

## Consumer Insight Supports the “Leap” to a Creative Idea by Shifting the Advertising Appeal from Functional to Emotional

### Abstract

Account planners identify and articulate a key strategic resource, consumer insight, from which creative ideation is said to “leap.” We argue that insight gives creatives a license to develop emotional advertising that connects with consumers. An experiment is performed using 60 working creatives who developed creative advertising ideas under three treatment conditions; a strong insight, a weak one and a no primed insight control. Although the knowledge domains creatives use in executions appear similar across the three conditions, providing insight leads to more emotional appeals rather than functional ones, especially for strong insight.

### Management Slant

- Consumer insight influences creative work by shifting the orientation of creative execution toward emotional appeals, rather than functional appeals.
- Strong insights (as opposed to weak ones) are more efficient in shifting creative work toward emotionality, giving up less functionality and gaining more emotionality.
- Consumer insight does *not* constrain creatives to the original insight’s knowledge domain. Instead it liberates creatives to pursue executional ideas related, yet divergent from the insight knowledge domain.
- Insight may be more important for the development of an emotional advertising appeal, because it tends to involve human motivation. Functional advertising appeals are usually product-related.

Advertising researchers have long sought to understand the role of emotional and rational appeals in advertising. Teichert et al. (2018) reviews this considerable literature and suggests a framework for the choice of advertising appeals based on target audience demographics and the advertiser's objectives. Some scholars (e.g., Tevi and Koslow, 2018) have gone so far as to argue that judicious application of emotional or rational appeals defines what advertising is. However, most of this research is focused on what effects finished ads have on consumers—and *not* on how one goes about managing the creative development process to make more emotional or functional advertising in the first place.

To approach the creative development process' use of affective or information appeals, Choi et al. (2017) studied Clio award-winning ads for how they might implement planning tools like the FCB grid. They show that ads in general tend to follow the FCB grid's planning recommendations for utilitarian or value expressive appeals depending on think/feel or high/low involvement categories. But Clio award-winning ads tend to be highly emotive regardless of the strategies suggested by the FCB grid. When only print and television winners were considered, over 90% of all award-winning ads were emotionally oriented. Similar concerns were raised by Kilgour, Sasser and Koslow (2013) who also noted how advertising considered award-winning tend to eschew strategic considerations. Thus, a major concern is how to manage the creative development process to achieve the client's strategic objectives while getting the balance right between emotional and functional appeals.

One tool account planners use to manage the creative process is the creative brief—and a critical element increasingly adopted in that brief is *consumer insight* (Hackley, 2003a&b; Gordon, 2002; Morrison and Hayley, 2006; Fallon and Senn, 2006). Parker, Ang and Koslow (2018) explain that consumer insight in advertising can be defined as a human truth which focuses on human motivation but also incorporates a tension that can be solved by a brand's attributes or benefits, in an original way. The idea behind insight is that when an

account planner identifies a deep human truth about consumer motivation, it is used to inform the advertising message proposition, which gives creative executions a stronger strategic focus (Steel, 1998; Hackley, 2003a&b). Insight acts as a priming cue that focuses on a strategic orientation from which creative ideation can leap. While constraining the strategic knowledge domain that will solve the advertising problem, insight should also liberate creatives' divergent thinking within this domain space (Parker, Ang and Koslow, 2018). That is, insight should provide the context for the advertising, but not actually be the idea.

However, from a creative thinking perspective, providing an insight may sometimes constrain the knowledge domain used for divergent thinking, and unintentionally limit the ability to arrive at an original idea. Specifically, an insight can be viewed as a priming cue that fixates the creatives on a specific knowledge domain. In this context, creativity scholars (e.g., Ford, 1996; Marsh et al., 1996; Schilling, 2005; Wiley, 1998) would argue that what planners call insight could impose *mental set fixation*, a hindrance to genuine creative thinking. Only if the prime is particularly useful and original—that is, the insight is strong—would quality ideas result. However, if the prime or insight is weak, then poorer creative work may likely follow. For example, Kilgour and Koslow (2009), manipulated the priming of a past, failed campaign—which should have been ignored. This weakened creativity, as those past failed ideas showed up in subsequent creative work.

If insight does help manage the creative development process, then its positive effects should be apparent in the work creatives develop. Yet, there are at least two different ways to assess its effect on creative work. The first is to confirm if creatives actually adhere to the literal strategic directions planners are trying to provide through insight. In this case, the knowledge domain of the insight should appear in finished advertising.

The trouble with this first form of assessment is that even though creatives might accept a consumer insight as a starting point of ideation that does not mean this is also the

ending point. That is, it is entirely possible that creatives will use insight to initiate concepts that once completed, appear to have little to do with the original insight initially provided. Creatives may indeed try to follow direction from account planners, but given the unpredictable path of creative thinking, creatives may still start with the knowledge domain implied by an insight, but leap into an entirely different domain and finish someplace new.

A second route to confirming insight's influence on creatives comes from Mitchell (2002) who suggests that from a practitioner perspective, insight helps creatives get to a more emotional advertising appeal. This is because insight can be seen as encouraging emotional communication rather than a focus on a unique selling proposition (USP). Given the "blurring of product differences in many market categories" (p. 45), many creatives do not want to tell stories about a product's USP. Instead, they want to stay connected with consumers by bringing them into the creative process (Drake, 1984). So, giving creatives a consumer insight allows creative license to tell narratives about people in the context of products and thus build the emotional connection between the brand and consumer. Insight, then, manages the use of advertising's *appeals* by directing the orientation of creative execution rather than shifting the knowledge domain.

To explore the role of insight, this research performs an experiment using 60 professional creatives from Sydney, Australia. They are asked to create both a print and television advertisement for a category that is typically functionally-oriented. We then test if adding a consumer strong or weak insight to the brief can alter the balance of functionality and emotionality, by shifting creative execution from the former to the latter.

First, we confirm that creatives themselves do use consumer insights, and distinguish between strong and weak ones, yet other creatives who judge the work frequently cannot recognize that *specific* insight reflected in the final advertisement. However, judges can still identify which campaigns are based on some kind of insight—that is, *any* insight—and which

are not. That is, while insight imparts a recognizable style in advertising, consumer insight does not constrain creatives to the original insight's knowledge domain. Second, we predict emotionality and functionality with the use of a strong and weak insight and a no primed insight control and demonstrate that insight orientates advertising execution toward an emotional appeal. Third, we also examine insight's effect on judges' perceptions of perceived advertising effectiveness. Like Teichert et al. (2018) we show that both emotional and functional appeals positively influence effectiveness. However, if insight increases emotional appeals at the expense of functional ones, then there may be no net influence on judges' perceptions of effectiveness—an effect we confirm empirically.

Implications for how to manage the creative advertising development process are explored. However, given this is the first controlled experiment on creative professionals to manipulate insight and as only two insights are studied, this research serves as a critical case study into what is possible rather than the last word. We clearly do not find insight to be a panacea that solves fundamental strategic or creative issues. If insight is a *human* truth, then it makes sense that it should shift advertising from functional to emotional. But future research needs to understand insight in a wider context of advertising strategy formation.

## **THEORY DEVELOPMENT**

Recent work by Parker, Ang and Koslow (2018) views insight through a lens of absorptive capacity. This concept was initially proposed by Cohen and Levinthal (1990) to understand why some firms are more innovative than others. Lane, Koka and Pathak (2006) add more detail to this model in that there are three separate steps. First, individuals must identify the information needed. Next, they need to assimilate this knowledge in the firm. Finally, they need to have a system of exploiting this assimilated knowledge.

Advertising agencies do this absorptive process so routinely that an agency is often thought of as ideas factory: it takes information about consumers and brands and transforms them into finished advertisements. Account planning implements the first two steps of this process. First, planners determine what information is needed and if any is lacking, then they have to find or infer what the advertising problem is that advertising is designed to address. Second, planners need to organize and assimilate this knowledge in the form of a creative brief in order to solidify the key message the advertising should communicate to resolve the advertising problem. Contained within this key strategic document is an insight that is used to impart a strategic idea into the message proposition. Finally, creative professionals exploit the brief and insight to develop advertising execution. Therefore, insight can be thought of as a seed from which creative ideation can leap.

### **Insight as a Starting Point in Creative Ideation**

In increasingly competitive markets, finding a differentiated expression of a brand benefit in advertising can be challenging to achieve. Product attributes and functional benefits can be quickly superseded, and increasingly emotional benefits are feeling like commodities (Tikkanen and Vaariskoski, 2010). Although some observers can be inferred to assume that advertising agencies can perform magic, a more realistic perspective is that one has to manage the creative process well. The starting place for managing the process is often account planning (Koslow, 2015).

Account planners in advertising agencies facilitate four essential functions: 1) they act as the consumer voice, 2) provides strategic direction for the brand, 3) inspire creativity among creatives and 4) protect the client's interest (Crosier, Grant and Gilmore, 2003; Haley, Taylor and Morrison, 2014). Central to achieving these functions is the account planner's role in developing a creative brief that connects the brand with the consumer and provides

inspiration to creatives in their development of the big idea (Steel, 1998; Haley, Taylor and Morrison, 2014).

An important element widely adopted by account planners in constructing the creative brief is insight (Fallon and Senn, 2006; Hall, 2002; Mitchell, 2002; Steel, 1998; Gordon, 2002). This “community of practitioners” suggest insight is built from an understanding of “truths” which represent unexpected findings about human behaviour. Haley et al. (2014) suggest account planners must identify “basic truths” and “interpret culture” in order to identify insights that will inspire creative execution. Similarly, planning practitioners refer to insight as “truths” that deepen the understanding of the relationship between consumers, the brand, category and competition (Gordon, 2002; Steel, 1998). For example, Fallon and Senn (2006) advise marketers to find the “emotional truth of the brand” (p. 78) arguing that good planning cases “start the conversation where the consumer was” (p. 89).

This notion of insight as a “human truth” is supported by Parker, Ang and Koslow (2018) who define insight as “(1) a succinct socio-cultural expression of human motivation or need which (2) contains an inherent tension that can be resolved by the brand attribute or benefit, in a manner that is (3) original, because it has not previously been applied to the category,” (p. 244). Critical to this definition is the tension inherent in the insight that the brand can resolve. By example, in the case of Persil, the human truth that all parents want their children to escape the bedroom and explore the outside world is resolved by the benefit of superior stain removal. Consequently, it is this tension-benefit relationship that drives usability of the insight domain.

Ultimately the insight and the benefit are used by the planner to construct a creative advertising message proposition. Parker, Ang and Koslow (2018) provide an example of a human truth that “teenage boys are sexually aspirant but socially insecure” which can be resolved by the brand benefit of “social confidence.” The insight and benefit can be linked

using the message proposition: Brand X is “your best first move.” This message proposition represents a succinct expression of the core promise made by the brand to the consumer. At the heart of the message proposition is the insight which points to the direction in which the creatives should ideate.

The account planner’s search for insight is therefore a highly creative and complex task. The account planner can search for insight in consumer research; in personal domain knowledge; by challenging conventions around the consumer, the brand, the category or the competition; through borrowed sources or around truths that may reside in proximity to the brand’s central narrative or brand positioning (Parker, Ang and Koslow, 2018). However, not all insights are of equal value in informing the advertising message proposition. The attributes of quality insight can be distinguished based on their originality for the category, the relatability of the insight by consumers, its usability that flows from the benefits ability to resolve the tension in the insight, and the vision the insight holds for the brand.

When insight suddenly reveals itself as a creatively congruent solution to the advertising problem it is often associated with the “Aha! Moment” (Haley, 2014; Parker, Ang and Koslow, 2018). An account planner experiences this event shifting from impasse to solution. Zaltman (2014) suggests insight is something initially hidden that needs to be uncovered: “a realization—an idea—that feels correct; it is a thought experienced as true at the moment it reaches awareness” (p. 373). When a planner identifies a creatively congruent insight they completed a large part of the creative process. The role of creative is to find a creative expression of that strategic idea. That is, the planner has done the first two steps of the absorptive capacity process and the creative need only do the third. In many instances, it is likely that the insight can be largely translated into the advertising execution fairly directly.

On the surface, one can logically assume that an advertising idea resulting from an insight has an orientation that is identifiable as coming from the insight. Yet, the resulting



creative idea will be subject to the “leap” in ideation that the creative brings to bear on the problem. Thus, one can look at a set of ideas and identify which were based on an insight—*any* insight—and which were not. But because the creative had to take a “leap” in coming up with the idea, the original insight may not be recognizable in the final advertising execution.

By way of illustration, consider the now famous Dove Real Beauty Sketches campaign (WARC, 2014). This outstanding work was built from the insight that the biggest barrier to a woman feeling beautiful is her inner beauty critic. The big idea was to show that women are more beautiful than they think, which manifest in a television execution that used a trained FBI sketch artist to draw women according to their own description, in order to compare it to that of a stranger.

This seminal ad has all the hallmarks of being based on insight—human motivation is on display, the tension between different perspectives of beauty is highlighted, and it’s profoundly original. If one knew the insight before seeing the ad, it is evident that the ad almost literally executes that insight. However, if one did not know the original insight, and were asked to guess what the original insight might have been, we argue that the accuracy in hitting the original insight will be low. For instance, in the case of the Dove example cited above, it is difficult to see how someone not privy to the insight could possibly retrofit the execution to the insight knowledge domain. There may be various insights the layperson might infer from the execution, for example, beauty is in the eye of the beholder.

Other work on insight and creativity show similar patterns. For example, Fallon and Senn (2006) provide multiple cases studies where insight progresses to a creative idea. If one follows how the campaigns evolve, they are clear applications of the insight. Also, an insight orientation is evident in the finished ads. But, in each situation, one would still be hard pressed to start with the final creative idea and infer the specific insight from which the idea came. Thus, our first hypothesis is:

H1: When creatives use insight as a starting point for ideation, one will not be able to identify the actual insight in the resulting work, even though the work will be seen as being based on some kind of insight.

### **Alternatives Influences of Insight: Emotional and Functional Advertising**

Another important question of insight remains: does insight shift the orientation of advertising toward more emotional advertising appeals? To explore this, we first review the literature on rational and emotional appeals which advertising scholars have long distinguished between (see Benson, 1938; MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; Park, Jaworski, and MacInnis, 1986; Shimp and Andrews, 2013). Emotional appeals represent an attempt to elicit an affective consumer connection to a brand by focusing on consumers' hedonic needs (MacInnis and Jaworski, 1989; Dahlén, Lange and Smith, 2010), which can be positive (for example, love, joy, or hope), or negative (for example, guilt, shame or fear) depending on the intended affective response (See Panda et al., 2013; Keshari and Jain, 2014). Rational appeals, on the other hand, tend to be more about informational content. Stafford and Day (1995) suggest that rational appeals are a straightforward presentation of factual information. In this way, rational appeals focus on the products utilitarian benefits informing key functional characteristics of a product (Resnik and Stern, 1977; Johar and Sirgy, 1991).

The reason advertising appeals are important is because they activate broadly two different buying motivations: utilitarian or hedonic. Utilitarian needs relate to rational buying motivations whereas hedonic needs involve the social, experiential, and sensory aspects that underpin our emotional consumption motivations. Rational appeals are more appropriate for products that satisfy predominantly utilitarian needs (e.g., washing detergent, insurance) while emotional appeals are more appropriate for products that fulfill predominantly hedonic needs (e.g., beer, sports cars) (see Armstrong, 2011; Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy and Johar,

1992). However, these two need states are not mutually exclusive, as both can be filled simultaneously (Voss, Spangenberg and Grohmann, 2003). For example, a farmer or tradesman considering purchasing a new utility vehicle may care for functional features (such as a large tray top), as well as hedonic features (such as a desired 'macho' self-image).

Researchers have demonstrated that the advertising appeal should match the choice of product being advertised. This is because different levels of consumer involvement with product and services lead to different levels of elaboration in the processing of marketing information (see Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). Some researchers suggest that emotional advertising appeals that focus on hedonic needs are more effective when involvement is low, while rational appeals that focus on utilitarian needs are more effective when product involvement is high (Johar and Sirgy, 1991; Sirgy and Johar, 1992). Others argue that emotional advertising appeals are more appropriate where there is little differentiation between brands in a category (Belch and Belch, 2004), or that emotional benefits are most appropriate when there is little rational reasoning that can be associated with a product benefit (Panda et al., 2013). These themes suggest the level of involvement, the type of need the product fulfills and the degree of competition influences the type of appeal appropriate.

However, researchers have also shown that emotional appeals are gaining in importance over time—possibly as a response to increased competitive pressure. A few decades ago, work like Stewart and Furse (1985) or Stewart and Koslow (1989) celebrated the rational, functional brand differentiating message. For older consumers, rational appeals still hold some sway (Sudbury-Riley and Edgar, 2016), however, more recently, emotional appeals have been seen to be more powerful, especially on television (Hornik, Ofir and Rachamim, 2017). Emotional appeals appear to make Super Bowl advertising effective (Kim, Freling and Grisaffe, 2013) and they also have stronger effects in countries with medium to high GDP per capita (Zarantonello, Schmitt and Jedidi, 2014). Although the general pattern

of the FCB grid remains regarding matching appeals to category characteristics, the relative value of emotional appeals has increased (Geuens, De Pelsmacker and Fasseur, 2011).

### **Does Insight Support Emotional or Functional Appeals?**

Despite all the discussion of emotional and functional appeals, a more difficult problem is how to design such executions in the first place. If one wanted to develop more emotional advertising for a rationally oriented category, how should one do this? For Rossiter (2008) the starting point is the *key benefit claim*, which then directs creative ideation. This claim is essentially the persuasive key to selling the brand, which is often called the *campaign theme* or *copy platform*, or underlying strategy of a campaign (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan, 2006). Such a claim may or may not be stated in the ad, and sometimes it's explicit and at other times implicit. Rossiter (2008) provides useful examples, but does not include a formal definition, or identify how a fundamental benefit claim is chosen in the first place.

However, a root problem is most of the categorizations of advertising appeals tend to be tautological. There is an implicit assumption that account planners and clients can manage the creative process by choosing from the list of appeals and then achieve that desired appeal in the finished creative execution. That is, researchers used the *finished* executions to identify, evaluate and infer whether a rational or emotional appeal was strategically *intended* rather than examine how the appeals came to *emanate* from the information provided to creatives in the creative brief. This distinction is all the more critical if the starting points of ideation are different from ending points. It is therefore essential to our understanding of how advertising manifests as either an emotional or functional appeal as a consequence of the elements of message strategy contained in the creative brief.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the previous advertising academic literature says little about the role of consumer insight in helping shape the advertising appeal. If consumer

insight can help set the direction of the creative process (Parker, Ang and Koslow, 2018), the next question to ask is what kind of appeal usually results? Fallon and Senn (2006) provide multiple examples of how insights about consumers make their way into advertising that aimed to appeal to emotions. For clients like Citi, Holiday Inn Express, Skoda, Lee Jeans and others, account planners looked for emotional truths that light up a focus group and then creatives can appeal to these emotionally laden themes in advertising. Since human motivation is defined as a critical part of consumer insight, when creatives use consumer insight, the outcome is likely to be an emotional advertisement. In other words, linking the brand to the human motivation would now orientate the strategic focus of the advertising toward an emotional benefit (Mitchell, 2002), rather than a functional appeal. This informs our second hypothesis:

H2: Providing creatives with insight will lead to an increased use of emotional appeals but decreased functional appeals in advertising.

### **However, Is Insight Just Another Priming Cue?**

An alternative perspective on insight might consider it as just another type of priming cue influencing creative work, possibly imposing a constraint on divergent thinking known as functional fixedness (Birch and Rabinowitz, 1951; Simonton, 1995; Wiley, 1998). This concept involves the failure to use familiar domain knowledge in an unfamiliar way. Functional fixedness results when people experience difficulty moving past the traditional domain knowledge conventions that guide thinking to automatically arrive at a preconditioned idea (Duncker and Lees, 1945; Gick and Lockhart, 1995; Schilling, 2005; Wiley, 1998) or a familiar problem–solution combination (Luchins, 1942). Fixation may not only inhibit the production of ideas *per se*, but it may also make those ideas less original

(Smith, Ward, and Schumacher, 1993). Fixation can originate from existing domain knowledge, or it can come about from informational cues that prime creatives to specific knowledge domains (Kilgour and Koslow, 2009; Marsh, Landau, and Hicks, 1996; Smith, Ward, and Schumacher, 1993).

However, regardless of the source of fixation its effect is not readily observable to those doing the creating. A widespread cognitive bias, fixation seems to be extremely problematic in innovation and creativity settings (see Zynga, 2013). This unseen bias affects both novices and experts, but sometimes these biases affect experts more than novices in that experts carefully train themselves to solve problems in set routines efficiently. By merely providing insight—any insight, strong or weak—this should restrict the range of ideation possible, thus restricting the originality in an execution. Insight creates a strategic focus that creatives may feel limits their ability to jump across to unusual knowledge domains to solve the advertising problem. That is, insight puts creatives in a narrow box or intellectual “straight-jacket,” which is hard to break out of, no matter how much effort is expended. It may be that insights keep one on a strategic orientation, but the level of originality is merely a function of the narrow range of ideas within which the ideation is kept.

However, fixation can still enhance originality if the domain one fixates on provides a fertile area for ideation. That is, if an insight is strong, originality may appear to increase, but not due to the usual route of a creative’s hard work resulting in an outstanding execution. Koslow (2015) suggests a situation where creatives literally execute a strong insight and find that the quality of the work is greatly enhanced. In effect, when planners are providing a strong insight to creatives, planners are providing the necessary level of originality for an outstanding execution and all the creative needs to do is execute it. Where a weaker insight is provided, however, the domain may be less fertile so creative work may still shift from functional to emotional, but not as efficiently as when a strong insight is used.

H3: Stronger insight will produce a more efficient trade-off of emotional appeals for functional appeals.

Although insight may alter the orientation of the advertising, another question is whether that advertising is more effective as a result. That is, should finding and using an insight raise the agency's confidence in presenting their ideas to a client? If insight acts as a cue, then insight is not some magic wand enhancing all advertising but instead must adhere to some kind of trade-off (Kilgour and Koslow, 2009). Thus, any increase in the use of emotional appeals would have to be offset by a reduction in functional appeal. In addition, the net influence on effectiveness may simply be a result of the value of emotional or functional appeals themselves. Insight cues may alter the mix of emotional and functional appeals, but the increase in one at the expense of the other may suggest little net influence on effectiveness.

H4: Although use of insight increases the use of emotional appeals at the expense of functional one, there is little net change in effectiveness.

## **METHOD**

To test the hypotheses, an experiment was undertaken to explore directly whether providing insight can alter the caliber of work creative professionals produce. To assess the quality of the work produced, we used external judges to ensure objectivity. The experiment adopted a 3x2 design. Manipulations were between subjects across three levels: strong insight, weak insight and no primed insight as the control condition. To provide some generalization to different media, all subjects produced both a print and television ad.

## **Sample**

The study was conducted among 60 Sydney based advertising agency creatives. 20 Participants were assigned to each of the three conditions. Specifically, 20 creatives received a strong insight, 20 creatives received a weak insight and 20 creatives received no primed insight as the control. The use of professional creatives was a deliberate design feature to assist in avoiding external validity issues (Nickerson, 1999).

The participants were all employed as professional creatives in 15 Sydney based advertising agencies. Thirteen of the agencies involved were international agency networks, and two were large privately-owned agencies. Seven participants were freelancers working at one of the multinational agencies on the day of the experiment. The average age of the participants was 37.5 years, with an average 13.6 years industry experience. Among the participants were 20 art directors, 21 copywriters, and 19 creative directors. There were 42 male and 18 female participants. Twenty-one participants had either regularly or always worked on an automotive client, twenty-four occasionally, five rarely, and ten had no category experience. The participants were all randomly assigned to treatment conditions.

## **Procedure**

The task involved developing a television and a print advertisement against a fictitious brief for an automotive brand. This creative task was modeled on Kilgour and Koslow (2009) however, an automotive utility vehicle or “ute” (or “pick-up” truck in American English) was substituted for insecticide spray. The automotive category was chosen given the anticipated differences in creatives experience levels across the category, and because advertising in the automotive category frequently communicates product attributes and functional benefits.



Participants were provided with an experiment booklet containing clear instructions. All the response booklets contained a creative brief that outlined the advertising objectives (to persuade shoppers for competing work utility vehicles to include in their consideration set), target audience (farmers and tradesmen), proposition (no harder working utility vehicle) and several product attributes (10% more power than competitors; 15% larger scratch-resistant tray; rust-resistant underbody and all-wheel drive). However, the booklets varied as to whether they contained a strong, weak or no insight condition.

The creatives were given 40 minutes to complete the advertising creativity task. The first 10 minutes was used to brainstorm ideas to solve the advertising problem. They then chose their best idea for print and their best idea for television and spent 15 minutes preparing each of the advertising executions. The researcher called time at the following intervals: 10 minutes, 15 minutes and 15 minutes. The experiment took place in a meeting room at each of the advertising agencies involved. All creatives commenced and finished the experiment within the same time frame. Those participants who received an insight in their booklet were instructed to use the insight to help inform the advertising message proposition. The control group were not instructed to use an insight of their choosing, however there was nothing to prohibit them using an insight at their discretion. At the completion of the experiment, participants completed a self-evaluation questionnaire.

### **Pre-test: Identifying Strong and Weak Insights**

The quality of insight was pre-tested among account planners to determine the strong and weak insight conditions. Nine account planners submitted insights they believed relevant to advertising the fictitious utility vehicle. There was an overlap in some of these insights that were ultimately reduced to nine unique insights listed in Table 1. These insights were then rated by a different sample of 20 account planners on 15 items across a seven-point scale

ranging from strongly disagree (-3) to strongly agree (3). The insights were loaded onto four multi-item scales. This included originality and the following three measures of appropriateness: familiar and motivating to consumers, fits with the strategy and message proposition, and usable for creatives. Each of the scales was reliable, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging between .76 and .96.

<<Insert Table 1 about here>>

Table 1 also lists the scores on the four scales used to evaluate insight. Most insights were high on some scales, but not on others. However, only one insight was high on all four scales, and one was low on all four. Thus, the strong insight adopted in the experiment was *"for tradesmen and farmers their vehicle is a point of pride, like scars that prove one's toughness."* The weak insight adopted was *"men do hard work."* These two insight conditions are labelled, pride/scars (for strong insight), and hard work (for weak insight).

## **Coding**

The creative work completed by creatives was evaluated and subsequently coded by two senior practicing creatives. The first judge was a senior art director while the second was a copy based creative director. Both had extensive international agency experience, automotive category experience and had participated in industry award judging. The judges were paid and highly motivated to score the work accurately. The judges also coded blind to the treatment conditions.

To achieve consistency in the assessments between judges, extensive training was undertaken. The judges were provided with two print and two television advertisements. They were given a copy of the generic creative brief, minus any insight condition. After assessing the work, the coders discussed any differences in scores and the researcher clarified any outstanding questions. The judges then proceeded to evaluate 10% of the print and

television executions within the different treatments. These were again checked, and the coder agreement was recorded as averaging .910 for print and .827 for television.

## **Scales**

Four single-items scales were used to explore whether or not judges could see the insight. Two of these asked the judges to “Rate the creative work in its ability to express the following insights.” The two insights provided were the strong and weak insights, and the response scale ranged from “very much so” (6) to “not at all” (0). Also, judges were asked to “Rate the extent to which the focus of the creative is about” and offered two ending phrases, “Human truth” and “Consumer insight.” The same seven-point response scale was used as well.

Two three-item scales were constructed to measure functionality and emotionality. Functional advertising is that which uses functional and rational appeals as well as focus on product features. Emotional advertising is that which uses emotional and non-rational appeals as well as focus on image. The appeals items were measured with the request to “Rate the creative work in its ability to express the follow consumer appeals.” These appeals were phrased as “Functional appeal,” “Rational appeal,” “Feature appeal,” “Emotional appeal,” “Non-rational appeal” and “Image appeal.” All six items were measured with the same seven item response scale ranging from “Not at all” (0) to “Very much so” (6).

Table 2 shows the factor analysis loadings for functionality and emotionality. Two factors were identified by the scree plot and the eigenvalues >1 test. The two factors explained 75.8% of the variance. All the expected loadings are above .6, and the highest cross loading is less than -.35. Overall, a good fit was achieved.

<<Insert Table 2 about here>>

Effectiveness was also measured with a single-item scale ranging from “far less than average” (-3) to “far above average” (+3) with “average” being the midpoint (0). The phrasing of the item was “Rate the PRINT execution” and on the next line was the word “effectiveness”. Parallel phrasing was used for television.

## **FINDINGS**

The data were analyzed in two steps. First, we confirmed whether the creatives or judges could see whether the creatives kept to insight themes offered by the treatments or used insights at all. Second, we modeled functionality and emotionality with insight. Third, effectiveness was modeled using all the same independent measures used in the first two models, plus functionality and emotionality.

The models used were all HLM models with the individual respondent (ID) used as a random effect. Each subject produced two responses, so HLM could control for skill differences among creative professionals. Although it is more complex than other methods like ANOVA or GLM, using the latter methods would take up a degree of freedom for each respondent, making it more difficult to find statistical significance. Another variable investigated indicated which media, print or TV, the ad used. However, this variable was only significant in the emotionality model. The analysis process also checked for all two-way interactions, none of which were significant. Several demographic variables (e.g., age, gender, job role, education, agency, years of experience and whether or not the respondent was a freelancer) were used, however, again were not significant directly or as interactions with other variables.

Individual creative participants could identify when they were given an insight and claimed they used it. To check this, subjects were asked, “was there an insight explicitly

stated in the brief you were given” with responses ranging from definitely no (1) to definitely yes (6). The strong and weak insight conditions had means of 4.9 and 4.55 respectively which were not statistically different from one another ( $p=.33$ ). The no primed insight control had a mean of 2.55, which was significantly different from the two insight groups ( $p<.0001$  in both cases). Subjects were also asked to rate how strong the insight in the brief was with possible responses ranging from extremely weak (1) to extremely strong (6). The strong insight condition achieved a mean of 4.25 which was statistically different from the means for the weak and no insight conditions 2.35 and 3.0 ( $p<0.0001$  and  $p=.0002$  respectively).

The four single-item scales relating to insight and truth were modeled in HLM using media and insight conditions as independent variables. In the case of the two items measuring whether the ad was perceived to be an application of the two insights used in the experiment, there were no significant differences regarding insight treatment. That is, judges’ rating of whether or not the scar/pride insight is expressed is not different among the three strong, weak or no insight conditions ( $p=.166$ ). The judges’ rating of whether or not the hard-work insight is expressed is again not different among the three conditions ( $p=.384$ ). However, for the other two items relating to “Human truth” and “Consumer insight,” both were predicted by insight condition ( $p=.0002$  and  $p=.0004$  respectively). Figure 1 plots the mean levels from the analyses.

<<Insert Figure 1 about here>>

In Figure 1, the right side shows the two items relating to the literal application of the two insights. On the left are the two items relating to the judges seeing any human truth or consumer insight in a creative execution. Although the two items rating the expression ability of the insight have higher means than the other two, former are still only mid-point on the response range, between somewhat and moderately. For judges’ perceptions of human truth or consumer insight, there is more discrimination between the treatments, but the levels are

lower. The no primed insight control is perceived to use insight “very little” while the weak insight uses insight “A little.” The strong insight condition level is just shy of “somewhat” being perceived as using either a human truth or consider insight. Although creatives are not noticeably using the insights provided in the treatments, those given a stronger insight do end up being observed as employing some kind of insight, whether or not it was the one provided. Thus, H1 is supported.

The emotionality and functionality of the creative executions are modeled in Table 3 as HLM models. In both cases, the fit is high. Although HLM does not provide the familiar  $R^2$  measure of fit, some idea of the level of fit can be inferred by comparing similar models. If the models were fit as repeated measures models with fixed effects for respondent differences, the variance explained would be 65% and 67% for emotionality and functionality respectively. The insight condition predicts both emotionality and functionality but does so differently in each model. Strong insights tend to have a positive effect on emotionality, and a negative effect on functionality. Hence, H2 is supported.

<<Insert Table 3 about here>>

To address the third hypothesis comparing strong and weak insights consider Figure 2. Expressed in standard units, the figure shows the influence of insight conditions influencing emotionality and functionality simultaneously. The means for the three conditions are plotted along with ovals, representing their means' 95% joint confident regions. In the lower right of the figure is the mean for the no primed insight control condition. Although more functionally oriented than the other two conditions, it is lower on emotionality. Both insight conditions are on the upper left, showing that they increased emotionality at the expense of functionality. However, the strong insight condition is to the upper right of the weak insight condition, and the means are jointly separated. That is, the strong insight condition reduced functionality less while increasing emotionality more. That

is, the strong insight condition is more efficient in orientating a creative execution toward a more emotional appeal. Therefore, H3 is supported.

<<Insert Figure 2 about here>>

The model for perceived effectiveness is also listed in Table 3. Both functionality and emotionality increased effectiveness but the inclusion of demographic variables and interactions were explored by proved not significant. However, neither insight nor media had direct influence on effectiveness. Given insight shifted appeals from functional to emotional, the net influence on effectiveness was not significant. That is, insight alters the character of the appeals, but does not expand effectiveness. Thus, H4 is supported.

## **DISCUSSION**

Although insight is seen as an important tool in practice, its contribution to creative advertising development is less straightforward. Consumer insight does not tell creatives what knowledge domains to express. Neither is a specific insight something that reveals itself when one inspects creative executions. Insight guides creativity by liberating creatives to tell narratives about people. Observers can tell consumer insight was used, but they find it harder to identify the breadcrumb trail of a specific insight. The strength of insight relates to how it shapes the orientation of the advertising appeal in creative execution. In the current study, functional appeals were common in the automotive “ute” category explored. However strong insight results in a creative execution that has an emotional appeal spawned from the human truth captured in the insight’s knowledge domain. Thus, insight gave creatives a starting point—a motivational angle from which to generate divergent ideas. From there they could leap to the creative idea.

## **Future Research and Limitations**

This study looked through the lens of creative judges to determine if insights made creative executions more emotive, but further work should validate whether insight makes the creative work more emotive to consumers. In moving the brand closer to human motivation, an insight is likely to affect consumer evaluations of the brand more favorably. This could also extend to brand recall, as emotional advertising tends to be remembered more than rational messages (Madison, 1999). Additional research may investigate insight's effect on attitudes toward the advertising, attitudes toward the brand and purchase intent. That is, this study does show how a utility vehicle that is arguably a high involvement item for a farmer or tradesman can be paired with a strong emotional appeal. However, we do not show whether a rational advertising appeal would elicit stronger consumption behavior.

Similar to any experiment this study has limitations. First, the time allowed to complete the task and the artificial condition associated with the environment under which the experiment is conducted can affect the results (Harrington, 1975). The time frame given to creatives to complete the experiment was short compared to that afforded in practice. This could impair the quality of divergent thinking capability of creatives in the elaboration of their ideas. Second, the creatives were asked to prepare a print and television commercial using different ideas. In practice, they would most likely develop a single-minded campaign idea relevant to both media. The experiment also deliberately focused on an automotive category where product attributes frequently support the brand promise. Replacing product attributes with non-product attributes or an experiential or symbolic benefit may have further advanced the emotional appeal of the advertising. Finally, the experiment was conducted among individual creatives, whereas in practice, creativity is socially constructed between art director and copywriter and other agency actors. We were motivated to avoid these limitations, but we needed to accept them to gain cooperation of creatives and their agencies.



Future research needs to consider the possibility that strong insights may sometimes lead to more, yet better fitting, functional appeals. That is, we have generally followed Parker, Ang and Koslow's (2018) lead in that insight is based on a *human* truth, but there may be other kinds of truths where product attributes or functional benefits lead to insight or simply a powerful functionally oriented execution. For example, Fallon and Senn's (2006) planning work attempts to get to "the essential truth of the Bahamas" (p. 157) and designed the destination's advertising and website around a framework that could accommodate its diverse offerings. In a product category dominated by emotional appeals, such an approach may be useful to move appeals from emotional to functional.

Of the nine insights considered in Table 1, it is noticeable that the insights considered most useful to creatives are the more emotive ones (e.g., insights 1, 5 and 8). However, the less emotive ones (e.g., insights 2, 4, 6 and 7), score modestly on some of Table 1's dimensions. A wider set of insights may have identified some that were strong, but less emotive. Or a valuable direction may be adding some emotive power to weaker insights. For example, the weak hard-work insight may have been strengthened by adding emotion, possibly appending a phrase like "measured in depth of suntan or buckets of sweat." Alternatively, insight may have its strongest influence when it hones the proposition. Only additional research can really address these concerns.

Experiments using professional creatives are uncommon so the potential for understanding creativity theory by studying professional practices is immense. No experiment in advertising development uses a large sample size of professional creatives, and only one other study, Kilgour and Koslow (2009), uses a modest-sized sample. But both that study and this suggest that advertising practices influence creative thinking, sometimes aiding creativity, but sometimes holding it back. Although one can use populations of advertising students to understand some aspects of creative thinking (e.g., Griffin, 2008), studying

proven creative elites provides a unique opportunity for pushing the boundaries of our knowledge of creative thinking.

## **Implications**

A significant implication for academics is that we challenge scholars' assumption that creatives freely choose among appeal types. For example, Armstrong (2011) lists almost 200 "advertising principles" or execution factors, including 30 rational execution elements and nine emotional ones. He, like most executional factors researchers, recommends advertisers choose from this list when developing advertising. In an ideal world possibly it can be a free choice, but in practice, use of appeals is limited by the kinds of information contained in the creative brief. Functional information is typically available from clients, who can describe the product or service in great detail. But if one wants an emotive appeal, then creatives need the right inputs, especially a strong insight.

The key implication for practitioners also stresses that to develop an emotional appeal, one option is to find a powerful consumer insight. If insight is lacking or weak in quality, attempting to develop highly emotive advertising may not work. Thus, diagnosing the strength of an insight may well be the basis of a quality brief. Unfortunately, few advertising researchers explore how the planning function limits, enables or manages creative ideation, but future research desperately needs to understand these critical planning inputs. For example, some insights may be said to be more scalable, relating to more individuals in a target market, or across different media or platforms. Alternatively, other insights may be more enduring by having greater stability across campaigns or longevity over time.

However, if marketers and advertising agencies want rational advertising with functional appeals, then they may not want to rely on an insight incorporating a human truth.

Providing insight to a creative means she will work to use it in some way—by developing emotional advertising and leaving more functional appeals aside.

This research also emphasizes that the starting points account planners give their creatives matter. Therefore, if a planner seeks creatives to generate a range of alternative appeals, one approach is to provide independent sets of creatives different starting points, in the form of diverse insights or propositions. In general, the framing of information provided to creatives is critical so planners need be cognizant of this. They also need to consider alternative ways of presenting research that manage creatives well.

However, the assumption always made was that finding that persuasive angle around which to build an emotional appeal was something that came naturally to good creatives and they didn't need management—at least in this aspect of creative work. That is, emotional appeals were always assumed to be there, close at hand, ready to use, if the client needed them and was open to using them. What was assumed to need management was keeping creatives on-strategy, and hence providing consumer insight in a creative brief was viewed as critical to getting the right knowledge domains expressed. But supplying insight to creatives only gives them the starting point for ideation, not the ending point, so insight doesn't really manage advertising knowledge domains. How consumer insight operates is in a less expected way, that of a tool to get to emotional advertising—especially in a functionally oriented category—by finding a consumer insight based on a deep human truth. Overall, there is much more to learn about how creatives make their celebrated magic, but this study still provides a roadmap to finding emotional advertising, something that starts with consumer insight.

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Table 1  
Pretest Evaluations of Insights

Order number	Insight	Original	Familiar and motivating to consumers	Fits with strategy and proposition	Usable for creatives
1	Blue-collar workers put out the hard yakka to build the dreams of the country and its people while silently holding dreams of their own.	.98	1.22	.21	1.10
2	Smart people get hard-working equipment to do their dirty jobs.	.52	1.72	2.03	.46
3	There is nobility in hard work.	.22	1.83	.76	.48
4	Work is physical, success is mental.	.38	.27	-.64	.31
5	For tradesmen and farmers their vehicle is a point of pride, like scars that prove ones toughness.	1.23	1.80	1.78	1.38
6	Men do hard work.	-1.97	-.10	-.86	-1.97
7	Tradesman and farmers don't want bells and whistles; they simply need a truck that can stand up to the punishment of a hard day's work.	.53	2.02	2.13	.42
8	Farmers and tradesmen wear a uniform of scrapes, mud, sweat and blood.	1.37	1.62	.99	1.34
9	Everyone has a secret to hide	.22	.22	-1.84	.05

NOTE:—Scales range from -3 to +3 with pooled standard error of .292.

Table 2

Factor Loadings of Emotionality and Functionality

	Functionality	Emotionality
Rational appeal	.957	-.061
Functional appeal	.929	.079
Features appeal	.683	-.247
Non-rational appeal	-.023	.921
Emotional appeal	.049	.900
Image appeal	-.349	.672
Cronbach's Alpha	.825	.793

NOTE:—VARIMAX rotation used.

Table 3

## HLM Models Predicting Emotionality, Functionality and Effectiveness

		Functionality		Emotionality		Effectiveness	
		Estimate	<i>p</i> -value	Estimate	<i>p</i> -value	Estimate	<i>p</i> -value
<b><i>Covariance Parameters</i></b>							
Intercept	ID	.167	.074	.187	.054	.193	.011
Residual		.697	<.0001	.673	<.0001	.414	<.0001
<b><i>Solution for fixed effects</i></b>							
Intercept		.537	.002	.056	.025	.001	1.000
Media	Print			-.683	<.0001		
	TV			0	.		
Insight	Strong	-.692	.004	.526	.025		
	Weak	-.920	.001	.331	.153		
	None	0	.	0	.		
Functionality						.546	<.0001
Emotionality						.436	<.0001
<b><i>Fit statistics</i></b>							
-2 Res Log Likelihood		323.2		322.9		282.9	
AIC		327.2		326.9		286.9	

Figure 1

Judges' Rating of How Different Insights are Portrayed by Creatives when Under Strong, Weak or No-Insight Conditions

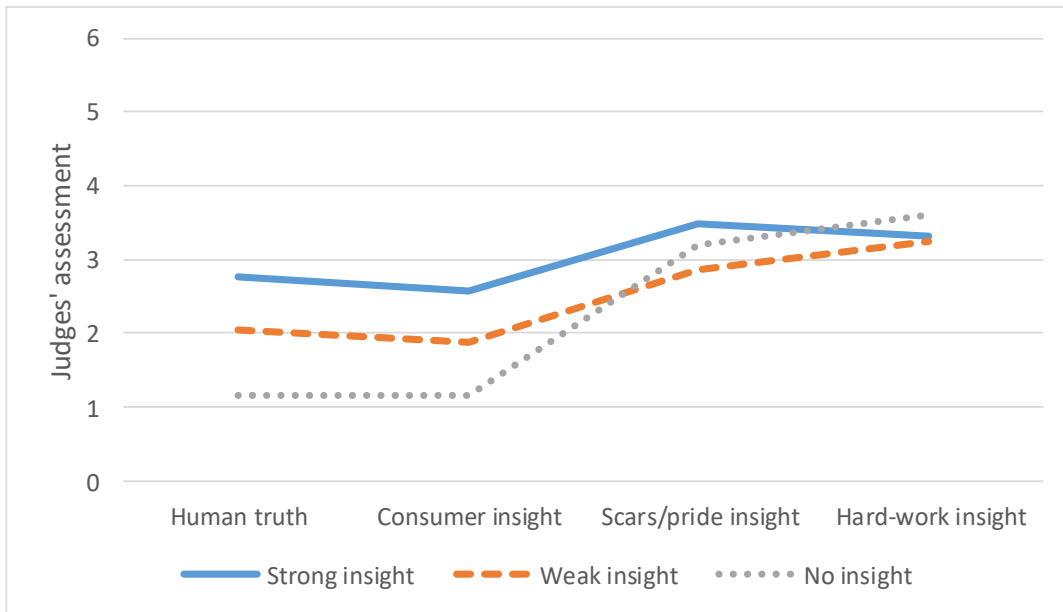


Figure 2

Trade-off of Emotionality and Functionality among Strong, Weak and No-Insight Conditions

