

# Think Outside the Ad: Can Advertising Creativity Benefit More Than the Advertiser?

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**This article adds to the literature on advertising creativity as well as the growing body of research on the unintended effects of advertising. In three experimental studies we “think outside the ad” and test whether there could be unintended, positive effects of advertising creativity. The results show advertising creativity to have a positive influence on consumers’ own creativity as well as their perceptions of media vehicle value. The effects are mediated by processing and perceived creativity. In discussing the results we encourage advertisers not only to take responsibility for avoiding unintended negative effects on consumers but also to explore and factor in potential positive effects that benefit consumers.**

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In this article, we apply a “think outside the box” approach to investigating the effects of advertising creativity. To think outside the ad and test whether advertising creativity could benefit both consumers and the media vehicles in which the ads are placed, we pose a question: Can advertising creativity benefit more than the advertiser? More specifically, we argue that creative advertising can make consumers who are exposed to the advertising more creative and increase the perceived value of the advertising’s media context.

Our investigation resonates with recent calls to place advertising in a wider context and recognize advertising’s unintentional effects on consumers (Eisend 2010; Fitzsimons, Chartrand, and Fitzsimons 2008; Maher et al. 2008). While previous

studies have focused mainly on the negative effects of advertising on, for example, consumer stereotypes, self-image, and health behaviors (e.g., Dhar and Baylis 2011; Eisend 2010; Maher et al. 2008), we hypothesize that advertising can have unintentional positive effects as well.

Our expectation that consumers who are exposed to creative advertising may become more creative builds on, and contributes to, two bodies of literature. First, it extends previous research showing advertising creativity to increase consumer processing of the ad (e.g., Baack, Wilson, and Till 2008; Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008) to include processing outside the ad as well. A heightened level of processing has been found to impact favorably on consumer creativity (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Dahl and Moreau 2002, 2007), meaning that an increase in processing provoked by a creative ad could potentially make the consumer a more creative problem solver. Second, we extend previous research on how advertising can affect consumers’ self-image (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992; Marshall et al. 2008; Mehta 1999) to include perceived own creativity. Perceived own creativity, in turn, has been found to have a significant effect on actual creativity, as it makes the individual more prone to take a creative perspective (e.g., Tierney and Farmer 2002, 2011).

Our investigation also resonates with repeated calls to investigate how advertising affects its media context (e.g., Elliott and Speck 1998; Ha and Litman 1997; Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak 2009). In line with recent findings that advertising (versus no advertising) can have a positive, rather than negative, influence on consumer enjoyment of the media context (Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak 2009; Rosengren and Dahlén 2013), we expect that advertising creativity may increase the perceived value of the media context. There are two reasons for this. First, we expect increased processing of creative advertising to spill over to processing of the editorial context, thereby enabling consumers to derive greater value from it. Second, and converse of the advertising context literature, which has found that the media context may prime perceptions of the inserted advertising (e.g., Dahlén 2005; De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002), we expect creative advertising to prime consumers’ perceptions so that they find the media context more creative (and thereby derive greater value from it).

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The authors gratefully acknowledge the generous financial support provided by the Torsten and Ragnar Söderberg Foundation and Jan Wallander’s and Tom Hedelius’s foundation that made this research possible.

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Our expectations are tested in three experimental studies. In a first study, we subject a panel of consumers who have been exposed to more creative versus less creative ads to a standard creativity test to find out whether advertising creativity could indeed make consumers more creative and whether such an effect would be mediated by increased processing and perceived own creativity. In a second study, we replicate these findings using different manipulations of ad creativity and different measures of processing and perceived own creativity. In the third study, we manipulate advertising creativity in a magazine and test whether it has a favorable influence on consumer-perceived value of the media context and whether increased processing and primed perceptions of the magazine's creativity mediate such an effect.

### EFFECTS OF ADVERTISING CREATIVITY

Thinking "inside the ad," advertising research has predominantly been occupied with understanding to what extent advertising affects how consumers think about products and themselves for the benefit of the advertiser. The same is true for research on the effects of advertising creativity (for a review, see Sasser and Koslow 2008). Inquiries have mainly focused on how creative ads (that is, ads that are both novel and relevant) can make consumers think more, and think more favorably, about the ad and its subject (e.g., Baack, Wilson, and Till 2008; Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008). Consequently, the interest in advertising creativity has revolved around finding more effective means to these ends, and the effects of advertising creativity have been assessed accordingly.

However, as advertising continues to increasingly permeate consumers' everyday lives, there have been recent calls to recognize advertising's potential, unintentional effects on consumers. In so doing, studies have investigated advertising's negative effects on consumers' views of themselves and others, for example, in terms of self-esteem and stereotypes (Eisend 2010; Maher et al. 2008). Applying this "outside the ad" perspective on advertising creativity, we investigate whether creative advertising executions can have unintentional, positive effects on consumers by enhancing their thinking and self-views not only related to the ads for the benefit of the advertiser but in ways that benefit the consumers themselves. We also investigate whether advertising creativity can benefit the media vehicle in which ads are included.

### THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING CREATIVITY ON CONSUMER CREATIVITY

Consumer processing of advertising has always been at the heart of advertising research. With some notable exceptions (e.g., Heath, Brandt, and Nairn 2006; Heath and Nairn 2005), the perennial notion is the more (positive) processing, the better for the advertiser. Consequently, the most common assessments of advertising effectiveness throughout the years have been standard measures such as attention, recall, and comprehension. Similarly, the more technologically sophisticated methods of recent years have targeted processing by measuring, for exam-

ple, brain activity (e.g., Rossiter and Silberstein 2001) and visual attention durations (e.g., Pieters, Wedel, and Batra 2010).

Not surprisingly, then, increased consumer processing is generally considered one of the primary benefits of advertising creativity. For example, studies have repeatedly found that more creative versus less creative ads produce greater recall and more thoughts (e.g., Baack, Wilson, and Till 2008; Phillips 1997; Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008). While these studies have stayed within the confines of the ad and measured only intended processing effects related to the advertising, we expect that advertising creativity could unintentionally evoke consumers' processing *per se*. Therefore, we hypothesize the following:

**H1:** Advertising creativity increases consumers' processing.

We also expect that advertising creativity may have unintended positive effects on consumers' perceptions of their own creativity, which would affect their ability to solve unrelated tasks. The expectation that consumers will perceive themselves as more creative when exposed to creative advertising is based on previous research findings showing (a) today's advertising-savvy consumers to be both able and inclined to assess the creative level of the advertising they are exposed to (Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn 2008) and (b) that consumers have been found to expect, and choose to attend to, advertising that reflects their character and needs (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992; Marshall et al. 2008; Mehta 1999). The latter findings suggest that consumers relate advertising to their perceptions of themselves, their self-concepts (Mehta 1999). The use of different appeals, language, and endorsers in advertising communicates messages about the type of person it targets. Consumers use these messages in defining their self-perceptions (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992; Marshall et al. 2008), meaning that they see advertising as indicative of who they are. Combining these two literatures, we expect advertising creativity to work in the same way as different appeals and thus affect consumers' perceptions of the type of person the ad targets. More specifically, we believe that advertising creativity will prime consumers' perceived own creativity according to a "if I take part of this creative ad, it must mean that I am a creative person" chain of thought.

Thinking outside the ad, we extend previous research, which suggests consumers reward with higher ratings the advertising that they perceive as treating them as smart individuals (e.g., Dahlén, Rosengren, Törn, and Öhman 2008), to hypothesize that advertising creativity may benefit consumers too by increasing their perceptions of their own creativity:

**H2:** Advertising creativity increases consumers' perceived own creativity.

We expect both the increased processing and the increased perceived own creativity that advertising creativity evokes to have a positive effect on consumers' actual creativity. First, studies on consumer creativity show that increasing the amount of processing individuals devote to a task (by way of, for example,

increased time) enhances their creative output in terms of the number and originality of their alternative task solutions (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Dahl and Moreau 2007; Moreau and Dahl 2005). We believe that a similar effect will occur as the increase in processing provoked by a creative ad makes consumers more likely to engage in more processing of a creative task. Extending the literature to creative advertising, we thus hypothesize that advertising creativity increases consumers' actual creativity in solving unrelated tasks by way of increasing their amount of processing (hypothesis 3a).

Second, we expect that consumers' actual creativity will increase as a result of the greater self-perceived creativity that creative advertising evokes. We base this expectation on research finding that increasing an individual's belief or conviction that he or she is creative enhances this person's actual creative performance by encouraging him or her to take more varied and original perspectives in solving tasks (e.g., Tierney and Farmer 2002, 2011). Therefore, we hypothesize that as advertising creativity increases consumers' perceived own creativity, it will also increase their actual creativity in solving unrelated tasks (hypothesis 3b):

**H3:** Advertising creativity increases consumers' actual creativity by way of (a) increased processing and (b) increased perceived own creativity.

Our theoretical framework and hypotheses 1 through 3 are summarized schematically in Figure 1.

## STUDY 1

Hypotheses 1 through 3 were tested in an experiment in which participants were exposed to a more creative or less creative ad, filled out a questionnaire, and then performed a creativity test.

## Stimulus Development

To test our hypotheses we employed the design from Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn's (2008) study on the effects of advertising creativity. More specifically, we developed two pairs of more creative versus less creative ads. For each pair, we used the same brand, the same key message, and (as far as possible) the same visual elements and design. This way we could avoid potential confounds and make sure the differences between conditions are only due to differences in the perceived creativity of the ads.

It should be noted that this approach focuses on global judgments of creativity rather than its subdimensions (see Sasser

and Koslow 2008; Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008). Our decision to use this method was based on the fact that (a) our interests are in outcomes rather than antecedents of creativity and (b) our theoretical reasoning and proposed mediations are with regards to creativity in general rather than its subdimensions. It should also be noted that the use of this type of global judgment of subjective creativity is recommended by Amabile (1996) and has also been used by, for example, Koslow, Sasser, and Riordan (2003) and Stone, Besser, and Lewis (2000).

We used real advertisements as a starting point for our stimuli, randomly picking two winners from the print category in the Swedish national creativity award (the Golden Egg) in a time period stretching from five to fifteen years earlier (to avoid potentially confounding effects from previous exposure). The two ads were for well-known brands and had been used in both outdoor and magazine settings.

The two ads were used in their original forms as stimuli for the "more creative" advertising condition. The creativity of each ad could be characterized using different creative (rhetorical) templates identified by Goldenberg, Mazursky, and Solomon (1999). The first ad (for a grocery retail brand) used analogy, and the second ad (for a brand of snacks) used dimensionality alteration. To lower the perceived creativity for the "less creative" advertising condition, we removed the creative templates in the message and communicated the same message in a more direct way (see the appendix for the actual ads used).

## Procedure

A total of 274 members of a nation-representative Internet panel participated in the study (134 females, mean age 39 years). The participants were asked to participate in a study of consumer reactions to advertising. They were first exposed to one of the stimulus ads (random assignment) and instructed to process it for as long as they preferred. Next, they were asked to answer a few questions about the advertisement and then given a creativity test. After completion of the creativity test, they were debriefed through a text explaining the purpose of the study. The procedure was in line with ethical guidelines posed by both the university and the research firm running the study.

## Measures

Processing (hypothesis 1) was operationalized in terms of ad processing. Participants were asked to answer the open-ended question: "Approximately how much time did you spend on the ad?" The response area was set as follows: "About \_\_\_\_

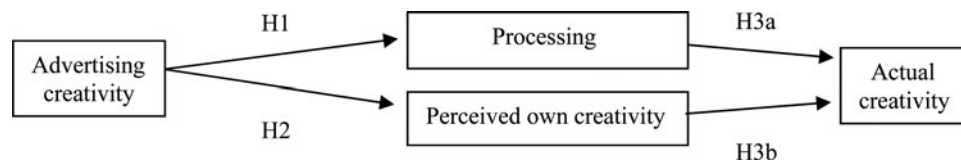


FIG. 1. Proposed theoretical model (Study 1 and Study 2).

seconds.” Although self-reports do not give accurate measures of actual processing time, previous studies suggest there should be no systematic differences in estimates between experimental conditions (e.g., Dahlén, Rosengren, Törn and Öhman 2008). Self-reports should thus be useful to test the hypothesized differences in processing between our creativity conditions.

To assess perceived own creativity (hypothesis 2), participants rated their agreement with the item “I feel creative” on a 7-point scale (1 = *Do not agree*, 7 = *Totally agree*).

Actual creativity (hypothesis 3) was assessed through the classic Alternative Uses Test (Wilson et al. 1954; Torrance 1966). The test gauges a person’s ability to conceive alternative uses for common objects. In our study, participants were asked to come up with as many uses they could think of for either a brick or a paper clip. Answers were given in an open space, and participants were allowed to spend as much time on the task as they wanted.

The uses identified by participants were then rated by two expert judges experienced in judging creative output, both of whom were marketing academics. The judges were blind to the experimental conditions of the study, and interrater reliability was .81. The test produced two dependent variables: The first was a count of the total number of conceived uses. The second was an index of rated creativity formed by averaging the rated flexibility (number of different categories of the generated uses), originality (how rare each use was), and elaboration (the detail of description of the uses), rated on a 7-point scale (1 = low, 7 = high; Cronbach’s alpha = .93).

As a manipulation check, we also included a measure of perceived advertising creativity. Participants were asked to rate the creativity of the advertisement stimulus, using the same one-item 7-point scale as, for example, Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn (2008) and Stone, Besser, and Lewis (2000), where 1 = *Not at all creative* and 7 = *Very creative*.

## STUDY 1 RESULTS

### Manipulation Test

First, we ran a *t*-test comparing the perceived advertising creativity of the more creative versus less creative advertisement stimuli. In line with our intended manipulation, the more creative

advertisements rated significantly higher than the less creative advertisements,  $M_{\text{more creative}} = 4.57$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 3.91$ ,  $t = 4.12$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Hypothesis Testing

Hypotheses 1 through 3 were tested by comparing the mean values between conditions (see Table 1). Supporting our first hypothesis that advertising creativity increases consumers’ processing, the more creative advertisements produced significantly longer processing times than the less creative advertisements did ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 11.53$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 10.26$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Participants also rated their perceived own creativity significantly higher in the more creative advertising condition compared to the less creative advertising condition ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 4.84$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.42$ ,  $p < .05$ ), supporting hypothesis 2.

To the test our third hypothesis, that advertising creativity increases consumers’ actual creativity, we first compared consumers’ actual creativity between the two advertising conditions. Both the number of alternative uses ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 4.22$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 3.22$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the rated creativity of the alternative uses ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 6.47$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 5.86$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly higher in the more creative condition.

Next, we tested whether participants’ actual creativity increased by way of (a) increased processing and (b) increased perceived own creativity by applying Hayes, Preacher, and Myers’ (2011) method for estimating multiple direct and indirect effects. First, we set our manipulated factor (more versus less creative advertising) as the independent variable *X* and allowed for direct and indirect, mediated effects on the dependent variable (*Y*) number of alternative uses. Next, we included ad processing (*M1*) and perceived own creativity (*M2*) as potential mediators. The model produced a significant indirect, mediated effect from our manipulation on the dependent variables. In support of hypothesis 3a, ad processing had a significant mediating effect ( $M1_{\text{number of uses}} = .09$ ,  $t = 3.11$ ) on the dependent variable. Similarly participants’ perceived own creativity produced a separate, indirect path ( $M2_{\text{number of uses}} = .22$ ,  $t = 2.23$ ) from our manipulation on the dependent variable, supporting hypothesis 3b.

TABLE 1  
Advertising Creativity’s Effect on Consumer Creativity, Study 1

Measure	More creative advertisements	Less creative advertisements	<i>t</i> value
Processing (time in seconds)	11.53	10.26	2.01
Perceived own creativity	4.84	4.42	1.73
Actual creativity			
Number of alternative uses (count)	4.22	3.22	3.32
Rated creativity of alternative uses (index)	6.46	5.86	1.99

The procedure was then repeated with rated creativity of uses as dependent variable ( $Y$ ). Again, ad processing had a significant mediating effect ( $M1_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = .05, t = 3.59$ ). A mediation was also found for participants' perceived own creativity ( $M2_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = .17, t = 2.39$ ). Thus hypotheses 3a and 3b are supported for both number and rated creativity of uses.

## Discussion

Taken together, the findings from Study 1 suggest that advertising creativity can produce unintended, positive effects that benefit more than the advertiser. Supporting our first two hypotheses, the more creative advertisements increased participants' processing as well as their perceived own creativity. Our analysis also showed that, as a consequence of both these effects, participants performed better in a subsequent creativity test, suggesting that they did indeed become more creative themselves by taking part of more creative versus less creative advertising.

The findings of Study 1 have, however, several limitations related to both the measurements and the stimulus materials used. First, when measuring processing we relied on self-reported assessments of ad processing. A stronger test of our hypothesis would require an assessment of actual processing time. What is more, we should also take processing of the actual creative task into account as this would allow us to test our theoretical reasoning more carefully (see Burroughs and Mick 2004). Second, using a multi-item measure of perceived own creativity would increase reliability of this measure and thus add credibility to our findings. Third, as Study 1 used only two pairs of ads, the results are highly sensitive to idiosyncratic differences due to the brands, categories, and manipulations of ad creativity used. Additional tests using a different set of brands and creativity manipulations would thus be needed.

## STUDY 2

Study 2 was conducted to replicate the findings of Study 1 using more reliable measures of processing and perceived own creativity. It also aimed to rule out the idiosyncratic effects of the manipulations used in Study 1. As in Study 1, hypotheses 1 through 3 were tested in an experiment in which participants were exposed to a more creative or less creative ad, filled out a questionnaire, and then took a creativity test.

### Stimulus Development

As in Study 1 we developed pairs of more creative or less creative advertising following Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn's (2008) approach. Each pair communicated the same brand and the same key message. As far as possible they also included the same visual elements and design to avoid any potential confounds.

In this study we used mock ads to avoid the effects of previous exposure. We first developed 10 pairs of more creative or less creative advertising for brands in 10 different categories. Two expert judges (advertising professionals) then selected four

of the pairs that they deemed to be the most representative of more creative or less creative ads. The selected ad pairs were for brands in the following categories: coffee, furniture, contraceptives, and pain killers. Creativity was varied in terms of (a) picture (more or less creatively associated to same text), (b) text (more or less creatively associated to same picture), (c) picture only (no text included), and (d) text only (no picture included). To avoid idiosyncratic effects the advertiser was masked in all ads.

### Procedure

A total of 420 members of a nation-representative Internet panel participated in the study (207 females, mean age = 41.4 years). To avoid overlap with participants in Study 1 the panel was provided by a different research firm. The overall procedure was the same as in Study 1, and allocation to the different advertisements was random.

### Measures

Processing (hypothesis 1) was measured by recording the actual time (in seconds) spent by participants in (a) viewing the ad and (b) coming up with alternative uses.

To assess perceived own creativity (hypothesis 2), we used the following four items: "I feel creative"; "My creativity level is high"; "I can be creative"; and "I see myself as creative." Answers were given on a 7-point scale (1 = *Do not agree*, 7 = *Totally agree*) and averaged to form an index ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

As in Study 1, actual creativity (hypothesis 3) was assessed through the Alternative Uses Test. This time participants were asked to come up with as many uses they could think of for either stools or hangers. Again, two expert judges blind to the experimental conditions were used to rate the uses identified by the participants (interrater reliability = .90). As a manipulation check, we included three measures of perceived advertising creativity. Participants were asked to rate their agreement (1 = *Do not agree*, 7 = *Totally agree*) with the statement "The ad is creative."

## STUDY 2 RESULTS

### Manipulation Test

First, we ran a  $t$ -test comparing the perceived advertising creativity of the more creative versus less creative advertisement stimuli. In line with our intended manipulation, the more creative advertisements rated significantly higher than the less creative advertisements,  $M_{\text{more creative}} = 5.72$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.07$  ( $t = 6.83, p < .01$ ).

### Hypothesis Testing

Testing hypotheses 1 through 3, we compared the mean values between conditions (Table 2). Supporting our first hypothesis that advertising creativity increases consumers' processing, the more creative advertisements produced significantly longer processing times than the less creative

TABLE 2  
Advertising Creativity's Effect on Consumer Creativity, Study 2

Measure	More creative advertisements	Less creative advertisements	<i>t</i> value
Ad processing (time in seconds)	13.85	10.18	2.31
Task processing (time in seconds)	130.03	110.85	1.67
Perceived own creativity	6.58	6.17	1.97
Actual creativity			
Number of alternative uses (count)	5.75	4.05	2.97
Rated creativity of alternative uses (index)	5.77	4.81	3.38

advertisements ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 13.85$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 10.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ). The same was also true for processing the creative task ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 130.03$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 110.85$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Similarly, participants rated their perceived own creativity significantly higher in the more creative advertising condition compared to the less creative advertising condition ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 6.58$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 6.17$ ,  $p < .05$ ), supporting hypothesis 2.

To the test our third hypothesis, that advertising creativity increases consumers' actual creativity, we first compared consumers' actual creativity between the two advertising conditions. Both the number of alternative uses ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 5.75$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.05$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the rated creativity of the alternative uses ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 5.77$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ) were significantly higher in the more creative condition.

We then tested whether participants' actual creativity increased by way of (a) increased processing ( $M1a$  = ad processing, which leads to  $M1b$  = task processing) and (b) increased perceived own creativity ( $M2$ ) by applying Hayes, Preacher, and Myers's (2011) method for estimating multiple direct and indirect effects. One model was created for each dependent variable (number of uses and rated creativity of use, respectively). Both models produced significant indirect, mediated effects from our manipulation on the dependent variables.

In support of hypothesis 3a, ad-evoked processing had a significant mediating effect ( $M1a = .17$ ,  $t = 3.15$ ) on participants' processing of the creativity test, which produced effects ( $M1b_{\text{number of uses}} = .02$ ,  $t_{\text{number of uses}} = 1.98$  and  $M1b_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = .02$ ,  $t_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = 3.06$ , respectively) on the dependents. Similarly supporting hypothesis 3b, participants' perceived own creativity produced a separate, indirect path from our manipulation on the dependent variables ( $M2_{\text{number of uses}} = .20$ ,  $t_{\text{number of uses}} = 1.99$  and  $M2_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = .28$ ,  $t_{\text{rated creativity of uses}} = 2.23$ , respectively).

## Discussion

Study 2 replicates the findings of Study 1, thereby providing additional support for hypotheses 1 through 3. Most notably, it

does so using different measures of processing and perceived own creativity. Mediation analysis also indicates that the ad processing stimulates processing in the creative task, thereby providing additional evidence for our proposed logic.

So far, then, Study 1 and Study 2 show that the benefits of advertising creativity extend beyond the effects of the advertiser documented in previous research (see Sasser and Koslow 2008). Next, we hypothesize that advertising creativity can also have unintended positive effects on consumers' derived value of media vehicles in which the advertising is featured and potentially benefits both the consumers and the media partners.

## THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING CREATIVITY ON THE MEDIA CONTEXT

Over the years, there have been repeated calls to widen the scope of advertising research to include advertising's effects on the media context in which it is inserted (e.g., Elliott and Speck 1998; Ha and Litman 1997; Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak 2009). With the recent exceptions of Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak's (2009) study of the positive effects of advertising interruption and Rosengren and Dahlén's (2013) study of the effects of advertising content on magazine evaluations, research answering these calls has focused mainly on the negative effects advertising has on consumers' consumption of the media context by way of clutter and interruption (e.g., Elliot and Speck 1998) and its potentially damaging consequences to media owners (e.g., Ha and Litman 1997). All studies have in common that they typically lump all ads together and focus on the presence of advertising per se. This means that they disregard the content of ads and their effects (for an exception, see Rosengren and Dahlén 2013). Building on the notion that all advertising is not equal, we believe that, thinking outside the ad, one could expect advertising creativity to have unintended positive effects on consumers' consumption of the media context (and, as a consequence, potentially on the media owners).

First, we expect advertising creativity to increase consumers' processing of the media context. Extending Nelson, Meyvis, and Galak's (2009) finding that advertising interruptions allow consumers to rest and thereby reinvigorate consumers' enjoyment of the editorial context, we argue that advertising creativity may

promote ads from relief to potential catalysts that increase consumers' processing and stimulate their processing of the media context. In other words, advertising creativity not only intentionally increases consumers' processing of the ad itself but may also unintentionally increase their processing of its media context. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H4:** Advertising creativity increases media context processing.

We also expect that advertising creativity may unintentionally prime consumers' perceptions of the media context so that they perceive it to be more creative, too. We base this expectation on the advertising context literature, which finds that the editorial context primes consumers' perceptions of the inserted advertising (e.g., Dahlén 2005; De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002). According to this literature, ads are not perceived in isolation but according to their context, meaning that consumers view advertising in light of the associations that its context evokes. Staying with our notion that advertising may have unintentional effects beyond the ad itself, converse to the findings from the advertising context literature we expect neither ads nor their editorial context are perceived in isolation and consumers may view the editorial context in light of the associations that the ads evoke (see Rosengren and Dahlén 2013).

Given that consumers are able and inclined to assess the creative level of advertising (Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn, 2008), we expect advertising creativity will evoke consumers' associations to creativity and, in light of these associations, they will perceive the media context as more creative. Therefore, we hypothesize:

**H5:** Advertising creativity increases perceived media context creativity.

We expect both the increased processing and the increase in perceived creativity that advertising creativity evokes to favorably affect consumers' perceived value of the media context. There are three main arguments why more processing would have a positive influence on perceived value of the media context. First, advertising studies suggest consumers enjoy processing of creative advertising content in its own right (e.g., Dahlén, Rosengren, Törn and Öhman 2008). Thus the processing of creative advertising should in itself add value to the media experience. Second, one would very simply expect more processing to enable consumers to extract a greater fraction of the actual value that the editorial offers. Third, by way of self-monitoring, one would expect consumers who process the editorial more ex-

tensively to conclude that they must find it more valuable (see Bodey and Grace 2006); thus we pose hypothesis 6a.

Extending the findings from advertising creativity research that consumers enjoy (e.g., Dahlén 2005) and perceive creativity as a quality (e.g., Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn 2008) in its own right, we expect the increased perceived creativity of the media context evoked by advertising creativity to increase the perceived value of the media context as well (hypothesis 6b):

**H6:** Advertising creativity increases perceived value of the media context by way of (a) increased processing and (b) increased perceived media context creativity.

Our theoretical framework and hypotheses 4 through 6 are summarized schematically in Figure 2.

### STUDY 3

Hypotheses 4 through 6 were tested in an experiment in which participants were exposed to a lifestyle magazine dummy featuring more creative versus less creative advertising. After reading the magazine dummy, they filled out a questionnaire.

#### Stimulus Development

First, we created a glossy, full-color dummy for a mock lifestyle magazine, titled *Intense*. *Intense* was created to cater to young men and women (ages 20 and up) by giving inspiration on a broad range of topics (e.g., career planning, homemaking, travel, self-improvement). It contained 16 pages of editorial material as well as four full-page ads, the focus of our manipulations. Both editorial content and advertisements were developed to fit a target audience consisting of young adults about to start their professional careers.

To test hypotheses 4 through 6, we manipulated the advertisements in the dummy to be more creative versus less creative. To ensure that ads fit with the glossy feel of the magazine, we used real ads as stimuli. All ads were taken from nondomestic, international magazines to avoid potentially confounding effects from previous exposure. Great care was taken to ensure that the selected ads were relevant for the theme and target group of the magazine. The use of real ads meant that we could not form pairs of ads with the same brand as in Studies 1 and 2. Instead, the ads were matched by category. More specifically, the ads were for an interior decoration brand, a food brand, a beauty care brand, and a travel agency. To avoid brand-specific effects and increase comparability between conditions, the advertiser was masked in all ads.

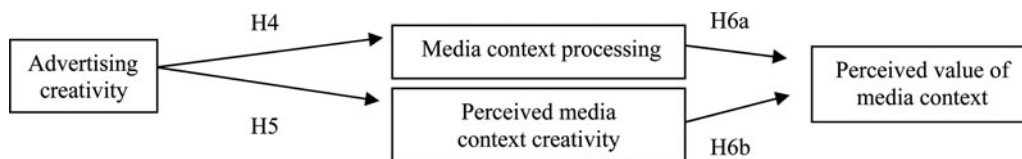


FIG. 2. Proposed theoretical model (Study 3).

Using the same scale as in Study 1, we pretested the perceived creativity of the selected ads. The more creative ads all rated significantly higher than the less creative ads ( $M_{\text{more creative}} > 5$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} < 3$ ,  $p < .01$ ,  $n = 27$ ).

### Procedure

In all, 121 adults participated in the study (79 female, mean age = 23 years). Participants were recruited by intercept in cafés and restaurants at a large business school campus. The choice of location allowed us to find participants who fit the target audience of the magazine both in terms of age and interests. Participants were informed that the magazine, targeted at both men and women, was soon to be launched in the region of study and that the study was conducted to test its market potential. They were instructed to look through the dummy for as long as they wanted and then were asked to answer some questions about the magazine. Assignment to the two conditions was random.

### Measures

Media context processing (hypothesis 4) was gauged using the same measure of processing time (in minutes) as in Study 1.

Perceived media context creativity (hypothesis 5) was measured by asking participants to rate the extent to which they found the magazine to be creative on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = *Completely disagree*, 7 = *Completely agree*).

Perceived value of the media context was operationalized in two ways. *Magazine value* was measured with three items: “valuable,” “worth reading,” and “useful,” on a 7-point scale taken from Dahlén, Granlund, and Grenros (2009). They formed an averaged index (Cronbach’s alpha = .86). In addition, we measured participants’ willingness to pay (WTP) for the magazine with an open-ended question: “What would you be willing to pay for this magazine?” The answers were given in the local currency. To facilitate interpretation, we have converted them into equivalent USD value.

In addition to the dependent variables, we measured congruence between the ads and the magazine to include as covariate in the analysis. Respondents rated the two items mismatch/match and poor fit/good fit on a 7-point semantic differential, to form an averaged index ( $r = .91$ ).

## STUDY 3 RESULTS

### Manipulation Check

First, we ran a  $t$ -test comparing participants’ ratings of the advertisements overall in the magazine, using the same measure as in Study 1. In line with our intended manipulation, the advertisements in the more creative advertising condition rated significantly higher than the advertisements in the less creative advertising condition,  $M_{\text{more creative}} = 5.24$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.16$ ,  $t = 8.27$ ,  $p < .01$ .

### Hypothesis Testing

Testing hypotheses 4 through 6, we first ran a MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) on all dependent variables simultaneously, with congruence as a covariate. Our manipulated factor (more creative versus less creative advertising) had significant effects on all dependents,  $F(4, 121) = 6.08$ , Wilks’ lambda = .90,  $p < .01$ . Next, we used planned contrasts to compare the mean values between conditions and test the hypotheses individually (Table 3).

Supporting our fourth hypothesis that advertising creativity increases media context processing, the more creative advertising condition produced significantly longer processing of the magazine than did the less creative advertising condition ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 6.43$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 5.80$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, participants rated the perceived creativity of the magazine significantly higher in the more creative advertising ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 4.83$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 3.92$ ,  $p < .01$ ), thus supporting hypothesis 5.

To the test our sixth hypothesis, that advertising creativity increases the perceived value of the media context, we first compared consumers’ actual creativity between the two advertising conditions. Participants’ ratings of the perceived value of the magazine ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 4.88$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 4.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and the price they were willing to pay ( $M_{\text{more creative}} = 7.0$  versus  $M_{\text{less creative}} = 6.0$ ,  $p < .05$ ) were both significantly higher in the more creative condition.

Next, we tested whether the perceived value of the media context increased by way of (a) increased processing and (b) increased perceived creativity by once again applying Hayes, Preacher, and Myers’s (2011) method for estimating multiple direct and indirect effects. First, we set our manipulated factor (more creative versus less creative advertising) as the indepen-

TABLE 3  
Advertising Creativity’s Effects on the Media Context, Study 3

Measure	More creative advertisements	Less creative advertisements	$p$ value
Processing (time in minutes)	6.43	5.80	<.01
Perceived creativity	4.83	3.92	<.01
Perceived value	4.88	4.25	<.01
Willingness to pay (WTP)	7.0	6.0	<.05



dent variable  $X$  and allowed for direct and indirect, mediated effects on the two dependent variables ( $Y$ ), rated perceived value of the magazine and participants' WTP (one model for each dependent variable). Next, we included processing ( $M1$ ) and perceived creativity ( $M2$ ) as potential mediators. Both models produced a significant indirect, mediated effect from our manipulation on the dependent variables. In support of hypothesis 6a, processing had a significant mediating effect ( $M1$ ) on the dependents ( $t_{\text{rated value}} = 3.06$ ,  $t_{\text{WTP}} = 2.20$ ). Similarly supporting hypothesis 6b, the perceived creativity of the magazine produced a separate, indirect path ( $M3$ ) from our manipulation on the dependent variables ( $t_{\text{rated value}} = 2.63$ ,  $t_{\text{WTP}} = 2.09$ ).

## Discussion

The results of Study 3 support hypothesis 4 through 6, suggesting that advertising creativity can have unintended, positive effects on the consumption of the media context in which the advertising is featured. More specifically, advertising creativity was found to increase participants' media context processing as well as perceived media context creativity. These two effects were found to simultaneously affect participants' perceived value of the media context favorably. The positive effects of advertising creativity on consumers thus seem to translate into positive effects on media vehicles. The implications of this finding are discussed next.

## GENERAL DISCUSSION

Taken together, our three studies find that creatively "thinking outside the box" in advertising is indeed beneficial. Our findings resonate with the numerous previous studies on advertising creativity that documented the positive effect on consumers that creative advertisements have (e.g., Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008). However, applying "think outside the box" not only to advertising but also to our research approach, and allowing our investigation to think outside the ad, we add to the existing knowledge by showing that advertising creativity may affect consumers and media vehicles in ways that are beneficial not only to the advertiser.

More specifically, our investigation suggests that, by way of increasing consumers' processing and priming their own creativity, advertising creativity benefits consumers by making them better at creatively solving unrelated tasks. But, as our third study finds, it can also allow them to derive greater value from the context in which they take part of the advertising. In enhancing the processing and perceived value of the media context, advertising creativity could thus benefit both consumers and media owners.

Theoretically, the current studies contribute by linking the literature on advertising creativity (e.g., Dahlén, Rosengren, and Törn 2008; Sasser and Koslow 2008) with research on consumer self-perceptions (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker 1992; Marshall et al. 2008) and consumer creativity (e.g., Burroughs and Mick 2004; Dahl and Moreau 2002). It also explores the findings from the advertising context literature (e.g., Dahlén 2005; De Pelsmacker,

Geuens, and Anckaert 2002) to show that, conversely, advertising creativity can have a positive impact on perceptions of the media context.

Our studies also respond to recent calls to recognize and investigate the potential unintended effects of advertising (e.g., Eisend 2010; Maher et al. 2008). But while recent efforts have explored the negative effects of advertising on consumers, we find that it may have unintended, positive effects as well. This may be an important first step to encourage advertisers not only to take responsibility for avoiding unintended negative effects on consumers but also to explore and factor in potential positive effects that benefit consumers.

## Implications for Advertisers

There are several reasons advertisers should take notice of our results. On a macro level, the increasing pervasiveness of advertising has been subject to intense debate in recent years (e.g., Ashgar 2010; Goodman 1999; Strasburger 2006). The discussion has hitherto focused on negative unintended effects of advertising. Targeting and communicating the positive effects of advertising creativity that benefit consumers could be an important way for advertisers to face this critique. Thinking outside the ad would also extend the argument for the positive effects of advertising, which has usually focused on its ability to do good in the intended communication of, for example, cause marketing (e.g., Youn and Kim 2008) and corporate social responsibility (e.g., Waller and Lanis 2009).

Targeting and communicating the positive effects of advertising creativity that benefit consumers should also be important on a micro level. With increasingly advertising-savvy consumers and technological advances (such as TiVo and ad-blocking software), advertising is becoming more and more dependent on consumers voluntarily exposing themselves to advertising (e.g., Dahlén and Edenius 2007). This means that advertisers need to offer something to consumers in order to earn their attention. Typically advertisers have faced this challenge by focusing on offering entertainment or information (e.g., Ducoffe 1995). Our findings, that consumers can become more creative and derive greater value from their media consumption, highlight that additional value can be offered to consumers in exchange for their attention.

Although it might be difficult to explain to consumers the value they will get out of creative advertising, media owners might be more open to our results. Potentially, advertisers could use the findings in negotiations with media owners. Advertising creativity can benefit media contexts by increasing consumers' processing of the context and favorably priming consumers' perceptions so that they derive greater value from it. This result reinforces Rosengren and Dahlén's (2013) findings that certain types of advertising can, indeed, make a media vehicle more valuable for consumers. In so doing, it challenges the view of advertising as a necessary evil for media. In this view consumers' derived value of the media consumption is traded off for advertising revenue (see Ha and Litman 1997). By focusing

on the content of the ads, one can actually find ways to increase the value of a media vehicle with advertising. Advertisers, consumers, and the media could all gain from widening the perspective of minimizing the necessary evil of advertising to promoting its potential mutual benefits. With the increase in media competition in recent years, advertising's potential to increase the perceived value of the editorial content should be most welcome by media owners and maybe even costly to neglect.

Taking all this into account, we suggest that advertising could, and should, target positive effects outside the ad as well. Advertisers should include them as additional measures of advertising effectiveness, as they would benefit advertisers both on a macro level by bettering advertising's reputation and standing in the public eye and on a micro level by adding to the value consumers derive from exposing themselves to advertising. Although this reasoning might seem idealistic it should be rather easy to implement, as advertising creativity has been found to be highly effective in terms of brand-related outcomes (e.g., Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008).

### Limitations and Further Research

In showing that advertising may have unintended, positive effects our current inquiry should be seen as a call to learn more about how advertising can benefit more than the advertiser. The findings are, however, limited by the scope and focus of our three studies. The present investigation utilized print ads, manipulated ad creativity, and measured short-term effects. Future research should replicate and extend the present findings, with a natural variation of creativity to other advertising formats and media, and test the longevity of the attained effects.

In the current study we argued, and found empirical support, for the proposed relationships. Still, some of these relationships are novel, and further research is needed to better understand the underlying mechanisms. This is especially true for our proposed effect of advertising creativity on perceived own creativity, which has not been documented before and warrants additional studies.

It should also be noted that there are several different ways to operationalize creativity in advertising research. Most of these approaches include measures of divergence/novelty and relevance. In our study we followed the approach used by Dahlén, Rosengren and Törn (2008). Although the focus of this approach is on global evaluations of ad creativity it relies on a manipulation of creativity that varies divergence/novelty while keeping relevance constant. Indeed, this approach removes some of the complexity of advertising creativity. In the future it would be important to test the robustness of our finding taking both relevance and novelty into account (see Smith, Chen, and Yang 2008). A similar concern could also be raised in terms of our assessment of actual creativity as the Unusual Uses Test focuses on divergent thinking.

In the future it would be important to investigate whether similar effects occur for creative advertising in other advertising formats and media. Print advertising is special as it is

reader paced; it would be interesting to see if similar effects would occur in media that is not, such as, for instance, TV or radio. Also, using a lifestyle magazine meant that our media context was geared toward entertainment. In the future it would be important to investigate whether similar results can be found in a more informative media context, such as that of newspapers.

In the light of these limitations, our investigation should be considered a first, small step to investigate potential positive advertising effects from a stakeholder perspective other than the advertiser's, and we hope it will contribute to expanding the body of literature on the subject.

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