

Designing Creative, Effective Ads: A Proposed Test of the Remote Conveyor Model

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Abstract

Due to the elusiveness of the concept of creativity, researchers and marketers alike often consider it as the exclusive province of the “creatives” who work for advertising agencies. The Remote Conveyor Model proposes a systematic way to generate creative and likely effective ideas for getting an advertising message across. The present paper outlines how the Remote Conveyor Model could be experimentally tested. If the Remote Conveyor Model turns out to be helpful, then we have a valuable method that can be easily applied by the many do-it-yourself advertisers.

Keywords: creativity; effectiveness; advertising; remote conveyor model; experiment

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Introduction

Creativity is arguably the lifeblood of marketing. Original, creative marketing campaigns or advertisements are able to grasp the consumer's attention (Kover, Goldberg, and James, 1995; Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel, 2002) and creativity is, hence, an important determinant of success in the cluttered marketplace (Smith et al., 2007). Assuming continuation of the trend toward perceived "commoditization" of brands (see Clancy and Krieg, 2007), creativity will remain vital in the future. About 14% in the U.S., of large companies (adspend of 1 million and higher) and a much higher proportion of small companies do all of their creative work "in house" (Horsky, 2006) and a recent U.S. Association of National Advertisers survey indicates that about 40% of member companies do at least some of their creative production in-house (ANA, 2008). There is a clear demand for tools and techniques that can help those people produce creative ideas.

In advertising, analogies or metaphors are commonly used to creatively convey the key benefit claim of (new) products or services (see, for example, Ait El Houssi, Morel, Hultink, 2005, Gregan-Paxton et al., 2002; Phillips and McQuarrie, 2002). Analogies or metaphors can be defined as "two distinct concepts presented as being similar" (Lagerwerf and Meijers, 2008, p. 19) or as "statements and/or pictures which cause the receiver to experience one thing in terms of another" (Morgan and Reichert, 1999, p. 1). These rhetorical figures can help to communicate a product's key benefit claim more creatively and effectively. For example, a picture of a dolphin could be used as a visual metaphor for conveying the superior "waterproofness" of a new sports watch (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005)

The Remote Conveyor (RC) model (Rossiter, 1994, 2008; Rossiter and Percy, 1997; Rossiter and Bellman, 2005) is an easy-to-use method for generating creative, effective conveyors. This article proposes a study to empirically test the RC model.

Brief Overview of the Literature on Creativity

Creativity research can be classified using Rhodes' (1961) componential framework that comprises the following interacting components (the "4P's"): (i) the creative *person*, who brings the creative product into being, (ii) the creative *process*, by which the person (or a group) brings the creative product into being, (ii) the creative *product* itself, and (iv) the creative *press* or work environment, in which the product is created (see also Amabile, 1983; Sasser and Koslow, 2008).

The Creative Product. The creative product or outcome in our study is an advertisement or, more specifically, the conveyor used in an ad. In the Handbook of Creativity, Sternberg and Lubart (1999) define the creativity of an outcome as a two-dimensional construct, comprising novelty and appropriateness. Creativity studies in marketing have used basically the same terms, such as "novelty" and "functionality" (Burroughs and Mick, 2004), "originality" and "usefulness" (Dahl, Chattopadhyay, and Gorn, 1999). We will use similar dimensions, i.e., originality and likely effectiveness, to assess the creativity of the generated conveyors.

The Creative Person. According to Rhodes' (1961) componential framework, one possibility for organizations to ensure a certain level of creative output is to hire creative individuals.

Research has shown that creative ability is not a dichotomous trait, but that it is normally distributed within the population (Tardif and Sternberg, 1988). However, most employees are probably not exploiting their creative potential to the fullest for various reasons, such as a lack of self-confidence, intrinsic motivation or proper incentives. (The latter refers to the fourth P (press), which is beyond the scope of our study.)

The Creative Process. To help people make better use of their creative potential, numerous creativity-enhancement techniques have been proposed in the literature, such as (electronic) brainstorming, analogies/ metaphors, force field analysis and guided fantasy, (see, e.g., Couger, 1995). One particularly compelling technique for use in advertising is the procedure based on the Remote Conveyor model, mentioned earlier, which has not been empirically tested so far. We briefly describe the theory and the procedure in the next section.

Theory and Research Propositions

The Remote Conveyor Model

Conveyors. The message of an ad should be the unique selling proposition, or the Key Benefit Claim (KBC), of the product or service (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). A Key Benefit Claim should be accurate (describing exactly the benefit that management has selected to be the key benefit of the product), persuasively sufficient (how are we going to persuade the customer?), and succinct (preferably not more than four words). Well-known examples of KBC's are: "I'm lovin' it" (McDonalds), "Safety" (Volvo Cars), and "Prestige" (American Express) (see Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). To dramatize the key benefit claim, conveyors are often used in advertisements. Conveyors are typically analogies or metaphors; they dramatize the key benefit by linking the product to another object, person, or situation that has that same benefit even more strongly. A metaphor can be stated verbally, e.g., "this watch is like a dolphin", or portrayed visually, which is usually found to be more effective (e.g., Kaplan, 1992; Morgan and Reichert, 1999).

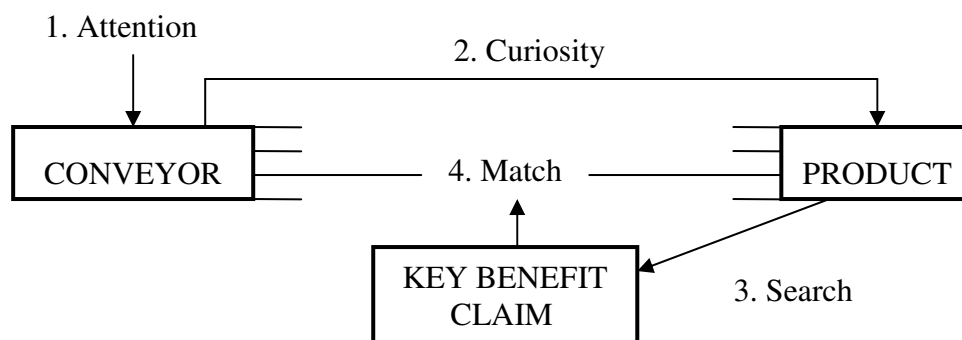


Figure 1 Remote Conveyor Model (Source: Rossiter, 2008)

The Creative Idea. A creative idea can be defined as an attention-getting way of dramatizing the key benefit claim. The creative idea might work through a rather simple and superficial path, such as for postmodern or likable, humorous ads, but normally the conveying of the key benefit claim has to occur via a strictly cognitive route (Rossiter and Bellman, 2005). The Remote Conveyor model (Rossiter, 1994, 2008; Rossiter and Percy, 1997; Rossiter and Bellman, 2005) is a comprehensive model of creative idea generation and testing which owes allegiance to Kroeber-Riel's theory of visual persuasion in advertising (Kroeber-Riel, 1993).

According to the RC model, the creative idea works by (1) drawing greater attention to the ad; (2) raising curiosity about the “remote” relationship between the conveyor and the advertised product or service; (3) which causes a search of the ad’s content to resolve the curiosity; and (4) resolution, which means that the receiver realizes that the key benefit is the association in common - hence, “matching” - of the conveyor and the advertised product or service (see Ang, 1994).

Conveyor Properties. The RC model also proposes a number of properties that an effective conveyor should have. The most important property for a conveyor to be effective in today’s cluttered marketplace is remoteness, that is, it should be remote in relation to (or incongruent with) the product being advertised. Thus, at a first glance, it must seem out of context, which will increase attention and produce curiosity. A property that is particularly important in today's cluttered marketplace. To satisfy curiosity, the brain will be energized to search for the key benefit, eventually leading to better product or brand awareness and recall. Other desirable properties of conveyors are (1) quickly and correctly labeled by the consumer (if the conveyor is too vague to be quickly and correctly identified it will not work); (2) high association of the key benefit when prompted (that is, the key benefit must be an obvious attribute of the product and strongly associated with the conveyor); and (3) no incidence of conflicting associations (if a conveyor elicits negative or contradictory associations, a safer one should be sought). We expect that (do-it-yourself) advertisers who are taught the Remote Conveyor model for generating conveyors will produce more creative and effective conveyors than those who are not informed about the RC model (more details are given in the methodology section). Thus, our first research proposition is:

P1 Use of the Remote Conveyor model will lead to more creative, effective conveyors.

The Role of the Remoteness of the Conveyor

Analogical or metaphorical reasoning involves accessing, mapping, inferring, and transferring elements from the base (here: the conveyor) to the target (here: the advertised product) (Gentner, 1983). The ease of transfer depends on the (cognitive) distance between the base and the target. Or, to put it in terms of the RC model, the “remoteness” of the conveyor. We can classify conveyors on a continuum of remoteness. Successful access and transfer of the key benefit from the conveyor to the advertised product or service requires more cognitive effort for conveyors that are more remote. Consequently, when using more remote conveyors, the resulting ad is likely to be less obvious and thus more original (cf. Dahl and Moreau, 2002). Hence, we expect that the remoteness of the conveyor will be positively related to originality. Although very remote conveyors are likely to be highly original, successful resolution or matching of the key benefit claim might become too complex or requires too much cognitive processing on the part of the consumer, which will be detrimental to the conveyor’s effectiveness. Hence, we propose a negative relationship between the remoteness of the conveyor and its effectiveness.

P2 Remoteness of the conveyor will be positively related to originality, but negatively related to effectiveness.

The optimal level of remoteness for a conveyor may depend on the type of product or service that is being advertised. Product category effects on the working of (creative) advertising have not been studied extensively, but practitioners generally believe that the product category plays a moderating role (Nyilasy and Reid, 2009). Following the Rossiter-Percy

(1997) grid, we make a distinction here between transformational and informational goods. Transformational goods might tolerate higher levels of remoteness as originality is important in conveying the desired brand image, whereas for informational goods the likely effectiveness of the conveyor might be more important. Thus, we propose the following:

P3 The relationship between the remoteness and the creativity of the conveyor will be moderated by the type of product, with transformational product categories requiring higher levels of remoteness than informational product categories.

Research Methodology

Participants, Task, and Procedure

Participants. Graduate business students will be used as subjects to test the effectiveness of the RC model instructions for generating creative, effective conveyors. Recently graduated business students are typically hired as junior product or brand managers; a position in which they are responsible for all marketing communication activities related to a product or a brand. So, our subjects will be drawn from the universe of prospective do-it-yourself advertisers. We will invite 10 subjects per condition to participate in the study in return for a small monetary reward. The small sample size is not problematic here, as the unit of analysis is not the person but the generated idea, of which there can be many per person. In the real world, typically a small number of brainstormers is called upon to generate ideas. We want to show that our results also hold for small numbers of brainstormers.

Tasks. Four different tasks will be used in order to strengthen the reliability and the generalizability of our findings. The brands for which we will ask participants to generate conveyors come from four different product categories: smart phones, ice cream, business schools, and travel guides. That is, we sampled one well-known product category from each cell of the Rossiter-Percy (1997) grid, i.e., high involvement/transformational, low involvement/transformational, high involvement/informational/ and low involvement/informational, respectively (cf. Bergkvist and Rossiter, 2007). For each of them, we have selected brands that are well-known within the student population (i.e., Apple's new iPhone 3GS, Unilever's new Magnum Temptation, ESSEC Business School Paris, and Lonely Planet's City Guide: Amsterdam Edition, respectively). Where possible, we have chosen products that are relatively new to the market, but to ensure that people not fall back on the brands' historical creative idea(s), we will explicitly instruct participants to seek new ideas.

Procedure. Participants will perform the tasks individually to avoid group confounds. Both the experimental and the control group will be given the same task and brainstorming instructions. For this purpose, we use a modified version of the instructions listed in Rossiter and Bellman (2005, p. 137). Additionally, the experimental group will receive an edited version of Rossiter and Bellman's (2005) description of the RC model (p. 132-135). This will not be available in the control group. Both groups will be given the definition of a creative idea (i.e., "an attention-getting way of dramatizing the key benefit"), the actual key benefit claim for each product/brand, and the same time limit (i.e., 8 minutes per task).

Measurements

The measurement procedure will consist of three phases. In the first phase, we will ask two persons to independently filter out the generated ideas that cannot reasonably serve as a

(verbal) conveyor in an ad for the brand. Ideas will be discarded when they are either too vaguely stated (e.g., “finance” for conveying the speed of the iPhone) or have not much to do with the brand’s key benefit (e.g., GPS for conveying the speed of the iPhone). The ideas that are discarded by both judges will be removed automatically. The ones that are mentioned only once will be further examined by the first author and removed if deemed inappropriate to serve as a verbal conveyor.

In the second phase, three trained students on the RC model will be asked to score the surviving creative ideas on the five conveyor properties. The judges will be blind to experimental conditions. For scoring the ideas, we follow the conveyor screening procedure as proposed by Rossiter and Bellman (2005, p. 139). That is, the judges will score all surviving conveyors on the following items: “attention-getting”, “correctly labeled”, “remoteness”, “key benefit conveyed” and “free of conflicting associations”, with possible scores of 1 is “no”, 2 is “moderately”, and 3 is “definitely”. PRL coefficients will be calculated to assess inter-rater reliability (see Rust and Cooil, 1994).

In the last phase, a new set of three judges will be asked to rate each conveyor, in conjunction with the branded product, on (1) originality or uniqueness among ads in that product category, and to rate (2) how well the conveyor is capable of communicating the key benefit of the brand, i.e., its likely effectiveness. To be able to do so, the judges need to have substantial practical experience in advertising and marketing, such as advertising agency personnel or product or brand managers. As the number of surviving ideas can be quite high, these busy experts will be asked to score the originality and likely effectiveness of the conveyors on single-item, seven-point, uni-polar scales (ranging from “not at all” to “very much”). Finally, we will use “cut-off” or “profile” sum scoring to classify the conveyor as creative or not, i.e., we will require that both item scores are above the mid-point of the scale (cf. Parnes, 1961).

Analyses

To investigate the effectiveness of the RC model, we will compare the average conveyor creativity, originality and likely effectiveness of the two experimental conditions. We will also investigate (a) whether or not “successful” conveyors were more likely than “unsuccessful” conveyors (i.e., failing on uniqueness, likely effectiveness, or both) to score “definite” on all five conveyor properties, and (b) whether or not the RC group produced a larger number of successful conveyors because more of their successful conveyors met all five properties. For this purpose, we will introduce a binary predictor variable called “property meeting” coded as 1 if the idea scores “definitely” on all five properties or 0 if it scores less than “definitely” on one or more properties. This variable will serve as input to a discriminant analysis with conveyor creativity (0 = “no”, 1 = “yes”) as dependent variable.

Conclusion

In a recent survey, 42% of U.S. Association of National Advertisers (ANA) members reported that they had established an in-house ad agency, mainly to achieve cost efficiencies (Maddox, 2009). However, one of the challenges for such in-house agencies is to maintain the same creative quality as outside agencies (Maddox, 2009). If the Remote Conveyor Model turns out to be helpful for generating creative, effective ideas for ads, then we have a valuable method that can be easily applied by the many do-it-yourself advertisers in companies.

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