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**Managing for Creativity in the Age of Data-Driven Marketing Communication:  
An Empirical Study on the Distribution and Valuation of Creativity in Agencies.**

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Keywords: creativity research, integrated marketing communication, data-driven marketing, agency management, omni-channel creativity

Description: An empirical paper that investigates what defines, drives, and inspires creative collaboration in different types of marketing communication agencies in Europe.

**EXTENDED ABSTRACT**

Whereas the need for integrated marketing communication (IMC) has been given considerable attention by researchers in recent decades, the integration of creativity into IMC has not. A difference between how creativity is valued in advertising versus specialized digital marketing agencies within an IMC environment may lead to brand message diffusion. This empirical paper addresses this difference and investigates what defines, drives, and inspires creative collaboration in different types of agencies. Drawing on a social constructivist methodology, empirical data were generated from leaders of industry-acclaimed agencies from four European countries (Norway, Italy, France and the UK). A conceptual model is proposed as a practical operational tool, and the extended construct of creative IMC is explored.

## **Research Question**

This study asks the following two questions. First, what, if any, are the motivational differences between marketing communication agencies that identify with creative accomplishments and those that identify with measurable data-driven performance? Second, are there different types of creativity that need to be motivated and managed in different ways?

## **Method and Data**

Due to a lack of directly comparable research, this exploratory, qualitative, constructivist and hermeneutical study used theoretical sampling and primary data collection techniques. Constructivism, as it resides at the intersection between theory and practice, was at the core of this study. Because groups/individuals are changeable the paradigm displays a “relativist realism” or “relative ontology”.

The ontological position of social constructivism considers multiple social realities and rejects ideas of value-free contexts, which has permitted this study to address the historical and real-world contexts in which practitioners construct their lived experience. For this reason, the study combines constructivism with hermeneutics. The aim was to identify practitioner-based constructs and explore how they affect motivation, performance and collaboration across teams in real-world work environments.

## **Summary of findings**

Although the results of this exploratory research cannot be generalized to verify a definitive trend, they provide some clear findings that might be useful in developing operational creative integrated marketing communication (CIMC). The findings indicate that creativity is not valued or implemented equally throughout the elements of IMC programs, even within the same agency. There is likely to be creative development in various parts of creative advertising agencies, but without a unified system, the coherence of the results is questionable. There are few standards regarding IMC and even fewer for CIMC in the advertising industry in Europe. IMC and creative concept integration are practiced in a variety of ways using agency-specific methods in many types of agency configurations; therefore, making generalizations is difficult.

Although the advertising agencies of today value and perform data-driven marketing services, creative agency cultures and environments still seem built largely around the creative team performing radical creativity. The desire to inspire other forms of creativity is there, but there is a lack of awareness regarding why and how.

## **Key Contributions**

To research: While a considerable amount of research has been conducted on the effectiveness of using IMC processes (Batra and Keller 2016; Calder and Malthouse, 2005; Ots and Nyilasy 2015), minimal attention has been paid to the effect of creativity on IMC work processes, despite the identification of a positive correlation over a decade ago. Recent literature on digital marketing communication has called for contemporary studies and new constructs on the impact of creativity on digital advertising (Bruce, Murthi and Rao 2017; West, Koslow and Kilgour 2019). This request for new constructs in creativity research is what motivates our study. This explorative research provides a starting point for operationalizing CIMC with a conceptual model.

To agency management: Although marketing communication services provided by advertising agencies have diversified in recent decades, applied creativity has not, and it probably has not been adapted, prioritized, or implemented equally across services. Because many agencies are still primarily geared toward radical creativity performed by traditional creative teams, the less understood data-optimized incremental creativity may suffer.

Creative agencies need to show that they value all creative contributions, not just the type of radical creativity that wins awards. Incremental forms of creativity needed for data-driven digital marketing communication over time need to be facilitated and incentivized so that both the creative team and the digital specialist prioritizes them. This research explores and reveals the untapped potential.

A useful first step is for managers to assess their overall creative resources, perhaps using the conceptual model presented. Then strategies and tactics that improve overall creative distribution and valuation can be used to strengthen an agency's creative profile. Based on this perspective, strategies and tactics designed to improve overall creative distribution and valuation can be used to strengthen an agency's creative profile.

References are available upon request.