and strategy; which matters the most: Expertise or passion? There was no one unanimous response, and Koslow argued throughout the paper that passion is the key driver.

How important is creativity in advertising? Advertising creativity is at the heart of the advertising industry and is able to enhance both brand interest and perceived brand quality (Dahlén, Rosengren, & Törn, 2008). The key outcomes being greater brand awareness, placed on the consideration list, and chosen over another product or service to be purchased.

3. THEORY DEVELOPMENT AND HYPOTHESES FORMULATION

Koslow and Sasser (2013) argue in their paper that the current debate over creativity in the advertising industry is based on two areas.

The first one involves the level of management support and encouragement in an advertising agency. Amabile (1996) developed her KEYS framework and proposed that various types of encouragement in organisations lead to more creative output. However empirical work by Verbeke (2008) conducted with major advertising agencies only finds positive effects for organisation encouragement, but negative effects for workgroup support and supervisory encouragement.
The authors in this recent study argue that individuals (working in advertising) are already highly internally motivated toward creativity for encouragement and support to have any effect. Thus, support for agency creativity amplifies the effect of passion on creativity rather than delivering an independent effect.

The second area of controversy involves the relative value of expertise (of knowing the client’s business). Innovation researchers like Damanpour (1991) show that technical expertise is the most consistent and powerful predictor of innovation. Other authors have argued that knowledge-based expertise leads to an understanding of the client’s business or consumers therefore should also be a strong predictor of creativity (Young 2003). However Nyilasy and Reid (2009) found that expertise in understanding the client’s business is not a strong predictor of creativity. Kasof (1995) also argues that expertise in creativity is over-attributed to individuals, and under-attributed to situations.

In his latest research paper, Koslow examines four constructs (Motivation, Organisational Support, Expertise and Politics) to develop the following hypotheses:

H1: A higher level of agency support enhances the positive influence of passion on advertising creativity, and

H2: The presence of organisational politics suppresses the positive influence of expertise on advertising creativity.
Before testing these hypotheses, Koslow also poses the question: so what happens in the real world in regards to producing “great” advertising work? His previous research (Sasser & Koslow 2008) suggests clients effects on advertising predominate and the agency effects, while important, are secondary. So motivation (within the agency) becomes a key factor to producing “excellent” work or “average but passable work”.

4. METHODOLOGY

The research was based on questionnaires collected from advertising agency executives across a comprehensive advertising creativity study. The method is consistent with other creativity studies (Koslow, Sasser, and Riordan 2003).

The research questionnaires were sent and collected from leading advertising executives from 22 advertising agencies in New York and Detroit, made up of 413 respondents for a total sample of 1,188 campaigns. Views were sought from creative, media, research, account managers, planners, specialists, and other senior advertising executives through questionnaires. Observation techniques were also employed in discovering digital social media issues, factor constructs, and appropriate advertising terminology.
To test the hypotheses, four independent constructs were measured and two others were also used to compute the creativity scale. To measure the four independent constructs, 13 items were used. A seven-point Likert scale format extending from “strongly disagree” (−3) to “strongly agree” (+3) was used. The neutral midpoint was labeled “neither agree nor disagree” (0).

However, the key question continually arises: How do you accurately measure creativity? This research defines creativity as outputs that are both original and appropriate, measured with two separate factors (Runco and Charles 1993). To measure creativity the derived measurement method was used to test the interaction of two single scales, originality and strategy.

Following this lead, creativity’s derived measure draws on the interaction of originality and strategy with equal weights, which is deemed normative creativity (Koslow et al 2003).

5. FINDINGS

Koslow overall finding is that creativity is something that happens to passionate people. The rest is “noise and distraction”. Most research is this area is about the methods to destroy creativity and undermine it (Amabile, 1996). A number of generalisations about creativity can thus be made about creativity, according to Koslow. It is easier to kill it than encourage it; well-meaning encouragement has the most negative effects; and organisations are usually toxic to creativity.
The detailed results in this study were well presented to the audience and in the paper. In this study, Hypothesis 1 suggests that passion has an interaction with support in predicting creativity. The test result in this study shows that when there is support for creativity, the influence of passion on creativity “almost doubles” (Koslow, 2013).

The creativity in the high-passion situations is distinctly higher than the low-passion conditions, and this confirms prior findings.

Hypothesis 2 claims that expertise in the client’s business is involved with an interaction with politics. The study findings illustrate that when politics are low, expertise has a positive influence on creativity.

However, the study demonstrates there is no statistically significant one-way effect of expertise, which does not support the prior literature.

Finally, the findings identified there is an interaction between politics and support for creativity. When politics is widespread, organizational support has a stronger influence on creativity.

6. DISCUSSION

The paper addressed the research problem in explaining how passion, expertise, politics and support impacts creativity in the advertising industry. The implications for advertising agencies (and their clients) is that passion, not expertise, leads to great creativity in advertising.
While this study focuses on creativity and the advertising industry, it has potential implications for future research of creativity into other service industry areas (e.g., new product development, design, and service delivery).

The link between creativity and effectiveness is often raised by many marketing practitioners, arguing this as an important factor on why organisations employ advertising as a method to increase sales. Koslow’s response to this question is that there is a positive correlation between those advertising campaigns that win major creativity awards, also tend to do well in the IPA Effectiveness awards.

Further, if your brands have a strong *share of mind*, you don’t need impactful creativity to stand out in your market. Conversely, a brand with a small *share of mind* needs a high level of creativity to break though the “clutter and noise” to be heard or seen. Thus, creativity can depend on the context of your brand.

The research data reflects the perspective of agency personnel, not the consumers or clients. Therefore, the authors may also consider using consumers or clients in their sampling for future studies on advertising creativity, and contrast results.

Finally, the sample base was in New York and Detroit, which reflects a higher percentage of fast moving package goods and motor vehicle clients. It ignores other major industries like Retail, IT, Telecommunication, Medical. Therefore, category bias may be a concern.
7. CONCLUSION

Both Koslow and Sasser are well-established academics and leading researchers in their field of advertising and creativity.

In the paper, Koslow clearly demonstrates his passion and knowledge for the subject matter. The author’s asks the key question “how can we be more creative”? His research strongly suggests: be intrinsically motivated; resist outside influence; and possibly get training.

Being recently published in the Journal of Advertising (a highly ranked academic publication), supports and enhances their academic reputation. For advertising people and those interested in creativity in agencies, this is important paper to understand and learn how creativity is nurtured and cultivated.
REFERENCES


