Delivering Return on Imagination: A Framework for Creativity in Developing Advertising Message Strategy

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Statement of Candidate

I certify that the work in this thesis entitled "Delivering Return on Imagination: A Framework for Creativity in Developing Advertising Message Strategy" has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree to any other university or institution other than Macquarie University.

I also certify that the thesis is an original piece of research and it has been written by me. Any help and assistance that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself have been appropriately acknowledged.

In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

The research presented in this thesis was approved by Macquarie University Ethics Review Committee, reference number: 5201400250 on 10/04/2014.

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08/10/2014

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Abstract

Advertising message strategy plays an important role in shaping creative execution, however, the way in which advertising message strategies are developed remains unclear and a consensus on the content of quality advertising message strategy is yet to be reached. Building on the strategy-as-practice perspective, this study looks at the strategy process (praxis) used by agency account planners (practitioners) in the development of the creative brief (practice), to propose a descriptive framework for the development of advertising message strategies. The aim of the research is to identify the sequence of events and the elements of message strategy that lead to stronger strategic creative outcomes. Specifically, the study identifies seven elements of message strategy content that may make their way into the creative brief: challenge, community, purpose, connection, promise, support and tone. These elements of message strategy content are navigated and committed by the account planner to the creative brief through five elements of strategy praxis: accumulation, association, repetition, cultivation and distillation. The study also identifies the attributes of quality insight that may be adopted by account planners as a dominant mode of strategy as: originality, suitability, usability and visionary attributes. This study responds to calls for further research in marketing using qualitative analysis to expand theory, strengthen research into marketing practitioners' epistemic culture and improve our understanding of the development of micro strategy work. These findings provide insights for marketers who want to design message strategy content that leads to more appropriate and original creative executions.

Introduction

Advertising researchers have long explored how to translate strategic thinking into effective advertisements; one way to approach this research is to start with finished advertisements and work backwards. This approach includes an exploration of the various dichotomies and typologies of creative execution and an assessment of their effectiveness. The major themes of this body of research are the importance of aligning benefits and appeals to the market conditions, the competitive context and the advertising objectives to improve the quality of output in creative execution. This approach focuses on the functional and emotional elements of persuasive appeal (Aaker & Norris, 1982) and how these might change in the presence of high and low consumer involvement (Vaughn, 1983). More elaborate typologies contain elements of strategic benefit (Schultz & Zinser, 1978; Glover, Hartly, & Patti, 1989), advertising claim and appeal (Frazer, 1983; Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989), executional factors (Stewart & Koslow, 1989) and the various decisions embodied in the advertising strategy process (Shimp, 2000). This message content approach has examined the advertising development process largely through a deductive analysis of creative execution and is relatively silent on the inductive managerial process of message strategy development.

An alternative approach is to start with the strategy development process and consider the ways in which the creative process can be better informed, and therefore perform better. This approach is defined as 'return on imagination', that is, the value-add from creatives' creative thinking skills within the advertising development process. We explore when and how better strategy leads to a more effective use of the imaginative energy of advertising creatives. Advertising message strategy development is an analytical and creative process (De Geus, 1988; Steel, 1998). Divergent and convergent thinking (Guilford, 1968) is deployed in pursuit of appropriate and original creative ideas to advance the competitive position of brands (Runco & Charles, 1993; Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2003). The immediate outcome of message strategy development is the creative brief, which serves to inspire creative execution (Steel, 1998). In the advertising development process, a key issue is the identification of the elements and the process of message strategy that advance creative execution in order to deliver 'return on imagination'. A significant goal for marketers is to optimise return on imagination, and maximise the marginal benefit to creative execution relative to the investment quality of a creative input(s). In the context of this study return on imagination represents the marginal contribution of creatives' ideation effort relative to the quality of the information contained in the creative brief.

While the literature regarding the consensus on the content of message strategy that may be present in a creative brief is relatively underdeveloped, it is agreed that there are several necessary components: the advertising objectives (Moriarty, 1983; Steel, 1998; Dahlen, Lange, & Smith, 2010), a description of the target audience (Steel 1998) and a consumer proposition (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989). Nevertheless, these components fail to provide a robust account of the key determinants that constitute quality advertising strategy because even a weak advertising strategy can be stated in terms that contain definitions of the advertising objective, the target audience and the selling proposition (Helgesen, 1992).

One significant element in the construction of message strategy is insight, which may be called on to enhance creativity by aligning consumer motivations more closely with the brand (Meyers, 1986; West & Ford, 2001; Hackley, 2003a; Steel, 1998). Insight serves to strengthen the affective appeal of consumer proposition (Hackley, 2003a; Steel, 1998), provide differentiation for the brand and acts as the seed of an idea from which creatives can launch their work (Hackley, 2003a; Steel,1998). Yet, while the benefits of insight in creative problem solving are widely acknowledged (Schilling, 2005; Gick & Lockhart, 1995; Simonton, 1988), the attributes of quality insight, in the context of advertising development, remain relatively unexplored.

In practice, the process of advertising strategy development can be studied through the lens of account planning. Originating in the United Kingdom in the 1960s (Morrison & Haley, 2003), the account-planning discipline serves to align advertising research, strategy and creative execution, elevating it to a more strategic level (Barry, Peterson, & Todd, 1987; Steel, 1998; Hackley, 2003a). Specifically, the role of the account planner is to determine the content of the message strategy contained in the creative brief, as well as ensure that the message strategy is reflected in the creative execution (Steel, 1998). An approach that aligns advertising strategy with immediate and unanticipated consumer wants (Goldman, 1995; Baskin, 2008) and in which the account planner has a central position in relation to advertising quality and effectiveness.

To fill this conceptual gap, this study adopts the strategy-as-practice perspective, applied to qualitative reports from account planners regarding the way in which they construct message strategy. Specifically, it examines the praxis of the strategy process used by account planners, as practitioners, in the development of the creative brief as a primary practice tool. A systematic analysis of message strategy development involves disentangling the different

stages of both the analytical and creative aspects of the strategy process. The aim of the research is to identify the sequence of events and the elements of message strategy that lead to stronger strategic creative outcomes. These findings provide insights for marketers who want to design message strategy content that leads to appropriate and original creative executions. Three key research questions are proposed: first, what is the typology of message strategy contained in the typical creative brief?; second, what is the sequence of events that account planners move through to arrive at the primary message strategy contained in the creative brief?; and third, what are the attributes of quality insight and under what conditions may insight advance or hinder creative execution?

Literature Review

Strategy Process in Complex Creative Settings

Strategy-as-practice has emerged as a framework that extends the strategy research agenda (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2005). While process studies provide valuable details about the sequence of 'individual and collective events, actions, and activities over time in context' (Pettigrew, 1997, p. 338), strategy-as-practice addresses some of their limitations. From a strategy-as-practice perspective, strategy has been defined as 'a situated, socially accomplished activity, while strategising comprises those actions, interactions and negotiations of multiple actors and the situated practices that they draw upon in accomplishing that activity' (Jarzabkowski, Balogun, & Seidl, 2007, p.7). Strategy-as-practice and strategy process both focus on the strategic events and activities in firms; however, strategy practice researchers tend to focus on the detailed actions that constitute a strategy process (Brown & Duguid, 2001). Hence, strategy-as-practice places a greater emphasis on social activity at the micro-level, rather than change events from the macro- or firm-level of analysis, as most process studies tend to do (Jarzabkowski, 2005; Johnson, Langley, Melin, & Whittington, 2003; Johnson, Melin, & Whittington, 2007; Whittington, 2007). Practice theory thus provides a more robust framework to investigate the nature of strategy process in more complex creative settings.

Strategy practice brings important ontological and epistemological assumptions to the strategy research agenda (Golsorkhi, Rouleau, Seidl, & Vaara, 2010; Jarzabkowski, 2005). The interpretivist ontology assumes that reality is constructed through the meaning we attribute to socially shared experiences. 'Practice' is a very special concept because it allows researchers to engage in direct dialogue with practitioners. The fundamental premise of strategy practice is that strategy is not something that firms have, but something that people do (Jarzabkowski, 2005). A focus on practice provides an opportunity to examine the micro-level of social activity and its construction in a real social context or field; a practice approach therefore allows the researcher to move from general and abstract reflection on social activity to an increasingly targeted analysis of social reality. In this respect, strategy practice research seeks to close the gap between knowledge and the reality of practice and is based on the understanding that strategy constitutes a social reality created and recreated in the interactions between various actors inside and outside the firm (Golsorkhi et al., 2010). Interpretivist epistemology, on the other hand, assumes that we cannot separate ourselves from what we

know and that the researcher, the participants and the subject of investigation are thus intrinsically linked. Collaborative engagement leads to the understanding of knowledge in order to establish reality (Angen, 2000; Silverman, 2011).

The Praxis, Practice and Practitioner Relationship

Critical to strategy practice are the concepts of praxis, practice and practitioners. 'Praxis' refers to the stream of activity in which strategy is accomplished over time to identify how strategy work takes place (Jarzabkowski, 2005); 'practices' refer to the social, symbolic and material tools through which strategy work is done (Jarzabkowski, 2005); while 'practitioners' are those that do the strategy work. As strategy practice research views strategy as something that people do, practitioners are central in this research. There is a wide definition of strategy practitioners that includes 'both those directly involved in making strategy–most prominently managers and consultants–and those with indirect influence–the policy-makers, the media, the gurus and the business schools who shape legitimate practices' (Jarzabkowski & Whittington, 2008, p. 101). In this respect, practitioners can be separated, in terms of the unit of analysis, into individual or collective actor(s) and classed according to whether they are inside or outside the organisation (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009).

While message strategy development is a process that is shared among various actors (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2005), including the account service, creatives and the client, it is the account planner's domain of expertise. In this context, the individual brings with them distinct cognitive approaches that shape the work specific to their domain (Amabile, 1996). In the message strategy development process, it is the account planner who individually contributes personal strategic thinking to the broader social process (Steel, 2008; Hackley, 2003a). If the intention is to develop our understanding of the true nature of message strategy development work, an exploration of how account planners engage in the advertising strategy process as individuals is required before any broader social actor participation studies are undertaken.

The strength of practice theory is its ability to explain how strategy is enabled and constrained by organisational and social practice (Vaara & Whittington, 2012). Strategy-as-practice research has advanced social theories in strategic management, extended the analysis of strategy beyond performance-centric measures, broadened the scope of organisations studied, opened up examination of the micro-level analysis of strategy and promoted new methodologies. In particular, it provides a framework within which to gain insight into the

tools and methods of strategy development (practices), how strategy work takes place (praxis), as well as the role of the actors involved (practitioners).

Advertising Strategy as Strategy Praxis

Advertising strategy, often referred to as creative strategy, contains two components: content and execution (Ray, 1982; Delozier & Shimp, 1986). The 'content' is the elements of the message strategy contained in the creative brief that define the intention of the communication (Steel, 1998; Jewler & Drewniany, 2001). These elements include the advertising objective, target audience, benefit, insight and proposition (Steel, 1998). Content also includes the elements of persuasion that drive cognitive and affective processing (Aaker & Norris, 1982; Frazer, 1983; Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989), including advertising appeal and tone. Advertising appeal relates to the rational and emotional elements of persuasion contained in the message strategy, while advertising tone relates to the positive or negative orientation of the message (Kotler & Armstrong, 1991). 'Execution' concerns itself with the way in which the message is constructed and the context in which it is executed (Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989; Manrai, Broach, & Manrai, 1992). Creative execution is dependent on, and shaped by, elements of both content and execution. This study concerns itself with the strategic construction of advertising strategy content; specifically, the process of message strategy and the elements contained in the creative brief that shape affective and cognitive appeals.

The Creative Brief as Strategy Practice

The creative brief is the outcome of strategy praxis and represents the primary practice tool developed by the account planner to guide the creative execution. The creative brief serves as inspiration for creative teams and should fulfil three main objectives: first, it provides direction on what the advertising is required to achieve; second, it must render a clear understanding of the target audience the advertising is designed to address and finally, it must identify the motivating message to which the target audience will be most responsive (Steel, 1998).

Advertising objective

The purpose of advertising objectives is to define the specific aims of the creative execution. These aims are expressed in terms of what the consumers are expected to do after exposure to

the advertising execution. A number of authors have discussed the precise content of advertising objectives: most of the earlier literature on advertising objectives consists of variations and extensions of the early hierarchy-of-effects model that identifies attention, interest, desire and action (AIDA) as possible advertising effects (see Colley, 1961; Lavidge & Steiner, 1961; Wolfe, Brown, & Thompson, 1962; Rogers, 2010; Preston, 1982; Vakratsas & Ambler, 1999). The majority of these models are limited by their representation of a number of linear steps through which it is presumed that consumers progress as part of the purchase decision process (Krugman, 1977; Politz, 1975). Some authors suggest measuring the success of the objectives in terms of sales achievement (Majaro, 1970), while others convincingly argue that marketing and advertising objectives need to be distinguished and isolated from sales performance (Ang, 2014; Steel, 1998), market share indicators and media weight (Corkindale, 1976). Despite these differing opinions on the content of advertising objectives, there is a general consensus that advertising objectives shed light on target audience characteristics and perceptions towards the brand or category (Dahlen, Lange, & Smith, 2010); provide context for the development of advertising appeals (see Hall, 1992; O'Malley, 1991); express what the advertising is intended to do in terms of the cognitive, affective and conative domains of perception, education and persuasion (Moriarty, 1983); and facilitate a framework within which clients can measure campaign success.

Target audience

The creative brief also contains a description of the target audience that relates to the broader concept of targeted marketing and refers to the identification of a homogenous group of consumers who share similar needs, wants and characteristics that brand communication are designed to serve (Kotler & Armstrong, 1991). The target audience, in the context of the advertising brief, refers to the group with whom the advertisement intends to communicate with, and by default, also defines other groups that are excluded (Steel, 1998). An understanding of target audience is designed to inform the creative team about the characteristics of the target group, providing a descriptive account of the demographic and psychological motivations that underpin their unique human behaviour (Steel, 1998). This contradiction between the similarities that unites a group or groups of consumers and the differences that make them distinct underlies the definition of a clear and discrete target audience.

As Steel (1998) explains, this description goes beyond a demographic account to provide a psychological and behavioural description of the target audience that is both emotive and

creative. It should provide the creative team with a rich and intimate understanding of human motivation at an individual level to which both the art director and the copywriter can relate. The description sheds light to how the target audience relates to the product or category; how a brand fits in to their lives; whether it is a product included in their existing repertoire; how they feel about it and what language, often derived from research anecdotes, consumers use to associate personal experience with the product or category.

Attributes and benefits

The concept of 'benefits' reflects the desirability that consumers associate with product attributes and serves to shape brand preference when consumers are evaluating what they believe the product or service can do for them (Keller, 1993). Benefits connect a product or service offering with the human motivations that lie behind decisions based on the relative importance placed by consumers on utilitarian versus hedonic needs. These concepts underpin the way in which consumers resolve certain issues; for example, the choice between purchasing a car that will accommodate a large family versus a desire to purchase a vehicle that will facilitate off-road adventure. Utilitarian needs are based on rational buying motives, while hedonic needs relate to the social, experiential and sensory aspects of emotional buying motives. However, hedonic and utilitarian needs are not mutually exclusive, as both need states can be experienced simultaneously (Voss, Spangenberg, & Grohmann, 2003); for example, a person considering the purchase of a pair of sneakers may care for functional features (such as durability), as well as hedonic features (such as design).

Based on the underlying motivations that shape differing wants and needs, benefits can be grouped into three distinct categories: (1) functional, (2) experiential and (3) symbolic (Park, Jaworski, & MacInnis, 1986; Fuchs & Diamantopoulos, 2010). Functional benefits rely on the consumer's cognitive decision making, relate to the more intrinsic advantages of product or service consumption and usually correspond to product-related attributes (Tikkanen & Vääriskoski, 2010; Shimp & Andrews, 2013). These benefits are typically concerned with the functional performance of a product or service, addressing functional consumer needs that prompt problem resolution, problem avoidance, frustration prevention or conflict resolution (see Fennell, 1978). However, functional benefits seldom provide the brand differentiation required for competitive advantage, as they can simply be copied by competitors (Tikkanen & Vääriskoski, 2010). Experiential benefits are concerned with what it feels like to use the product or service, adding depth to the experience of owning or using a brand and also typically correspond with product-related attributes. Symbolic benefits relate the brand to the

concept of the self (Solomon, 1983) and serve as a vehicle for personal self-expression, self-pride or peer acceptance. In this sense, they focus on the extrinsic advantages of product or service consumption and are usually related to non-product attributes, such as price, user or usage imagery (Shimp & Andrews, 2013).

These benefits resonate in advertising execution as informational and transformational advertising appeals (Ratchford, 1987; Naylor, Kleiser, Baker, & Yorkston, 2008). Rossiter and Percy (1998) identify a number of needs that are activated in purchase motivations, describing them as informational motivations (activated when a consumer recognises a need in the actual state) and transformational motivations (activated when consumers feel a need to move to a desired state). Informational motivations (for example, problem removal, problem avoidance, incomplete satisfaction and normal depletion) require marketing communications that provide a solution to a problem. Transformational motivations (for example, sensory gratification, social approval and intellectual stimulation) move the consumer to an 'altered state' by appealing to consumer emotions.

Message Strategy as Creative Process

In the development of advertising message strategy, account planners engage in analytical analysis, where planning tools and processes are used to aid creative thinking (De Geus, 1988). The account planner's role is to explore the research and data in order to identify the strategic idea that more closely links the consumer to the brand and, ultimately, to help the creatives on their way (Steel, 1998; Griffin, 2008). In this context, both advertising message strategy and creative execution embrace the notion of creativity (Steel, 1998), containing elements of both originality and appropriateness (Runco & Charles, 1993; Koslow, Sasser, & Riordan, 2003). Appropriate ideas deliver the desired advertising objective, ensure continuity in the brand message, differentiate the brand from competitors (Korgaonkar & Bellenger, 1985), reinforce brand equity and affirm consumer self-brand connections (Escalas, 2004). Original ideas create impact in order to break through the consumers' relative indifference to advertising (Thorson & Zhao, 1997), they modify and reinforce brand attitudes (Haberland & Dacin, 1992) and offer transformation to an unexpected brand reality (Jackson & Messick, 1965). Appropriateness and originality are therefore important concepts in message strategy and the account planner is central to both.

Message Strategy as Divergent and Convergent Thinking

As account planners individually search for appropriate and original ideas, a key question arises: how do account planners engage with the message strategy development process? The message strategy process as an antecedent to creative execution involves the evolution of creative ideas through either a process of creation, synthesis or modification (Engle, Mah, & Sadri, 1997), requiring both divergent and convergent thinking processes (Guilford, 1968). Divergent thinking focuses on the cognitive processes that yield multiple disparate solutions to a problem across distant domains involving the engagement of the imagination in connecting unrelated concepts, challenging conventions and prompting serendipitous revelation in pursuit of originality (Amabile, 1989). In order to arrive at a well-defined solution, divergent thinking alone is insufficient, as ideas need to be forged into a single appropriate solution (Baer, 2003; Jaarsveld & Leeuwen, 2005). This latter process relies on convergent thinking, which refers to the cognitive processes in the deductive genesis of a single, appropriate solution within the problem domain (Guilford, 1967; Halpern, 2003; Kaufmann, 2003). Convergent thinking requires the identification of relevant, existing properties that frame reasoning from learning and intuition to provide context for the issue or opportunity at hand, to facilitate the evaluation of alternative solutions (Kozbelt, 2006) and to evaluate the consequences of a chosen path (Goel & Pirolli, 1992). It may also involve sub-processes of divergent thinking when revisions to thinking are required in order to overcome barriers that may present with a particular thinking pathway (Mumford, Hunter, Eubanks, Bedell, & Murphy, 2007). As a consequence, the normative perspective is that, in order for creativity to be original and appropriate, divergent and convergent thinking must operate conjointly.

The processes of divergent and convergent thinking combine during the advertising message strategy process to frame a strategic idea. Ang (2014, p.166) suggests that the advertising strategy process commences with convergent thinking in order to clearly identify the business issue or opportunity, followed by an exploration of multiple divergent ideas, before converging on a final, appropriate creative strategy selection. These sequential steps move the planner closer to the desired strategic outcome and inform a process where in concepts are collected, related, created and donated in order to advance creative strategic work (Shneiderman, 2000).

Insight as Divergent and Convergent Thinking

A number of authors in the advertising literature have discussed the relationship between the account planner and insight in the message strategy development process (Hackley, 2003a, 2003b; Steel, 1998; Reid, King, & DeLorme, 1998). The role of insight is to align consumers more closely with the brand strategy development process (Meyers, 1986; West & Ford, 2001; Hackley, 2003a). While insights may be quantitative, they are primarily qualitative accounts of human behaviour. Ang (2014, p. 32) suggests that consumer insights consist of 'unexpected observations or findings about consumer behaviour, which a firm can capitalise into profitable solutions either by creating opportunities or solving problems'. In this context, insight links consumer motivation to a creative congruent resolution in order to solve a communication issue or opportunity.

The interest in insight stems from its capacity to accelerate quantum leaps in creative problem solving. Distinguishing insight from normative problem solving or opportunity identification is the 'Aha!' moment, an affective response to the unexpected nature of the insight and the suddenness in that insight providing an appropriate solution (Gick & Lockhart, 1995). The degree of the affective response from the 'Aha!' moment is mediated by the degree of unexpectedness and the size and complexity of the knowledge domains to bring the insight into clarity. When a breakthrough is realised as a result of insight, distant, unrelated ideas that appear to be twisted together in a tangled mass of divergent thoughts, present themselves in a relevant and surprising way.

Numerous authors have explored the notion of insight (Schilling, 2005; Gick & Lockhart, 1995; Simonton, 1988) and shed light on its role within the context of problem solving and opportunity revelation. Schilling (2005) suggests that insight arises through the process of either (a) completing a schema, (b) re-organising information or reformulating a problem, (c) overcoming a mental block, (d) finding a problem analogue or (e) random recombination. Completing a schema and re-organising information represent convergent thinking techniques, whereas the other processes represent divergent thinking. While each of these processes offers differing routes to insight, the basic underlying processes are essentially identical.

Schilling (2005) argues that insight arises when atypical representations from multiple, often distant, knowledge domains are linked by cognitive thought in a manner that rapidly shortens

the associated path length, re-orientating the relationship between domains and sometimes providing a cue for further connections. This unique route can progress through the process of random recombination (Simonton, 1988) or via a search through the individuals cognitive knowledge of the domain (Baughman & Mumford, 1995; Mumford, Baughman, Maher, Costanza, & Supinski, 1997).

Impact of Knowledge on Insight Process

A number of researchers have studied the impact of domain-specific knowledge on creative thinking, which serves to illustrate the way in which account planners may develop insight (Amabile, 1983; Simonton, 1999; Gardner, 2011; Schilling, 2005). This body of research proposes that the cognitive process in insight ideation is influenced by the scope of individual knowledge domains and suggests that extensive discipline knowledge is an antecedent to insightful thinking (Amabile, 1983; Simonton, 1999; Gardner, 2011). Domain knowledge facilitates an understanding of the relationships from which unique ideas arise (Schilling, 2005) and patterns of learning develop over time, enabling the correct appropriation of associated concepts (Dosi, 1988). However, discipline specific knowledge has also been shown to impede insightful cognitive thinking (Birch & Rabinowitz, 1951; Wiley, 1998; Simonton, 1995) because domain-specific experience can induce functional fixedness and impair divergent thinking. This is a result of not being able to move beyond the conventions relating to a specific domain or having an automated response to a pre-conditioned representation due to the automated nature of thinking (Duncker & Lees, 1945; Schilling, 2005; Wiley, 1998; Gick & Lockhart, 1995). Alternatively, it can be the result of a predisposition to rely on a pre-conditioned problem-solution set (Luchins, 1942). Other research suggests that a broad, general knowledge of domains is a more conducive means to insightful thinking (Martindale, 1995). Despite these conflicting views, the dominant perspective is that domain-specific knowledge may be a necessary component of insightful thinking, although it is not sufficient in itself (Schilling, 2005; Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). Simply having the knowledge is insufficient because cognition is required to build associations between representations in order for insight to materialise (Smith, Ward, & Finke, 1995; Schilling, 2005).

Impact of Domain Knowledge Priming on Strategic Thinking

Insight is a strategic input widely used in the message strategy process that requires an understanding of how it affects the executional outcome. It is posited that the quality of

insight as a strategy input moderates the quality of the creative output. If the objective of the message strategy is to prime the creative team to pursue appropriate and original outcomes, it raises the question of whether knowledge priming through insight hinders or advances creative execution? This is an important question in the strategy development process because insight is a priming technique that shapes the appropriateness of creative execution. The literature suggests that the priming of domain-specific knowledge is shaped by the degree of experience (novice or expert) because the individual's experience level shapes the cognitive thinking processes that underpin the appropriate and original outcomes. In the absence of individual domain-specific knowledge, novices will adopt primed knowledge, disregarding instructions to abstain from doing so (Marsh, Ward, & Landau, 1999; Smith, Ward, & Schumacher, 1993). The novice tendency to adopt the primed knowledge domain reduces originality (Smith et al., 1993). When primed with domain-specific knowledge, experts tend to commit early to a problem-solution based on a predefined mental set (Wiley, 1998), limiting divergent thinking, and resulting in less appropriate creative ideation (Hecht & Proffitt, 1995).

Kilgour and Koslow (2009) found that there is a trade-off between the originality and appropriateness of creative ideas among individuals with respect to divergent and convergent thinking techniques. Divergent thinking techniques aided the originality of creative thinking among account executives, however, it inhibited originality for creatives. On the other hand, priming with convergent techniques reduced originality, but increased appropriateness among the creatives. These findings suggest that divergent thinking techniques are not 'universally effective' (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009, p. 306) and that, if insight is contained in the creative brief, domain-specific knowledge priming may reduce originality. When insight is weak or absent as a strategy element, the creative team may have greater latitude for creative ideation; this may induce creative risk-taking, which has been linked to higher levels of creativity (El-Murad & West, 2003). When insight is highly descriptive and offers little room for originality, creatives may lack the passion required to excite originality. Hence, the trade-offs between appropriateness and originality observed by Kilgour and Koslow (2009) at the individual creative level, may well be replicated at the planning level.

Methodology

This research is informed by grounded theory, as the purpose of the research is to identify practitioner-based constructs and theories. Grounded theory is congruent with the strategy-as-practice perspective to develop an inductive and holistic understanding of the praxis of the strategy process by the practitioner. The grounded theory approach is designed to advance theoretical understanding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Goulding, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1990) and is guided by practitioner accounts of the strategy planning process, rather than theoretical testing. Glaser and Strauss (1967) proposed grounded theory as a practical method to conduct research that focuses on the interpretive process by analysing 'the actual production of meanings and concepts used by social actors in real settings' (Gephart, 2004, p. 457). It is based on an interpretive paradigm where meaning arises from social interaction. This meaning is subject to an inquiry that involves modification through an ongoing interpretive process.

Directed by empirical data, the researcher first aims to identify the emerging patterns presented in the data. In grounded theory, data collection and analysis occur simultaneously in order to make use of constant comparisons and, in this respect, the analysis directs future interviews and observations. Every concept discovered in the research process is first considered provisional. Each concept earns its way into the theory by its repeated presence or by its silent absence in the interviews and observations (Charmaz, 2006). The requirement that a concept's relevance to the evolving theory be demonstrated is one way in which grounded theory guards itself against researcher bias. Grounding concepts in the reality of data 'gives this method theory-observation congruence or compatibility' (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, p. 7). The research process itself guides the researcher towards an examination of all of the possible avenues of understanding (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This facilitates an ongoing process of inquiry that continues until the researcher reaches a level of knowledge 'saturation' (where further inquiry adds nothing further to an understanding of the phenomenon). The constructs that emerge from the data then guide the researcher to the literature that is relevant to the phenomenon in order to assist with the interpretation of patterns. Nevertheless, interpretive evidence from the theoretical constructs act only to support the empirical evidence of the phenomenon, rather than confirming a known or assumed relationship (Glaser, 1992). This iterative analysis between the empirical evidence and the theoretical constructs continues until the researcher is confident that there is sufficient evidence in support of the proposed theoretical framework.

Data Collection

The study was informed by a theoretical sample (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), consisting of twenty account planners. The sample population size exceeded the number recommended for grounded theory studies by Creswell (1998) and Kvale (1996). The respondents were purposefully selected from leading Sydney-based multinational advertising agencies, at the senior account planner- and planning director-levels. Semi-structured interviews (Annex 1) conducted by one interviewer, as one-on-one dialogue, formed the basis of the data collection. The duration of the interviews ranged between sixty and ninety minutes. After explaining the purpose of the interview, the questions were divided into three parts. First, the interview focused on establishing the respondent's understanding of the term 'brand strategy' in order to provide context and clarity to the area of research. The interview then required the respondent to provide one example in each of the four quadrants (see Figure 1) where strategy had led to high and low appropriateness and high and low originality. Each respondent thus provided four campaign examples across the matrix, providing 80 campaign examples across the entire study. The purpose of these questions was to identify the elements in message strategy that advanced or hindered creative execution. The case examples provided by the respondents later served as a framework to identify the elements of message strategy content, the process of message strategy development and the attributes of quality insights. The interviews were transcribed verbatim from the audio interviews and pseudonyms were assigned to respondents to provide anonymity.

		Appropriateness (strategy brief)	
		High	Low
Originality (creative execution)	High	20 Respondents 1 Campaign example	20 Respondents 1 Campaign example
	Low	20 Respondents 1 Campaign example	20 Respondents 1 Campaign example

Figure 1: Level of Creative Originality and Strategic Appropriateness

The study also reviewed the seven awarded case study papers, prepared by account planners for submission into the 2013 Cannes Lion Effectiveness awards (WARC, 2014). These papers outlined the advertising objectives, detailed the thinking process in strategy development and provided a comprehensive account of advertising effectiveness against measures of success. This additional data source provided further evidence to aid with the converging analysis of the account-planning phenomenon.

Data Analysis

The theory was developed through the processes of 'coding', 'memo', 'sorting' and 'theoretical writing'. Data analysis commenced using 'open coding' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), which involved undertaking a systematic review of the interview transcripts and award papers in NVivo, as well as a preliminary process of 'breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualising and categorising data' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61). The focus was then placed on identifying the meaning contained in words, sentences and paragraphs, breaking the data down into distinct units of meaning. It also involved ordering of process by evaluating the causes, contexts, consequences and conditions relating to specific incidents. Themes were constructed by identifying narrative repetitions (Bogdan & Taylor, 1975), metaphors and analogies, similarities and differences, as well as missing data. This resulted in the classification of clusters of data as 'belonging to, representing or being an example of [the] more general [advertising message strategy] phenomenon' (Spiggle, 1994, p. 493). The aim of this process was to uncover conceptual properties by comparing incidents to incidents and concepts to more incidents (Glaser, 1978). Several pertinent questions directed the development of open codes: What is the activity under study in the data? To what category does the incident relate? What does the incident indicate in terms of process? What is the basic social process involved? Using these questions, the researcher focused on (1) categories and their underlying properties and (2) the social process embodied in the incident. The concepts identified in the open coding process were captured in memos in order to describe what was happening in the data and to track the categories, properties, hypotheses and the evolving questions arising from the analysis.

At this point, axial coding was undertaken to link the categories based on interrelationships. Axial coding refers to a 'set of procedures whereby data are put back together in new ways after open coding, by making connections between categories' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 96). Assigning these concepts involves the process of abstraction onto a theoretical level (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). These abstract concepts encompassed a number of more concrete

instances found in the data, confirming their theoretical significance and, once these concepts were identified, their attributes were explored in order to exhaust their characteristics. The categories and concepts developed during the open coding process were analysed to confirm their relationship with (1) the phenomena under study, (2) the cause of the phenomena, (3) the attributes of the context, (4) the contributing conditions that influence the phenomena, (5) the action and interaction strategies used by the actors in relation to the phenomena and (6) the consequences of the strategies adopted by the actors. This process continued, using constant comparison until the data was saturated, at which point memo sorting was completed in order to arrive at the final theoretical categories and their associated properties.

The final step in the data analysis was the selective coding, which required 'selecting the core category, systematically relating it to other categories, and filling in categories that need further refinement and development' (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 116). The data was subsumed into a core category, using selective coding that was designed to pull together all the strands in order to offer an explanation of the behaviour under study. At this point, the theory was committed to writing, which led to new discovery and further category refinement.

Research Findings

Seven elements of message strategy content emerge from account planner strategy development that may make their way into the creative brief: challenge, community, purpose, connection, promise, support and tone. These elements of message strategy content are navigated and committed by the account planner to the creative brief through five elements of strategy praxis: accumulation, association, repetition, cultivation and distillation. The study also identifies the attributes of quality insight that may be adopted by account planners as a dominant mode of strategy as: originality, suitability, usability and visionary attributes.

Elements of Advertising Message Strategy Practice

The data revealed that account planners engage with a rich and complex set of message strategy elements that are intrinsically linked. Account planners are reluctant to have their work reduced to a simplistic formula, as the extent to which each of these elements is called on and whether they make their way into the creative brief is influenced by the individual account planner's intuition and subjective judgements. The decisions regarding the inclusion of strategy elements in the creative brief are mediated by the particular challenge facing the brand and the differing normative creative brief formats in different advertising agencies.

The elements of the message strategy content are derived from an array of analytical and creative thinking processes. These thinking processes are cumulative, in that one builds on another to shape the desired strategic narrative of the brand: with each step, the account planner moves closer to developing a strategic idea that is both appropriate and original. In this manner, the planner moves the brand closer to a narrative that is more likely to connect with its desired customers.

The elements of message strategy encompass the following: the problem or opportunity facing the brand (challenge); the target audience and the inherent motivation that unites them as a homogenous group with whom advertising seeks to engage (community); the desired effect of the communication on the community, that is, to elicit conative action (purpose); the insight or convention that can be built on as the dominant mode of the strategy (connection); the attribute(s) or benefit the brand delivers to the community (promise); the attribute(s), benefit or personality of the brand that provides credibility to the promise (support); and the personality of the brand that shapes the voice of the communication (tone). These elements all play a collective role in shaping the strategic narrative of the brand (brand story). Table 1

provides a summary of the main category, subcategories and properties identified in the study, while Table 2 provides an illustration of the coding that was used.

Table 1: Main Category, Elements and Properties of Message Strategy Content

Main Category	Elements	Properties
Brand Story	Challenge	Opportunity Problem
	Community	Motivations
	Purpose	Effect Engagement Action
	Connection	Insight Convention
	Promise	Attribute(s) Benefit Insight
	Support	Attribute(s) Benefit Personality
	Tone	Personality

Table 2: Message Strategy Elements and their Interpretation and Coding

Elements of message strategy practice	Examples	Interpretation and coding
Challenge	'The starting point for developing [message] strategy is identifying the issue or the opportunity that opens the vision for brand growth'.	Directly identifies the 'issue' holding the brand back or 'opportunity' to strengthen customer/brand connection. Coding: Brand association with growth quest.
	'The first planning director I ever worked for was insistent that I started with defining the advertising contest in terms of the bond or barrier the advertising needed to address'.	Addresses a 'barrier' or 'bond' to advance competitive stance. Coding: Consumer association with growth quest.

Community	'[I]nstead of defining a segment by demographics that divide people, let's look for something that unites them'.	Directly identifies a homogenous group that shares common characteristics. Coding: Homogenous target
	'The target audience also identifies where you expect the anticipated sales growth to come from. That may be new users, current users or lapsed users'.	Prescribes the present customer engagement with the brand. Coding: Customer engagement characteristics.
Purpose	'[Message] strategy needs to be built within the parameters of what needs to be achieved'.	Directly identifies the objectives, containing properties of 'target audience'. Coding: Strategy as communication objective.
	The objectives of advertising need to be stated in terms of what we want them to do … consider, try, refer, increase consumption, switch, trade-up, inform, participate in conversation and so forth'.	Identifies desired audience/brand engagement, post-advertising exposure. Coding: Desired conative effect.
Connection	'You see … the power of insights is the way they manifest as a latent truth about people, culture, the category, the product or the brand'.	Directly identifies insight as a 'latent truth'. Coding: Insight as latent truth.
	'An alternate route to finding insight is conventions, which I often explore as part of the strategy process to unlock category, marketing, or consumer conventions that can be challenged'.	Challenges a 'category', 'marketing' or 'consumer convention' to reframe the status quo. Coding: Conventions as path to insight.
Promise	'The benefit is ultimately what's in it for the consumer … it is influential in creating brand preference and generating loyalty'.	Implies the benefit is a promise to consumers to stimulate 'brand preference' and 'loyalty'. Coding: Benefit as promise.
	'Whilst not their only means of construction, propositions link an insight to a brand benefit'.	Signals that there is more than one way to construct a proposition; however, propositions can be constructed through properties of 'insight' and 'benefit'. Coding: Connective nature of proposition.
Support	'The support for that being it's expressive, it's loud, it's passionate, it's youthful, it's vibrant, it's colourful, it's unburdened by the constraints and rules of the tradition of other sports'.	Directly identifies evidence for a promise. Coding: Attributes as evidence.
Tone	'[A]n expectation of how consumers expect a brand to behave is important because it guides the communication's tone of voice'.	Indicates that brands have expectant elements of behaviour that are reflected through a 'tone of voice'. Coding: Personality as constraint.

The following sections discuss each of these steps in further detail and outline the elements of the thinking process that planners move through as they formulate the elements of message strategy content. The final analysis presents the findings on the attributes that embody quality insights.

Brand Challenge

The challenge that brands set arise in response to the opposing forces of stability and change. During periods of stability, brands respond to opportunity and a brand narrative is constructed around the central narrative of the brand to further strengthen the inherent bond between the customer and the brand. This central narrative refers to the overarching brand story that positions the brand in the minds of consumers and serves to create continuity in the brand meaning. Respondents referred to these elements within the context of a 'brand story', using descriptors such as 'sensual pleasure', 'caring shared', 'magical moments', 'creative empowerment' and 'Italian authenticity' to frame the broad nature of a brand's central theme, from which new stories are then constructed to create a story within the story. These central narrative themes represent elements that frame message strategy development from a historical context for an existing brand or, alternatively, serve to establish a future-focused story for a new brand.

Nevertheless, periods of instability, caused by both internal and external forces, can leave a brand out of sync with its environment. Strategy shifts in response to these periods of misalignment, adopting new patterns of strategic thinking to regain stability. Brands respond to these gradual or rapid shifts by addressing the barriers that constrain human motivation. These barriers are expressed in terms of problems that pose an immediate or future risk to the brand's competitive position; the problems may not always be easily distinguishable and may require as a Senior Planner suggests: 'changing the problem from one that can't be solved to one that can'. The barriers act to inhibit brand adoption and call for the identification of what is 'holding customers back from engaging with your brand'. They can emanate from internal forces (for example, where a brand has moved its narrative away from its traditional target audience resulting in a falling market share), they can be the result of external factors (for example, where the overall category consumption for a product or service is experiencing decline) or can be caused by the combined impact of internal and external forces.

Community

The brand challenge defines the 'target audience' with whom the communication is designed to engage, answering the question, 'Whom are we talking to?' or 'With whom are we engaging in conversation or community participation?' In this way, the target audience is inherent in the very articulation of the problem or opportunity contained in the brand challenge; that is, the identification of the target audience emerges from the challenge that the brand is attempting to address:

> the problem itself gives rise to the target audience you are seeking to communicate with … because they represent the people or consumers you're trying to influence … either through reinforcing existing attitudes or behaviours towards the brand or category or encouraging a shift in their current attitudes or behaviours in relation to the brand or category. (Interview with senior planner)

While it may be classified demographically, the community is predominantly defined by the homogenous characteristics that unite them. Community involves the concept of market segmentation, providing the focus required to engage a specific target audience:

> [I]nstead of defining a segment by demographics that divide people, let's look for something that unites them. It might be their love of cats, you know it might be their desire for teenage sexual conquest. (Interview with senior planner)

> [I]t could be smokers themselves or it could be the loved ones of smokers you want to communicate with to be influencers in creating behaviour change. (Interview with senior planner)

The communication may be required to address two separate target audiences who hold inherently different behavioural motivations (for example, mothers who purchase cereal for their children to consume). Sometimes, this may require two distinctive message strategies to appeal to the different motivations; however, in such circumstances the account planner strives to identify a common theme that unites the distinct groups under a central theme:

> [T]he story was about helping boys grow into Iron Men. This mythological, culturally resonant concept of an idealised teenager … led to a story that said 'here's a food that helps boys along that path' that resonated with two groups … boys were motivated to grow into strong, fit idolised boys, which was also an image of their son mums wanted her boys to be. Both audiences would say the same thing in what the brand stood for, but what it meant to each of them, and the significance was somewhat different. (Interview with planning director)

In its practical application, account planners seek to provide context for the individual motivations that give members of a group a sense of belonging, relying on a descriptive, rich and creative account of the behaviours that underpin the motivation of the target as it relates to the business challenge. Specifically, it involves an exploration, frequently with the aid of research, of how the individual relates to the brand or category.

Purpose

Purpose defines the desired effect(s) of the communication, in the context of the current level of community engagement; that is, to elicit the action(s) required of the community. The purpose provides an explicit instruction to a creative team as to what the advertising needs to achieve as a measure of success and also serves to identify where the anticipated sales growth will likely be realised. Yet, measures of advertising purpose are noticeably absent in measures of numeric sales performance, reflecting the desire of account planners to be measured solely on the behaviours that are the result of the purpose of communication.

The desired effect represents what is specifically required of the communication, containing purpose-driven cues such as 'persuade', 'increase penetration', 'increase consumption', or 'invite conversation'. These statements of effect relate to the degree of existing community engagement with the brand, category or social marketing initiative. This degree of community engagement is expressed, for example, in terms such as 'new users', 'existing users', 'lapsed users', 'considerers' or 'brand advocates'. However, community engagement may also make its way into the creative brief as a descriptive term that captures the entire homogenous group (for example, 'teenage boys', which could refer to existing, lapsed and new users).

The interrelationship between the desired effect and the level of customer engagement provide important distinctions that shape message strategy purpose: '[A]dvertising that seeks to persuade customers to try a new product variant is very different from a social media campaign that may invite consumers to participate in conversation about their experiences with that new product variant'. As this senior account planner implies, the former is directed at persuading new users to trial the product, while the latter is inviting on-line participation in brand conversation from existing users.

Moreover, the purpose details the conative response expected from the community post-advertising execution exposure, representing the 'call to action' requested of the consumer. This may involve active statements, for example, 'think about', 'engage in', 'use more', 'return to', 'try', 'buy', or 'share'. The final statement of the purpose of a communication typically makes its way into the creative brief as a succinct, directed statement or list of purpose statements. For example:

> 'The advertising needed to persuade [*effect*] lapsed beer drinkers [*engagement*] to
> return to the brand [*action*]' (interview with planning director).

Connection

While the strategy process is analytical, it is also creative. The properties of the brand promise can be distinguished from the creative thinking processes used by account planners in strategic ideation. In the same way that the creative team adopts creative ideas for the development of creative execution (see Goldenberg, Mazursky, & Solomon, 1999), account planners adopt creative thinking to advance the originality of their strategic thinking. These techniques play an integral role in identifying the human motivation and challenging the conventional framework of thinking that may dominate corporate, brand, marketing or consumer conventions. They serve to unlock 'fresh' modes of thinking that create differentiation for the brand, relevance for the consumer and inspiration for the creative team.

One technique used to direct and focus thinking on the strategic articulation of the brand promise is insight. The respondents confirmed the role of insight in consummating an emotional bond between the consumer and the brand. The use of insight has gained prominence in response to the relative commodity nature of emotional benefit statements. The primary purpose of insight is to link the brand benefit to a truth or truths in pursuit of a creative strategic idea. Insights are not statements of fact, although facts can be connected to other thinking domains in order to give rise to insight. Rather, compelling insights are embodied in what account planners describe as human, cultural, category or brand truths. Insights are found where, as one senior account planner suggests 'the truth of a consumer's life meets the truth of the brand', creating or cementing a bond between them. Insights can result from a single element of brand truth or a single expression of insight may draw on several categories of truth. The following example demonstrates how domain knowledge pertaining to a brand truth is strategically related with a human truth in the formation of insight:

> We wanted to embrace our globalism … thinking beyond our borders … [that is] one clear truth about the Heineken brand [*brand truth*]. This led to a core new platform for Heineken … we made a connection back to the aspirations of our consumers. Nobody wants to feel like they're a provincial amateur [*human truth as final insight*]. (Heineken Case Study: Grand Prix, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014)

These insights lead to revelations that can be used to build connections between people and brands. When planners uncover some 'truth' about people, culture, the product or category in which the brand competes, these truths can be built on as the dominant mode of the strategy, to build a visionary new place for the brand. In this way, insights serve as a platform from

which to unlock more creative strategic ideas and they make their way into the creative brief as simple and succinct expressions of strategic thought. Consider, for example:

> Happiness is a shared experience. (Coca-Cola South Pacific. Winner, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014)

> Teenage boys are sexually aspirant, but socially insecure. (Interview with senior planner]

The account planner calls on various external and internal resources to identify insight. The insights may be conceived from multiple sources, including: (1) through brand specific quantitative, qualitative and observational research methods; (2) by borrowing insight from advertising execution in other product categories and markets; (3) by drawing on existing knowledge from actor-specific life experiences and other category domain knowledge; (4) by borrowing from other storytelling mediums, such as movies, books and speeches; (5) by linking product and category facts to different domains; and (6) by challenging corporate, marketing and consumer conventions that give rise to insight.

As suggested above, an alternate route to achieving insight is the challenging of corporate, marketing and consumer conventions. Challenging corporate conventions is related to challenging the assumptions around who the competition is and what category the brand is really competing in. For example, a senior planner suggests that youth football clubs are not just competing against rival clubs, 'your competition is as much the beach ... and that's [competing for target audience] share of time'. The challenging of marketing conventions require the questioning of decisions pertaining to the product, its price and distribution; for example a planning director demonstrates, 'if you're looking at a premium food category, you may choose to question the fact that premium foods are positioned around solitary indulgence. Questioning this may lead you to an insight around sharing'. Challenging consumer conventions involves challenging the nature of consumer decision-making, questioning the relationship between the purchaser and the consumer; the purchaser and the brand and the role that brands play in consumer's lives. Challenging conventions tend to be disruptive by nature because account planners focus on disrupting the status quo (see Dru, 1996), and they rest on the notion that history and habit often govern the way we manage brand messaging. Challenging these conventions inspires fresh insight that opens up new horizons for a brand.

Promise

The promise, frequently referred to as the 'proposition' by account planners, embodies the single most compelling message the creative work is to convey to the community. It therefore contains the central, single-minded idea that unites strategic thinking and creative execution ideation in the pursuit of appropriateness and originality. In this context, the construction of the promise represents a creative articulation of what will resolve the issue or opportunity that the communication is intended to address. Its significance as a part of the creative brief is that it succinctly captures a large part of the strategic thinking.

As the promise is bounded by purpose, there are no defined rules. The planners point out that a brand promise can evolve from a variety of areas, including, but not limited to, the problem itself: it may be inherent in the solution; 'it could evolve from a statement of fact'; 'from the understanding of the reasons why an attribute is important'; 'from the role the brand plays in our lives, its reason for being … the brand purpose … for example, "DHL undertakes to keep your promises"'; from a 'value, such as commitment, safety or environmental preservation that consumers hold in high regard'; or 'it may simply be evident from a benefit such as … built tough'. The notion that promise can come from a number of thinking domains is a recurring theme among the planners, as one planning director describes:

> There are ultimately a number of ways to arrive at a proposition. One of those is benefit and it may be a functional or emotional expression of that benefit. If I am exploring the role of a functional benefit I am interested in what the product actually does for the user and that may involve looking at whether I could possibly find a credible superiority claim to accompany it such as 'makes whites whiter' [reference to clothing] or it could be a problem that can be resolved by a functional benefit. Another way may be to heighten the experience of consumption … what's it going to feel like to consume something … or it could be an attitude important to the brand. Another area might be the territory that heightens the anticipation of consumption … It could be something that tells you about something inherent or intrinsic to the product, such as picked off north facing trees', or 'caught in the South Atlantic'. (Interview with planning director)

Factors that determine the convergent choice in the promise direction include the appropriateness with regard to addressing the problem or advancing the opportunity; the extent to which one strategic path, versus an alternative path, opens creative opportunity or the degree of category adoption of a particular strategic route that may encourage the selection of a different path in order to emphasise differentiation:

> [W]hen looking for a way to differentiate from the competition you may find, for example, that a category focuses heavily on emotional benefits, another on functional, others on attitude … you'll consider whether a different context to arrive at a strategic idea will help you break through the clutter. (Interview with senior planner)

Ultimately the promise, built on the singular properties of product attribute or benefit makes its way into the creative brief. The expression of promise incorporating one of these properties may be in the absence, or presence, of insight. These properties facilitate different routes to the development of a single-minded strategic idea and are central to the development of the execution by the creative team as it informs what consumers are likely to respond to. The following examples demonstrate the promise expressed in the context of a functional benefit, a symbolic benefit and an experiential benefit:

> Functional benefit: 'NRMA Insurance covers as standard the parts other insurers call extras'. (NRMA Insurance Case Study: Winner, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014)

> Symbolic benefit: 'Heineken is for men who know their way around'. (Heineken Case Study: Grand Prix, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014)

> Experiential benefit: '[Brand name] is the ultimate in intimate pleasure'. (Interview with planning director)

An avenue for revealing a brand promise may similarly arise from focusing on a feature of a product where the benefit is clearly evident, requiring no further explanation. An example of such an attribute is clear in the following:

> Attribute: 'authentically Italian'. (Interview with senior planner)

In the presence of insight, the strategic connection between insight and benefit gives rise to a promise, serving to strengthen brand differentiation by closely aligning the promise to human motivation. The following examples demonstrate how account planners identify the insight(s) and the benefit to which the insight relates to construct the final brand promise made to the consumer:

> Lynx was a campaign I worked on in the UK … based on a wonderful [human] insight that teenage boys are sexually aspirant, but socially insecure. The primary brand benefit was social confidence and this connection between benefit and insight led to a powerful strategic idea that we articulated as 'your best first move' [*promise*]. (Interview with senior planner)

> We needed Heineken to be a brand that men would want to be seen with, that would say something about them wherever they might be [*symbolic benefit*] … We wanted to embrace our globalism … thinking beyond our borders … [that is] one clear truth about the Heineken brand [*brand truth*]. This led to a core new platform for Heineken … we made a connection back to the aspirations of our consumers. Nobody wants to feel like they're a provincial amateur [*human truth*]. To hold a Heineken was to prove that you are a Man of the World. In other words – Heineken is for men who know their way around [*promise*]. (Heineken Case Study: Grand Prix, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014)

When insight is deployed to give rise to a promise, it becomes redundant in its own right, having served its purpose in adding value to the promise. As a senior planner argues, '[C]reative work has got to express the proposition rather than express the insight because if the proposition is valid it comes out of an insight'.

Support

The support acts to provide consumers with 'reasons to believe' the promise that the brand is making; that is, it serves to provide the proof, evidence or support of the promise made by the brand to the consumer. Support takes the form of either a benefit, an attribute or is inferred through the brand's personality. Account planners assign the required support to the promise based on a judgement that may involve 'laddering' attributes into a benefit statement or focusing on single or multiple elements of attribute. The following example, provided by a senior planner identifies how the promise made by an automotive brand was supported by a benefit; however, it could have equally been supported by multiple product attributes:

> [T]he central idea of the communication was to provide safety conscious drivers protection from life's unexpected events. The support for that promise was that [brand name] provided more standard safety features … but it could have equally been expressed as an array of product features, such as multiple airbags or dynamic braking or lane assist technology, adaptive lights and the like. (Interview with planning director)

Where the promise of the brand represents a symbolic benefit to the user, the support is frequently directed through the personality of the brand. The subsequent example provided by a senior planner emphasises the rationale for adopting the brands personality in support of the promise made by a fashion brand:

> I can't give you a good example I've worked on but I think FCUK is a great example … it was a UK fashion brand built on anti-fashion credentials … it reflects the attitude of the user who tends to be more irreverent to high class fashion, more individual in their choices, not condemned to fashion trends. And that's all stuff that is brought out through the personality of the brand… in that sense it's the very attitude of the brand that legitimises its positioning. (Interview with senior planner)

Tone

Advertising tone serves to depict the character or personality that describes the brand's behaviour and reflects the human characteristics of the brand (see Aaker, 1997). Characteristics of advertising tone are used for both functional and emotional appeals and serve to aid brand differentiation, as well as playing an important role in placing a binding constraint on the tone of creative execution to ensure its consistency with the target's sense of self. The following case example for Heineken indicates the role of tone as a binding constraint, designed to direct creative execution in a manner consistent with consumer expectations around how the brand should behave:

> We couldn't afford to invent some distant fiction with no relation to the lives of our audience, so we also set ourselves some tramlines through our brand voice: Witty:

We take our beer seriously, not ourselves; Worldly: At home all over the world; Open: Exuding a sense of broad horizons and good taste. (Heineken Case Study: Grand Prix, Creative Effectiveness, Lions, 2013; WARC, 2014).

Brand Story

Brand story was selected as the core category of the study because it is representative of the descriptor used to define strategic narrative. In the interviews, a resounding 85 per cent of the planners refer to their role, either explicitly or implicitly, within the context of storytelling. The brand story also represents the desired outcome from the strategy development process. It is the collective result of the conceptual categories and their properties through which the brand strategy takes shape and gains explanatory power. As the strategic process unfolds, layer by layer the ideas come together to seamlessly provide a strategic brand narrative. This narrative directs creative execution through its own succinct story, adopted in the creative brief, using those elements and formats assigned by account planner intuition which are just sufficient written to direct a single-minded story to consumers (see Table 3).

Table 3: Brand Strategy Narrative Relationship Example

Subcategories	Brand Story Narrative
Purpose:	'The advertising needs to persuade' [*effect*].
Community:	'Teenage boys' [*engagement*].
Connection:	'Who are sexually aspirant, but socially insecure'.
	'To embrace (BRAND)' [*purpose action*].
Promise:	'As their best first move'.

The Praxis of Message Strategy Development

Table 4: Elements of Strategy Praxis and their Interpretation and Coding

Elements of Strategy Praxis	Examples	Interpretation and Coding
Accumulation	'Each step in the strategy process builds upon the other in order to arrive at a cohesive story that delivers against what we set out to achieve'.	Directly associates the process as cumulative. Coding: Message strategy-as-process as cumulative steps.
Association	'Once we've got a very clear understanding of the group to whom we are addressing [behavioural target] with the communication, that almost naturally leads to a more effective insight'.	Directly associates the process as conjunctive. Coding: Message strategy as connective thinking.
Repetition	'When you are trying to creatively articulate the proposition, you'll almost certainly find yourself writing it several times to make sure the link between the insight and benefit is both clear and inspirational to the creative team'.	Directly identifies the process as iterative. Coding: Message strategy as iterative process.
Cultivation	'The way to do it is to diverge and go wide'.	Implies, describes or infers the process of divergent thinking. Coding: Message strategy as divergent thinking.
Distillation	'[T]hen converge on what is an optimal way to address the problem'.	Implies, describes or infers the process of convergent thinking. Coding: Message strategy as convergent thinking.

In the development of message strategy, the account planners move through a complex set of analytical and creative tasks. These elements of strategy praxis involve cumulative ideas that build on each other to shape the content of message strategy. As seen in Table 4, the progression is linear, progressing from one stage to another in a series of sequential steps (accumulation), made through an array of conjunctive thoughts that either relate to each other or form a connection between ideas (association). It may involve divergent exploration of ideas (cultivation) or convergent thinking to arrive at a single appropriate solution (distillation), which frequently involves iterative thinking to reach a desired goal (repetition).

The message strategy process employed by the account planner involves the 'accumulation' of message strategy elements that can be 'associated' to form the coherent strategic story. This interaction between the accumulation and the association of the message strategy elements underpins the way in which the strategic narrative takes a coherent shape to address the brand challenge:

> I don't want to call it a production line because that makes it mechanical, but I think there is a very linear relationship between the steps that we go through, problem definition, segmentation, insight generation, the proposition development and indeed each of those steps, of course it should be linear but they need to build and build upon one another. (Interview with planning director)

> When I am reviewing a brief I look for a clear connection between the collective thoughts [contained in] the brief, to ensure it reflects what we set out to achieve. (Interview with planning director)

Each sequential step in the thinking process causes the acceptance or rejection of a strategic pathway, resulting in the inclusion or exclusion of message strategy content. That is, each progressive step, irrespective of the message strategy elements involved or the order in which they are accumulated, has an inherent relationship to the previous step, all of which cumulatively add to the strategic meaning. In this way, each step in the strategy process moves the account planner towards a message strategy that encapsulates an appropriate, single-minded, creative and differentiated promise to consumers.

The processes of 'distillation' and 'cultivation' underpin the processes of 'accumulation' and 'association'. The account planner adopts convergent thinking techniques to distil the problem inherent in the brand challenge:

> [T]he way to do that [identify the problem definition] is to analyse the reasons that underpin the factors that are inhibiting brand growth and then converge on what is an optimal way to address the problem. (Interview with planning director)

The degree of convergent thinking is mediated by the complexity of the problem definition. This convergent thinking may involve re-organising information or completing a schema (Schilling, 2005). In re-organising the information, the planner will seek to view the problem in a new way in an attempt to redefine the purpose of the communication. This may also involve completing a schema to identify how the issue(s) fit the purpose of the challenge in a coherent structure. The process thus contrasts with opportunity-based tasks where convergent thinking is less complex, as planners tend to build on an existing brand narrative where the task is more clearly framed.

The cultivation of ideas can be pursued through the adoption of convergent or divergent thinking processes. Sometimes, the thinking processes result in original ideas that are non-divergent across the thinking pathway. Under these conditions, insights arise in response to

normal learning processes and are not dependant upon quantum leaps of inspiration. Investigations may lead the planner on a logical path that reveals a linear solution to a problem that can inform the promise that is made to consumers. On other occasions, the account planner may be required to use more divergent thinking to come to an insight that identifies the originality necessary to address the brand challenge. These divergent thinking processes involve quantum leaps of inspiration, distinguishing it from insight that may be revealed through normal modes of problem solving.

Where divergent thinking is required in the pursuit of originality, this takes place at the connection and promise stages of the strategy development process. To correctly align brand message strategy to human motivation, account planners engage widely with divergent creative thinking processes related to insight and conventions. These processes serve to cultivate original creative ideas pertaining to the promise and can be associated with what Schilling (2005) refers to as 'random recombination' or finding a 'problem analogue'. Account planners search to randomly recombine disparate ideas from singular or multiple knowledge domains, either proximal or distant from the product or brand, in order to yield fruitful insight. This may also involve challenging conventions to reframe the status quo in a way that allows new thinking and gives rise to insight. Account planners can also deploy divergent thinking by finding a 'problem analogue'; that is, identifying a problem or opportunity experienced and addressed by one brand and applying it to another.

Insight relies upon an exploration of ideas, which may involve fruitless discovery in one direction of effort, or even multiple attempts at identifying a breakthrough solution. The thinking processes in identifying a suitable insight, is a highly iterative process as account planners search for that serendipitous discovery, that ultimately presents itself with an immediate potency. Account planners frequently describe these divergent thinking processes in terms of identifying the 'human, cultural, category and brand truths' that may resonate with consumers to create brand preference. These truths may be used in isolation or may involve the accumulation of multiple 'truths' that can be associated to inform the overarching strategic idea.

Ultimately, these areas of idea cultivation are distilled into a single insight domain, mediated by the convergent appropriation of singular elements of attribute, functional, experiential or symbolic benefit. The outcome is a brand promise built through an association between the attribute or benefit and the insight. This process also frequently requires 'repetition' and

iterative re-working as ideas are included and excluded from consideration and new, more evocative, expressions of insight and brand promise are pursued:

> When you are trying to creatively articulate the proposition, you'll almost certainly find yourself writing it several times to make sure the link between the insight and benefit is both clear and inspirational to the creative team. (Interview with planning director)

Overall, the central idea contained in the brand promise is associated with the other elements of message strategy to ensure strategic appropriateness under a unified story. Specifically, this promise may be associated with elements of challenge, community, purpose, as well as elements of support and tone.

The Attributes and Properties of Quality Insight

Insight serves as an important element of the message strategy that may be called on by account planners to advance the strategic advertising message content. Insight acts to link the brand to human motivation (Steel, 1998) and posits that better insight generates more appropriate and original creative execution.

Quality insight is characterised by four primary attributes, which, in turn, contain fourteen key properties that provide context for the account planner, consumer, creative and brand perspectives (see Figure 2). An illustration of the coding adopted in developing the attributes of quality insight is contained in Table 5.
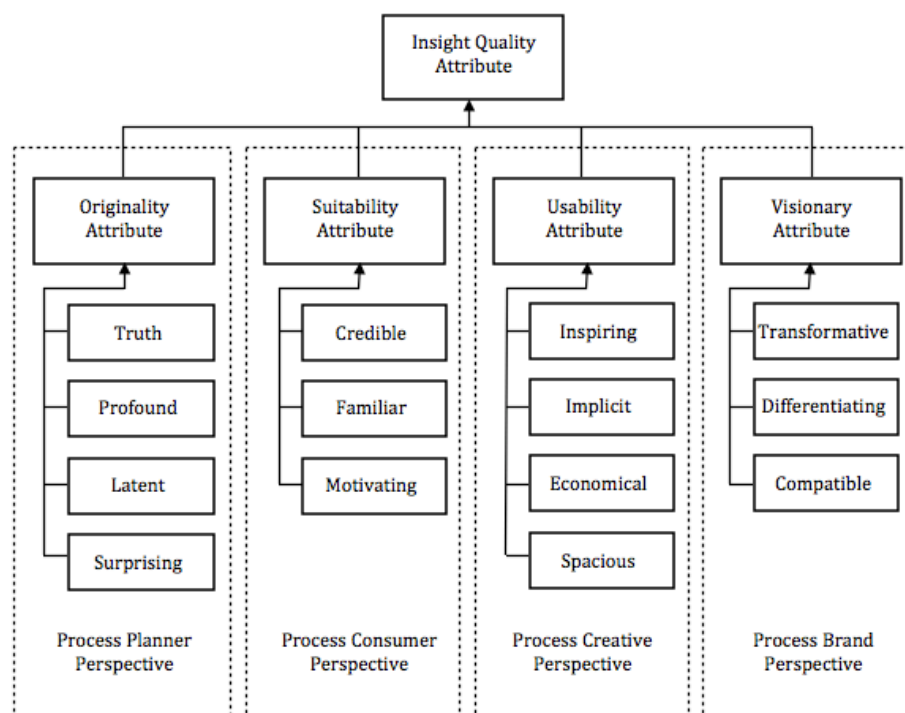
Figure 2: Quality Insight Attributes and Properties

Table 5: Attributes of Quality Insight and their Interpretation and Coding

Insight Quality Attribute	Examples	Interpretation and Coding
Originality	'It's the fact that they [insights] surround us, yet remains unnoticed'.	Directly suggests that insights are hidden from conscious thought. Coding: Insights as latent.
	'[W]hen they [insights] are brought to our attention … they offer an element of surprise'.	Directly suggest that insight offers an element of 'surprise'. Coding: Insights as surprising.
Suitability	'As long as it's [insight] genuine and as long as it's relevant and hits back to you know our deeper human instinct…'.	Directly suggests that insight needs to be 'genuine' and 'relevant'. Coding: Insight as credible.
Usability	'[T]he expression [of insight] needs to be just sufficiently expressed to capture the thought'.	Suggests that insights need to be captured succinctly. Coding: Insight as an economy of expression.
	'[I]nsight should provide the context for the storytelling, but not actually be the story'.	Implies that insight needs to contain gaps from which 'storytelling' can be built. Coding: Insight as spacious.
Visionary	'Insights have gained prominence because emotional benefits have become like commodities'.	Implies that insights strengthen the 'commodity' nature of benefits. Coding: Insights as differentiating.

Originality Attribute

The originality attribute of insight embodies the account planner's quest to uncover a truth that is profound, latent and surprising. The truth provides a deep understanding of human behaviour that ultimately serves to link the brand to consumer motivation. This truth is intensely profound and demonstrates the intellectual penetration of creative thinking. Insight may rely on connecting distant domains of knowledge, not directly related to the product category or brand, yet capable of being strategically related. In fact, frequent planner accounts explicitly or implicitly suggest that the most potent insight is found the more distant the knowledge domain is from the product category:

> I think that in the true sense of the word great insights come from places well removed from the product or category … they tend to be more powerful … Playstation once did a campaign where I suspect the insight was around the idea that

we all have a secret to hide, which in that instance they related to adult gaming. Now when you think of secrets you wouldn't naturally think of gaming, but Playstation made that connection. (Interview with senior planner)

However, other planner accounts indicate that proximal domain knowledge is sufficient, provided that insight relates to latent behaviour that is potentially existing, yet not presently evident or realised. The following example demonstrates how a significant fact revealed a latent consumer benefit that formed the basis of an insight that was leveraged to increase the consumption of packet chips:

[T]he other thing we look for is things that are latent behaviours. A good example [is] Walkers Chips in the UK that won the first effectiveness award for Cannes in 2012. It recognised that 12% of people who ate chips did so with a sandwich which recognised a latent consumer benefit, which I think was acknowledge by over 60% of people, that lunch would be enhanced with a bag of chips. (Interview with planning director)

In both the above examples, it is the latent nature of insight that gives rise to the 'Aha!' moment and the inherent nature of surprise. The discovery of insight therefore requires a transition from the known to the unknown, which can be built on as the dominant part of the message strategy. In the absence of surprise, insight is likely to be a mere factual account of human behaviour and therefore lacks the ability to cement the required emotional consumer connection:

It's [insight] a surprising truth and one that I believe leads to more inspiring strategy and creative work than merely a fact that often masquerades as an insight. (Interview with senior planner)

Suitability Attribute

Insights must also be congruent and therefore suitable for the target audience with respect to credibility, familiarity and human motivation. In order to be credible, insights are compelled to be believable, even in the absence of evidence:

[W]hen evaluating an insight it must be an interesting truth and yes it must be true, most importantly in order for consumers to be able to relate to it. (Interview with senior planner)

Like metaphors, analogies and similes, insight creates associations via audience familiarity (Bullmore, 2004). Quality insights, through their sense of immediacy, seek to evoke and inform on human behaviour through which personalised associations can be drawn. This familiarity that consumers assign to insight needs to be motivating in order to provide the required persuasive appeal, and as one senior planner describes, '[I]nsights are powerful because we make an immediate association with them … so if insights fail to provide that experience for you as a planner they will inevitably fail to provide that experience for the consumer'.

Usability Attribute

The usability attribute encompasses the properties of insights that inherently aid the creative team in the development of a creative execution. Insights are strongly influenced by the linguistic frame of language adopted by the account planner and represent a highly creative task that relies upon imagination to identify a potency of expression. As the inherent role of insight is to provide a preliminary idea from which the creative team can launch their work, insight must facilitate creative inspiration:

> [I]nsight should serve to inform and provide inspiration to the proposition and in that sense provide inspiration to the creative team. (Interview with senior planner)

Quality insights are framed implicitly and avoid an explicit articulation of the underpinning behaviour. Account planners consistently affirm the importance of focussing insight on the inherent nature of human behaviour, to avoid an explicit descriptive expression, which is more likely to provide a factual, rather than the required insightful account of the human behaviour under study:

> [W]hen you're articulating an insight you need to avoid being too descriptive and if it is descriptive it's likely you haven't found the insight so you need to delve deeper. (Interview with senior planner)

Insights are also characterised by an economy of expression that is succinct, creative and motivating, yet surprisingly familiar (Bullmore, 2004). This economy of expression serves as a discipline that compels the account planner to be focussed and clear on the idea that needs to resonate with consumers and creative:

> [T]he expression [of insight] needs to be just sufficiently expressed to capture the thought clearly.(Interview with planning director)

This expression may frequently be portrayed as a thought that is neither complete nor grammatically correct. Importantly this creative expression needs to provide a space from which the creatives can leap to an executional idea, requiring that the expression be liberating, not constraining:

> [I]nsight should provide the context for the storytelling, but not actually be the story. (Interview with planning director)

> Think of insight as a seed, not a tree. A seed needs room to grow. (Interview with planning Director)

Planners report that, when insight is highly descriptive and offers little room for originality, creatives may lack the passion required to excite originality:

> [I]t's quite ironic that, in many instances, often the strategic work doesn't live up to the strategy and I find a lot of examples of creative work which I see these days where you look at the ad and say 'oh, that's the creative brief or the insight, where is the creative work?' (Interview with senior planner)

Visionary Attribute

Quality insights also offer a visionary space for a brand that is transformative and differentiates it from the competition, yet is compatible with the desired brand promise. Insights manifest as transformative by opening a new space that either offers a fresh opportunity for narrative expression that is consistent with the brand's existing story narrative or assists in repositioning the brand in response to a changing competitive environment.

Insights provide differentiation to more generic emotional benefits by associating the benefit with a truth in order to construct a promise that can leverage human motivation. Planners describe the importance of insight as product categories are increasingly 'flooded' with the same emotional benefits:

> Insights have gained prominence because emotional benefits have become like commodities…. Insight adds a unique idea to that benefit (interview with senior planner)

Insight therefore serves to make the brand an imperfect substitute for another brand by providing the uniqueness required to establish competitive advantage. However, in order to be relevant, insight must be compatible with the benefit and related to the brand challenge.

Managerial Implications and Discussion

This study responds to calls for further research in marketing using qualitative analysis to expand theory (Hanson & Grimmer, 2007), strengthen research into the marketing practitioners' epistemic culture (Wierenga, 2011) and improve our understanding of the development of micro strategy work (Jarzabkowski & Spee, 2009). The key findings is that what differentiates good work from lesser work is the quality of the insight. Better insights can improve the quality of creative ideas developed, but only up to a point. After that, insight reduced the can reduce the quality of creative work.

Whilst the study assumes that account planners are the sole practitioner of message strategy development, in reality, rarely is a single actor solely responsible for the message strategy development process. Strategy is normally a shared social activity involving multiple actors (Whittington, 1996; Jarzabkowski, 2005), which, in the context of advertising communication, includes the creative team, account service and the client (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006; Nyilasy et al., 2013). However, before any broader social actor participation studies are undertaken, a focus on the account planner as a major contributor to message strategy development helps to advance our understanding of message strategy development work. Future research is required to examine the influence of other social actors on strategic message strategy development.

From a management perspective, this comprehensive study of the message strategy process provides a basis for the improvement of message strategy effectiveness. These findings provide insights for marketers who want to design strategic brand communications that lead to more appropriate and original creative executions. From a practical standpoint marketers may benefit from paying closer attention to the elements of message strategy that not only serve to provide consumer engagement but also engage creative inspiration. The outcome of message strategy development is the creative brief which represents an artefact written for creatives' to inspire return on imagination from their efforts. The creative brief has to provide sufficient room so creatives' have a runway from which they can take-off in order to produce original and appropriate execution. The creative brief also provides the binding constraint required to deliver strategic appropriateness to creative execution. The sharper the point of view on what the challenge is for the brand the stronger the work is likely to be. This challenge shapes the promise made to consumers by the brand in order for the purpose of the communication to be realised. The promise contains much of the strategic thinking around the

brand and embodies the most important message the communication is intended to convey to consumers to create brand preference. In the development of the brand promise, insight may serve as a creative technique to advance the originality of the strategic idea by connecting the brand benefit to a 'truth' that heightens brand differentiation. Whilst the appropriation of message strategy elements will be guided by intuition we echo comments that marketers must be cognisant of the fact that the creative brief is something that creatives' should write from, not something creatives' should write to (Steel 1998).

Creative Brief as Creative Process

This study analysed the elements of message strategy and the thinking processes employed by account planners in the development of the creative brief as a primary practice tool. We produced a descriptive framework of the message strategy development adopted by account planners so that researchers can better understand their individual role in message strategy construction, the interrelationships between message strategy elements and their role in shaping advertising execution. Specifically, this study identifies seven elements of message strategy content that may make their way into the creative brief: challenge, community, purpose, connection, promise, support and tone. Prior research has found various typologies and dichotomies of advertising message strategy that can be employed in advertising execution (Glover, Hartly, & Patti, 1989; Frazer, 1983; Laskey, Day, & Crask, 1989); these focus on facilitating a conceptual framework of the reliable coding of advertisements. We, however, provide a deeper understanding of how planners actually build message strategy from the challenge that faces the brand.

The use of these message strategy elements in the creative brief is based on the subjective judgement of the individual account planner. The creative brief serves to create strategic boundaries on creative execution in pursuit of appropriateness, yet equally serves to provide an original strategic idea from which an original creative execution can be developed. The creative brief also serves to provide creative inspiration, from which creative execution can evolve, involving both an analytical and a creative thinking process. While prior research suggests that strategy is a parallel process to creative execution (Nyilasy, Canniford, & Kreshel, 2013), this study suggests that message strategy provides the creative framework within which advertising execution is shaped and is, therefore, intrinsic to the overall creative development process.

This study identifies those thinking processes that account planners move through that cumulatively build a coherent and focused message strategy to meet the advertising challenge. These thinking processes inform our understanding of how account planners assign elements of message strategy to the creative brief, the thinking techniques employed to create strategic originality in order to provide creative inspiration as well as the thinking processes that frame appropriateness. Specifically, this study identifies five elements of strategy praxis that account planners navigate in committing to the message strategy contained in the creative brief: accumulation, association, repetition, cultivation and distillation.

Insights as a Dominant Form of Message Strategy

In the message strategy development process, account planners employ creative thinking to advance the originality of their work. A widely adopted creative thinking process involves the use of insight, which can ultimately make its way into the creative brief as a dominant mode of strategy. As they seek insight, account planners aim to create differentiation to the brand promise by connecting brand benefits to human motivation, which may reside in knowledge domains that reveal truths around people, a culture, a product or a category. These truths either operate in isolation or may be connected to provide a single empowering thought to advance message strategy. Account planners can also focus on the corporate, marketing or consumer conventions, challenging the assumptions from which insight flows.

This study outlines the role of insight in connecting the brand promise more closely to human motivation. We identify the attributes of quality insight that lead to more original and appropriate ideas in advancing the promise made by the brand to consumers. These findings on quality insight report on the attributes of insight that can serve to moderate the degree of affective response from the 'Aha!' moment. We posit that better quality insight may lead to more appropriate and original creative execution as a result of the inherent inspiration it provides to creative teams and the degree of consumer affective response reflected in the creative execution. Specifically, we identify four primary attributes that embody quality insight: originality, suitability, usability and visionary attributes.

## Mediators of Effective Message Strategy Development

A significant goal for marketers is to optimise return on imagination, which represents the marginal benefit to creative execution relative to the investment quality of a creative input(s). In the context of this study return on imagination represents the marginal contribution of

creatives' ideation effort relative to the quality of the information contained in the creative brief. Understanding why some elements of strategy lead to more original and appropriate creative execution is imperative in the evaluation of advertising effectiveness. In the presence of a strategically focused message strategy, a key question is: Why does creative execution frequently fail to live up to message strategy expectation? When message strategy does live up to expectation, the account planners report that it is typically in the presence of an original brand promise, correctly appropriated to the brand challenge and frequently in the presence of quality insight. Interestingly, however, account planners report that weak strategy can also lead to strong creative execution, where insight was weak or absent as a strategy element. We propose that, when insight is weak or absent as a strategy element, creative may have greater latitude for originality. This may induce creative risk-taking, which has been linked to higher levels of creativity (El-Murad & West, 2003).

Account planners report that message strategy can fail to advance effective creative execution under the following conditions. First, when the message strategy fails to address the correct problem definition in the brand challenge that is required to motivate brand preference. Second, when insight is too descriptive, containing little space for creative originality, although this can potentially be explained by the fact that the creative team lacks the passion required to excite originality. The trade-offs between appropriateness and originality, observed by Kilgour and Koslow (2009) at the individual creative level, may therefore be replicated at the strategy planning level. It may also relate to the level of the creatives' domain knowledge, resulting in their adoption of the primed knowledge embodied in the insight. Third, when the promise is based on a functional message strategy appeal that is non-differentiating for the brand.

To give these effects some structure, I refer to the framework of Kilgour and Koslow (2009) regarding originality and strategy in Figure 3. The kind of work account planners usually carry out would appear as a region on the lower-right because their thinking is highly strategic, but not as original as that of the creative team. Creatives' work typically belongs in the upper-left because their ideas are highly original, but less strategic. The goal is to produce advertisements in the upper-right, which are both original and strategic. Kilgour and Koslow (2009) thus demonstrate that there is an efficiency frontier of sorts, the curved line in Figure 3, where all points represent ideas that are equally creative, which is sometimes called an 'iso-creative' curve. Kilgour and Koslow's (2009) manipulations could, at best, move creatives' and account people along the curve, or behind the curve, but never in front of the curve.

The key role for insight is that its use may be one of the few ways to get into the upper-right region of Figure 3. If account planners are on the lower-right, the development of strong insight leads them to an original approach to understand the problem and automatically places them in the upper-right region of the figure. In these situations a common frustration for planners is that, creatives' often execute the brief literally: the creative knows they are still ending up with a highly creative advertisement, but they have achieved it through the quality of the message strategy contained in the creative brief alone and not through creative own efforts. This may be frustrating for the planner, but it is straightforward work for a creative. Thus the 'return on imagination' delivered by creatives' in the creative execution may be low, not as the result of a failure, but due to the planner's success in doing a portion of the creatives' work.
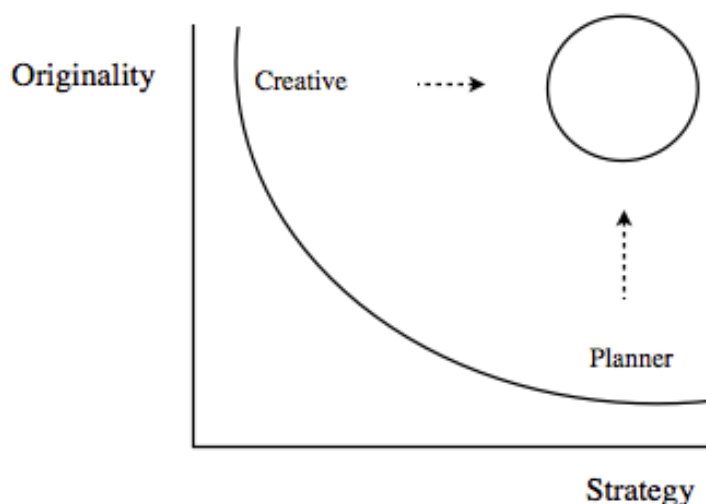

Figure 3: Originality/Strategy Trade-Off Framework (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009)

In other situations, when planners produce a weak insight, yet strategic on the mark, creatives' do a much better job of applying their conceptual skills to the work. In these situations, the brief is highly strategic, but not original, and provides the raw material required by creatives' to carry out highly original work (the result of which may well be in the upper-right region of Figure 3). This is the typical situation where the 'return on imagination' works effectively and the creative pay-off can be high. The difficulties experienced in reaching the upper-right region of Figure 3 appear to occur when the strategy is weak and therefore not able to feed the imaginations of the creatives'. In such situations, the 'return on imagination' from creatives' must necessarily be low and the creatives' themselves can also experience frustration.

To express the relationship between quality insight and return on imagination see figure 4. In the presence of weak insight the ability of creative to build from the strategic work is low. As quality of insight improves the ability of creative to build from those insights, that is to provide needed imagination, improves but only up to a certain point. At very high levels of quality of insight creative do not have to work as hard and their marginal contribution to the work decreases, yet it may still be exceptionally good advertising. At the top of the inverted curve, the quality of insight and the return on creative imagination is at its peak.
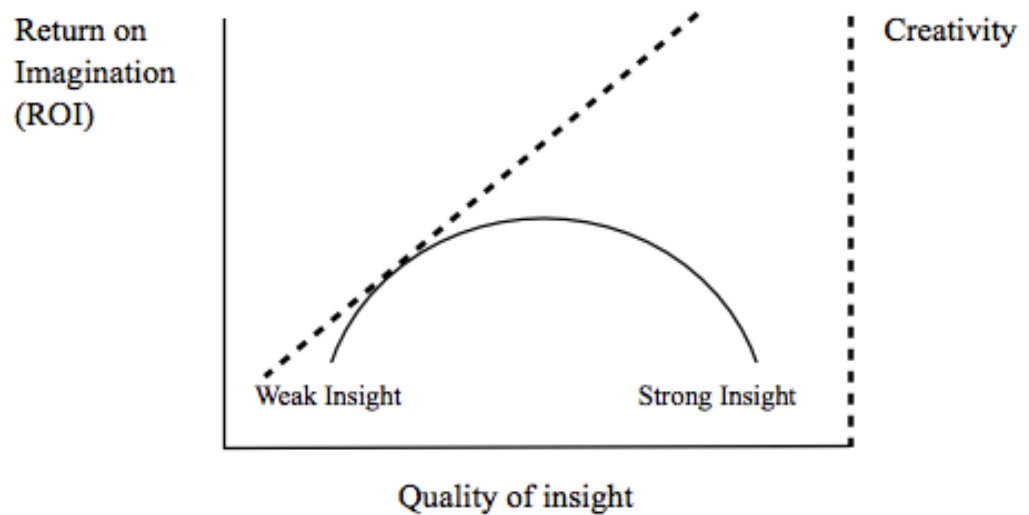
Figure 4: Quality Insight/Return on Imagination and Quality of Insight/ Creativity Relationship

The role of creative advertising is to produce original and strategic work. Scholars, such as Kilgour and Koslow (2009), have argued that such work cannot be achieved using creative thinking techniques alone, rather, it requires a team of professionals working on various aspects of the problem. The role of the planner is to provide the strategic convergent thinking that creatives' can maximise through their divergent thinking processes. This is the textbook, sequential approach to developing quality advertising because the strategy development process takes on a traditional linear approach. However, planners want to do more than just maximise the return on the creatives' execution; they want to create high-quality insights themselves that go directly to the 'sweet spot' of highly original and highly strategic advertising. This involves a strategy praxis that goes beyond mere accumulation to introduce association and repetition into the process. Further, planners also use a combination of cultivation and distillation to incorporate both divergent *and* convergent thinking. The goal is to develop strong insights that enliven the elements of the strategy development process and

drive it forward, a chance to be original, yet suitable to consumers and useable by creatives'. It is to build vision for the brand, a compatible narrative that transforms and differentiates, a creative journey that itself delivers imagination.

Annex 1: Interview Questions

The following interview guide was designed to probe account planner practitioner processes in the development of message strategy content, however served only as a semi-structured framework.

1. As an account planner what do you see as the role of 'brand strategy' in the context of advertising development?

2. Can you tell me about a campaign you have worked on where a strong strategy led to a highly original creative execution?

3. Can you tell me about a campaign you have worked on where a strong strategy led to a weak creative execution?

4. Can you tell me about a campaign you have worked on where a weak strategy led to a highly original creative execution?

5. Can you tell me about a campaign you have worked on where a weak strategy led to a weak creative execution?

6. Thinking about the campaigns you have just discussed can you describe the thinking processes you move through as you develop the advertising message strategy for a campaign?

7. Can you tell me what elements you commit to the creative brief and why?

8. Can you describe how you arrive at an insight as an account planner?

9. Can you tell me what you think makes an insight strong?

10. Can you tell me what makes an insight weak?

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