

# The Fundamental Templates of Quality Ads

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## Abstract

Creative ideation is a highly complex process, which is difficult to formalize and control. Evidently, even in a complex thinking context certain patterns of creativity may emerge. Relying on such observed patterns may help in "organizing" the creative process by promoting routes that have been proven to lead to productive ideas and avoiding those that do not.

The present research suggests that successful advertisements share and are characterized by such abstract patterns termed *creativity templates*. The theoretical rationale for the emergence of such templates and the empirical studies that detect the key creativity templates underlying quality ads indicate that the templates are identifiable, objectively verifiable, and generalizable across multiple categories. Studies 1 and 2 were designed to identify and describe the templates. Six major creativity templates were derived by inference from a sample of 200 highly evaluated print ads drawn from award-winning ad contests such as The One Show (Study 1). Judges found that 89% of the ads could be explained by the six creativity templates. Following a formal description of the templates and their versions, a study comparing 200 award-winning and 200 nonwinning ads (Study 2) is reported. It was found that the two groups differed systematically in the number and distribution of creativity templates: 50% of the award-winning ads as opposed to only 2.5% of the nonwinning ads could be explained by the templates. Further validation of the template approach was obtained by manipulating presence or absence of templates in an experimental setting. In Study 3 groups of individuals were trained in template-based idea generation, an association technique, or not trained at all, prior to an ad-ideation task. Another group subsequently rated the ideas. Findings indicate that a priori knowledge of the templates was associated with the generation of higher quality ads in terms of creativity, brand attitude judgments, and recall (Study 4), with some variation in terms of feeling responses which included humor, emotion, and annoyance.

The findings of the reported studies and several real-life applications conducted in leading ad agencies, indicate that the template taxonomy is a trainable, resource-saving, and effective tool. It simplifies and improves the decision-making

process involved in designing advertising strategies. It can be applied either by hiring trained personnel employed by consulting firms, or by training the agency's own personnel to routinely evaluate past and current ads, and engage in creative activity.

The template approach represents a step forward in defining a comprehensive model of the antecedents of outcome reactions to advertising stimuli. Improved understanding of the wide spectrum of reactions connecting the basic templates with end-user reactions is likely to be beneficial both for academicians and for practitioners. Such a framework can serve as a basis for a synthesis between the activity of creative professionals whose focal interest is the generation of ads, managers, whose main responsibility is strategy formulation, and academic activity, which focuses mainly on the consumer reaction-end of the advertising process. Hence, in addition to academicians, the relevant target audience is likely to include a wide array of communication-related personnel such as creative professionals and planners in advertising agencies, consultants, and brand managers.

In addition, it is postulated that the template taxonomy provides the means to achieve "creativity expertise". Unlike the divergent thinking approaches, in which the required expertise is not necessarily related to the creativity process itself (e.g. individuals can be trained to be better moderators in brainstorming), the creativity template approach is trainable and has the capacity to measure and directly improve creativity outcomes. The template taxonomy facilitates the focused cognitive effort involved in generating new ideas, the capacity to access relevant information, and enables high memorability of the reduced set of information needed to perform the tasks.

The fact that templates are less transient than the ideas produced does not mean that templates are permanent or that they are insensitive to changes over long term frameworks. Indeed, advertising reflects social norms and trends, and as such, long term social trends are expected to reshape the templates and provide conditions for the evolution of new templates. Nonetheless, the dynamics of template changes are expected to be much slower than the dynamics of changes in ad hoc idea generation.

*(Advertising Creativity; Advertising Strategy; Creativity in Marketing; Marketing Ideation Processes)*

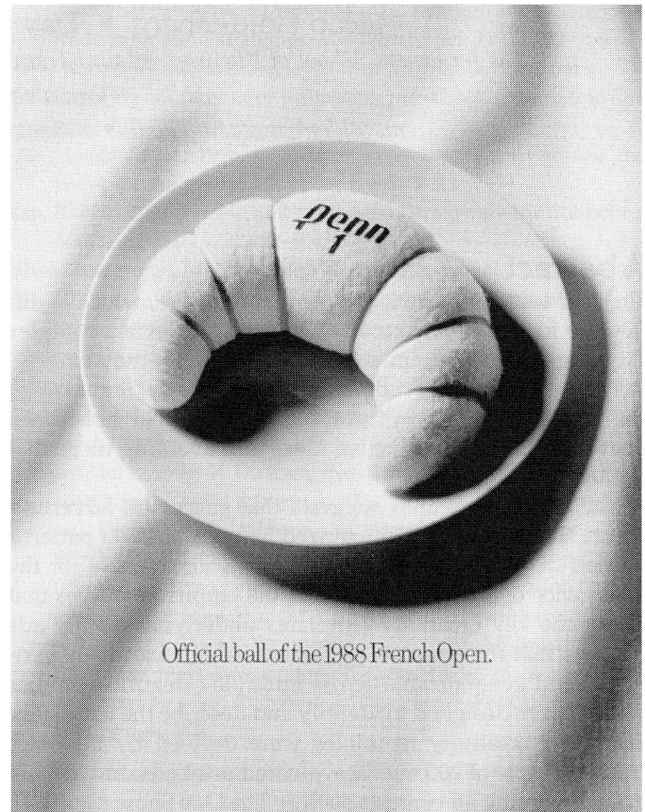
## Introduction

Creativity in advertising frequently involves methods that encourage the generation of a large number of ad concepts (Batra, et al. 1996) on the assumption that the rewards of producing a large number of ideas will outweigh the costs (Winston 1990). The generation of new ideas in this manner tends to be highly unformalized and unsystematic. Often, such methods are based on the *divergent* thinking approach (e.g., focus groups, free association, and other projective techniques; see O'Guinn, et al. 1998) whereby judgment is suspended and ideas emerge by associative thinking in a "limitation free" environment.

However, even in a divergent thinking context certain patterns of creativity may emerge. Creative teams often seek ways to become more productive as they progress from one creativity task to another. *Common patterns* relevant to different domains are sometimes identified (cf. Boden 1992; Dasgupta 1994; Weisberg 1992). These may then be applied on an ad hoc basis within a given advertising context, or even transported to other contexts. Such patterns will be more stable and less transient than the abundance of random ideas that emerge in the process of associative thinking. They may also help in "organizing" the creative process by promoting routes that have been proven to lead to productive ideas and avoiding those that do not. Nonetheless, even if they prove productive, such patterns tend to be idiosyncratic and they are often not verbally definable (Weisberg 1992). As such, they are likely to lack permanence and generality. In the present paper, it is posited that certain patterns are identifiable, objectively verifiable, and generalizable across categories. It is suggested that these patterns, termed *creativity templates*, underlie the generation of quality ads because they facilitate focused creativity, and lead to more effective outcomes.

Let us portray these notions with an example. Figure 1a shows an ad for the 1989 French Open Tennis Championship sponsored by Penn (The One Show, 1989). The ad features a croissant-shaped tennis ball or, viewed differently, a croissant with a (Penn) tennis-ball surface. The pattern of this ad served in generating an ad featuring a hockey puck shaped tennis ball for the Canadian Open (Figure 1b, The One Show, 1991) and a moisture ring of a tea cup for Penn's sponsorship

Figure 1a Ad for the French Open Tennis Championship



of the British Lipton Championships (Figure 1c, The One Show, 1992). The common pattern in all three ads is a modified tennis ball designed to symbolize a country. Consistent with the original ad and its principle pattern, the U.S. Open Tennis Championship might consider using a hamburger-shaped tennis ball or the American flag with tennis balls replacing the stars, as ad ideas.

### Identification of the Creativity Templates

The common pattern of the tennis ball ads can be depicted schematically. From analysis of the French tennis tournament ad (Figure 1a), a scheme depicting the possible links between the tennis tournament and France can be constructed. Figure 2a provides the breakdown of the tennis tournament (left-hand side) into some of its internal components such as a player, court, or a ball. The message theme in this ad (right-hand side) is the location which in the case of France, can be represented by various symbols such as the

Figure 1b Ad for the Canadian Open

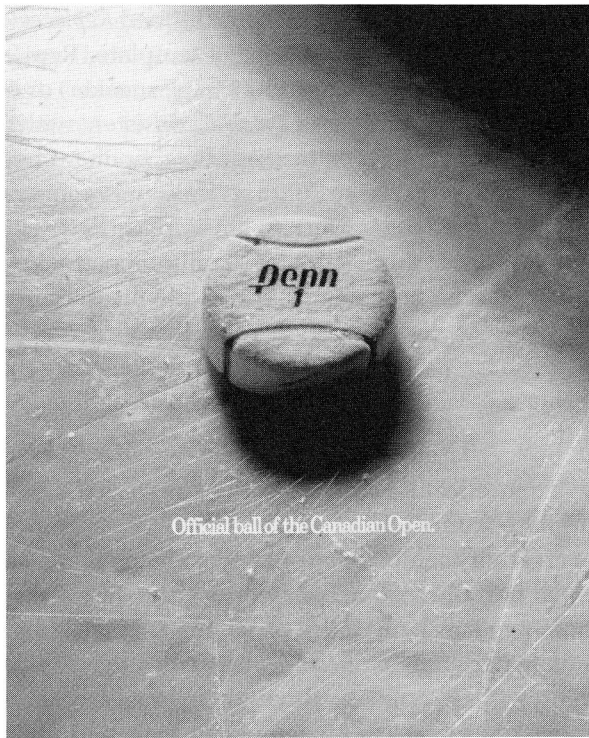


Figure 1c Ad for the British Lipton Championship

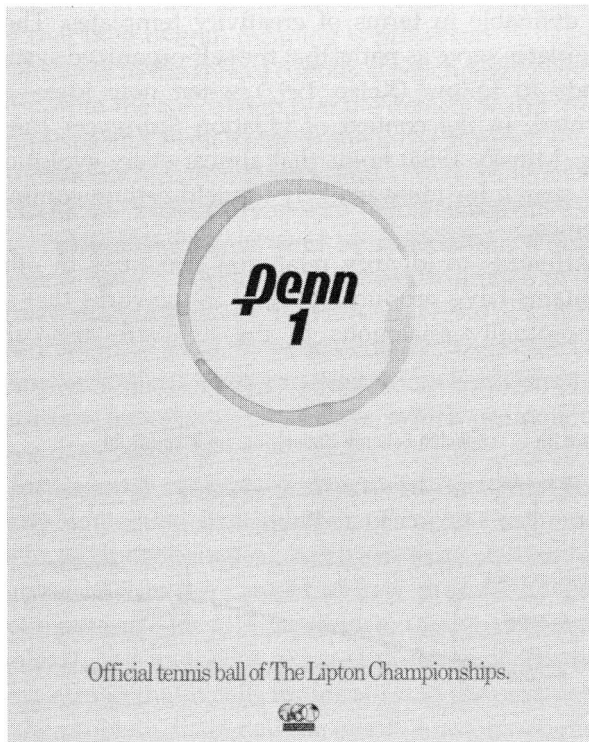
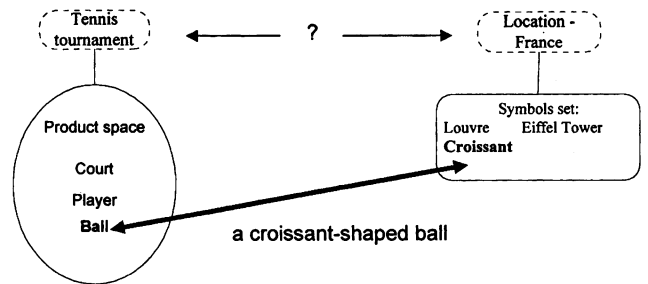


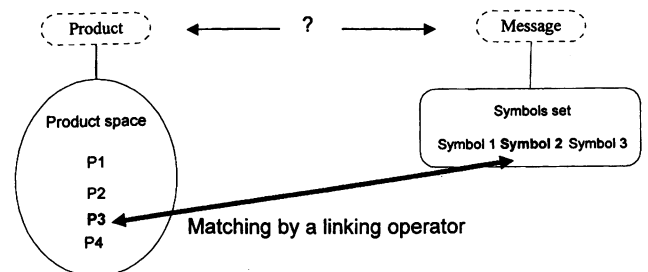
Figure 2a Specific Scheme Underlying the French Open Tennis Championship Ad



Louvre, the Eiffel Tower, or a croissant. The advertised event and the main theme (France as location) are then unified by matching their shapes. In a similar manner, schemes can be constructed for the ads that stress the importance of other locations. Note, however, that these schemes depict specific combinations of events and locations.

Generalization of this operation may be achieved by inferring a general scheme. A scheme can be considered general only to the extent that it can be widely applied in a variety of products, events, and messages. The repetitive appearance of a scheme in different domains reveals a creativity template. Thus, the transformation from a specific scheme (Figure 2a) to a general scheme (Figure 2b) extends the notion of *common patterns* to the notion of *creativity templates*. The general scheme, shown in Figure 2b, consists of two parts: The first part, denoted as the *product space*, is formed by the internal components of the product and the objects that interact with it (P1, P2, P3 in Figure 2b). The tennis ball is a major internal component of the set of components

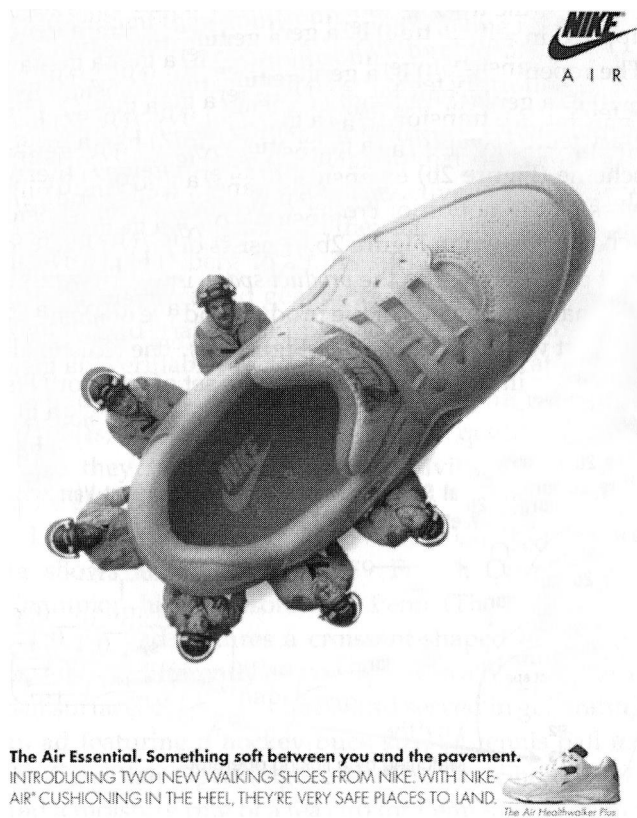
Figure 2b General Scheme underlying the Replacement Version of the Pictorial Analogy Template



that feature in a tennis championship. The second part, denoted as the *symbols set*, is formed by the symbols that feature in the consumer's representation of the message. In the tennis tournament examples, the croissant (as a symbol of France) was chosen in the creation of one ad, hockey puck (as a symbol of Canada) was chosen in another, and finally, the moisture ring of a tea cup (as a symbol of the UK) was selected for a third ad.

The elements chosen from the two parts of the general scheme (the product space and the symbols set) are then unified through a *linking operator* which matches their shape, color, or sound. Note that the product space and symbols set *and* the specification of their matching mechanism can be traced in additional domains. Although at first glance it may appear remote, the ad for Nike-Air sneakers, shown in Figure 3a, has the same fundamental scheme as the tennis

**Figure 3a Nike-Air: An Example for the Replacement Version of the Pictorial Analogy Template (Wieden and Kennedy, USA 1995. Reprinted with permission.)**



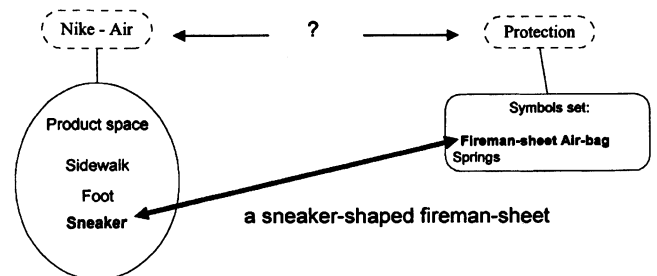
tournament ads. Figure 3b depicts the scheme underlying the Nike-Air ad. This scheme termed *Replacement* is a version of a *Pictorial Analogy* template. Replacement is obtained when a product (e.g., sneaker) or one of its parameters, replaces a symbol consistent with the meaning of the conveyed message (e.g., fireman sheet). Conceptually, the Nike-Air application is more abstract than the tennis tournament applications which involved simple duplication of a common pattern. The general scheme no longer involves identical information, nor does it necessarily involve the same product. Yet, it is identifiable, objectively verifiable, and generalizable across different ads. As such, it is defined as a *creativity template*.

**The Theoretical Rationale for the Creativity Template Approach**

The creativity template approach contends that a substantial part of creative behavior is guided by abstract fundamental schemes. In some instances creativity teams may define explicit ideation rules that are consistent with templates, although in many other instances consistency with templates may be implicit. Even when the creative execution process involves an unstructured idea generation context, many ideas will be definable in terms of creativity templates. These templates serve as paths that the self-organized system tends to follow (Kelso 1997) when new ideas are formed. In the context of ideation *Sparseness Theory* (e.g. Minsky 1985) holds that almost every evolutionary search for ideas is likely to yield certain common themes.

Attempts to identify relational structures in other domains have produced several frameworks that are conceptually analogous to the template approach.

**Figure 3b Specific Scheme Underlying the Nike-Air Ad**



Such structures have been developed in disciplines such as Linguistics (Eco 1986; Chomsky 1978), Anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1974), Random Graphics (Palmer 1985), Venture and Transitional Management (Kauffman 1995), Psychology (Simon 1966), and Artificial Intelligence (Minsky 1988). However, the background, schemes, and implications of the structures developed in these areas are essentially different. For example, creativity may not be as central as it is to advertising.

In light of the central role of creativity in advertising the emergence of templates is expected since they ensure the balance between *surprise* and *regularity*. Regarding surprise, Hayes (1978, p. 232) noted that an act is perceived as creative when "... most people could not or would not have arrived at the same solution". However, Simon (1966) stressed the importance of regularity in the creativity process and the need to form a solution plan to direct their effort because people seem to get lost easily in executing their solution plans. In the sender-receiver communication process surprisingness is indeed useful but not at the expense of altering the overall intended meaning of the message. If some regularity in the idea generation process is identified then creative ideas may be evoked while ensuring that their overall meaning is preserved.

Findings in the area of cognitive psychology provide support to the conclusion that the detection and use of templates may even result in enhanced surprisingness. For example, according to Perkins (1981), adherence to a cognitive frame of reference involves sensitivity to the "rules of the game" and by functioning within a frame, a better position is achieved to notice or recognize the unexpected. Finke et al. (1992) noted that restricting the ways in which creative cognitions are interpreted forces people to think about conceptual implications in more atypical ways, which promote creative discovery.

Indeed, the concept of structured creativity is already embedded in a number of current techniques such as morphological analysis (e.g., Urban and Hauser 1993 in the context of new product development; note also the HIT procedure, Tauber 1972 in that context). This method is akin to the notion of creativity templates in that it calls for identifying the parameters of the problem, listing all the possible combinations of

parameters, examining their feasibility, and deciding on the best alternative. However, morphological analysis does not provide specific and generalizable guidelines on how to combine these parameters. A step toward providing structured guidelines was introduced by Altshuler (1986) in his attempt to uncover latent logical patterns underlying creative ideas. By a backward analysis of problem-solution relationships, he succeeded in identifying a number of such patterns which he labeled "standards". These standards represent common phenomenological patterns. The notion of creativity templates extends the view of common patterns by allowing them to be more abstract and hence more widely applicable across ads for different products and services.

Some other approaches, such as *Resonance* and those involving the *Janusian* concepts, are more directly tailored to the context of advertising creativity. The resonance approach involves dual or multiple meanings surrounding a single word or phrase, such as "Forget-Me-Knots" in an ad showing men's ties arranged to form a floral bouquet (see Mcquarrie and Mick 1992). The Janusian approach involves "the capacity to conceive and utilize two or more contradictory concepts, ideas or images simultaneously" (Rothenberg 1971, p. 195); for instance, Blasko and Mokwa (1986) cite: "We're first because we last" and "We've got the inside of outside protection." Although, unlike the creativity templates described in this paper, these methods do not lend themselves to schematization, they do provide important rules for creativity. An interesting step toward generating a broader taxonomy of figuration modes was presented recently by Mcquarrie and Mick (1996). The rhetorical perspective proposed by them contends that the manner in which a statement is expressed may be more influential than its content. Finally, it is interesting to note a specific area of advertising, namely, humor, in which certain dimensions of ads were found as successful predictors of humorous ads. Alden et al. (1993), using Raskin's psycholinguistic theory of humor to explain why certain ads are perceived as more humorous than others, found that ads that employed a contrast between everyday life and the unexpected were generally perceived as more humorous than those employing a contrast between everyday life and the impossible. By extending these approaches, that typically emerged from a specific

pattern of creative execution, the creativity template taxonomy provides fundamental generalizable structures for the generation of quality ads.

In reviewing the relevant research, the distinct contribution of several well-known taxonomies of advertising strategies, which focus on other perspectives of ad generation, should be assessed vis-a-vis the creativity template approach. For example, Simon (1971) proposed a framework which includes ad strategies such as information, argument, repeated assertion, command, and symbolic association. Similarly, Burke et al. (1990) proposed a taxonomy in which positioning (defined as the featured benefits and the distinctiveness of a brand relative to other brands), and message emotion (which pertains to the emotional tone of the ad), are key ad strategies. The main distinction between these frameworks and the creativity template taxonomy lies in the level of the cognitive representation of the framework factors. The advertising strategies represent summative factors and intended *consequences* (e.g. emotional response), and the creativity templates represent the *schemes that antecede and give rise to these strategies*. For instance, a specific well-defined template may evoke an emotional response, but the emotion itself does not offer the scheme nor the means to elicit this response. Thus, the aforementioned advertising strategy frameworks focus on the decision between different consequences (e.g., emotion, positioning); in contrast, the creativity template approach focuses on the cognitive activities that lead to these consequences.

In the present research, the notion of creativity templates in advertising is conceptualized, formulated, and examined empirically. Studies 1 and 2 were designed to identify and describe the templates. We begin by deriving six creativity templates from a sample of 200 highly evaluated ads and examining their distribution in this sample (Study 1). Then, a formal description of these templates is provided. Next, a study comparing 200 award-winning and 200 nonwinning ads, is reported (Study 2). The purpose of Study 2 was to examine whether templates appear uniquely in high quality ads. It was found that templates appear substantially more frequently in the award-winning ads than in the nonwinning ads. Further validation of the template approach was obtained by manipulating the

presence or absence of the templates in an experimental setting. In Study 3 individuals were trained in template-based idea generation, in an association technique, or not trained at all, prior to an ad ideation task. Another group of individuals, blind to the training procedure and hypotheses, subsequently rated the ideas. Findings indicate that a priori knowledge of the templates was associated with higher quality ads in terms of creativity, brand attitude judgments, and recall (which is examined in Study 4), with some variation in their capacity to trigger feeling responses.

## Study 1: Detection of Creativity Templates

**Objective.** The objective of the first study was to identify general creativity templates of ads among high quality ads and to examine the frequency and distribution of these templates.

**Ads and Screening Procedure.** The award-winning ads and contest finalists of NY, The One Show, and USADREVIEW, all for the years 1990–1995, served as a pool of highly evaluated ads. A set of 500 ads was selected using convenience sampling from this pool and presented in a random order to three senior creative experts (all of whom had at least 12 years of experience in the advertising field) who were asked to select the highest quality ads from that set. The three experts performed the selection task individually and independently. The criterion of quality was in accordance with that which is used by judges of The One Show contest combining newness and significance. The instruction given to each expert was to sort out the highest quality ads and subsequently, order the pile containing the highest quality ads from highest to lowest. Upon completion, the piles containing the highest quality ads chosen by the experts were compared. The interjudge agreement rate measured by the overlap in the “best” ads across the sort piles was 90% and disagreements were resolved by discussion. The 200 top ads served as the sample for subsequent analysis.

**Inferring Templates.** The search for templates was conducted by inferring the *linking operators* in each ad and identifying the relevant *sets* and their *spaces*, in a manner consistent with the inference of the pictorial

analogy template described earlier. For example, an ad showing a lady barking at burglars and scaring them away, in an ad for a security lock (see Table 1), led to the identification of a template version termed *absurd alternatives* by the following procedure. First the product (lock) and the message theme (safety) were identified. Then the linking operator was inferred—the lady voice was *replaced* by dog barks. An unanswered question was, what elements are linked by the linking operator? In one end of this link, the lady reading a book threatened by a burglar is a situation which provokes the need for safety (the message). In the other end, the dog could serve as an *alternative* to a lock in enhancing safety. Other options, serving the same function (e.g., security guards, alarm systems) are also available. Accordingly, the lady represents an *element* in a *situation set* whereas the dog and the other options represent *elements* in an *alternative option set*. The *absurd alternatives* template version of the *extreme situation* template is obtained by the unrealistic nature of the solution created by the linking operator.

The repetitive appearance of this scheme in various ads and regarding different products and messages, defines a general scheme, or template. A total of six key templates and their 16 versions were identified. A detailed description and formulation of the six templates is given in Table 1 using one example for each template. The following templates and their versions were identified (see Figure 4 for overall structure):

*I. The Pictorial Analogy Template.* The pictorial analogy template portrays situations in which a symbol is introduced into the product space, as discussed in detail in the Introduction. This template has two versions: The *replacement version* and the *extreme analogy version*. In the extreme analogy version the symbol is taken to the extreme whereas in the replacement version it is merely transplanted.

*II. The Extreme Situation Template.* The extreme situation template represents situations that are unrealistic in order to enhance the prominence of key attributes of a product or service. This category includes three versions: The *absurd alternative version*, the *extreme attribute version*, and the *extreme worth version*. The extreme situation template is exemplified and described in Table 1 using the absurd alternative version. The

*extreme attribute* and *extreme worth* versions portray situations in which either the attribute or the worth of a product (or service) is exaggerated to unrealistic proportions (e.g., a jeep driving underneath the snow to demonstrate its all-weather driving capacity: Cliff Freeman & Partners, NY, 1994).

*III. The Consequences Template.* The consequences template indicates the implications of either executing or failing to execute the recommendation advocated in the ad. There are two versions of this template: The *extreme consequences version* (exemplified and described in detail in Table 1) and the *inverted consequences version*. The *inverted consequences version* warns against the implications of *not* executing the recommendation of the ad (e.g., an ad promoting a brand of vitamin showing an otherwise highly energetic person, unable to get out of bed in the morning).

*IV. The Competition Template.* The competition template portrays situations in which the product is subjected to competition with another product or event from a different class. The selection of the other product or event is guided by its expected superiority over the advertised product, for example: (1) a race between an advertised car and a bullet (Della Femina Trivisanod & Partners, Los Angeles 1989), or (2) a person contemplating whether to continue eating the (advertised) cereal or to answer a ringing phone. There are three versions of the competition template: The *attribute in competition version*, the *worth in competition version*, and the *uncommon use version*. The difference between the first two versions relates to whether the competition pertains to a product attribute or whether it challenges the worth of the product. The competition template is exemplified in Table 1 by the uncommon use version.

*V. The Interactive Experiment Template.*<sup>1</sup> The interactive experiment template induces realization of the benefits of the product by requiring the viewer to engage in an interactive experience with the medium in which the ad appears. This can be achieved either by actually engaging in an experiment (*the activation ver-*

<sup>1</sup>The notion of interactive experiment is different from the notion of "demonstrations" often used by copywriters, in that demonstrations despite their function in enhancing involvement do not involve physical action in the manner described here.

**Table 1** Examples, Descriptions, and Formulation of Template Versions

	I. The Pictorial Analogy Template: The Replacement Version	II. The Extreme Situation Template: The Absurd Alternative Version
<b>Example</b>	Examples and detailed formulation of the scheme underlying the replacement version of the pictorial analogy template (composed of a symbols set, a product space, and a linking operator) are presented in the Introduction elaborating the notion of creativity templates (see Figures 1–3).	The commercial for locks showing an old lady scaring away burglars by barking at them (Suissa Miller Advertising Company, USA, 1993, Cannes contest award) conveys the message that a safe and peaceful evening can be achieved either by buying a certain lock or by barking.
<b>Description</b>	Note description in the Introduction.	<p>The idea of this version is to present a tongue-in-cheek suggestion to the viewer: “You don’t have to buy our product. There are <i>alternative options</i> for achieving the same results, such as . . .” The <i>alternative option</i> is presented in a seemingly serious manner but, contrary to the declared position of the advertiser, the viewer will draw the conclusion that such an alternative is absurd and ridiculous.</p> <p>The following elements typically appear in this version:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. An unexpected shift in the consumer’s frame of mind into an imaginary status or into a different product category (but unlikely, to a competitive brand).</li> <li>2. The absurdity and extreme unrealism of the alternative option are obvious and recognizable by the consumer: Any attempt to make the alternative more realistic would only weaken the claim of the ad.</li> </ol>
<b>Formulation</b>	Note formulation in the Introduction.	The specific scheme of the lock commercial mentioned in text consists of two sets: A <i>set of alternative options</i> and a <i>set of situations</i> . An <i>alternative option</i> is an object or an action (a dog, in this case) which can be used to achieve the product’s attribute (safety). The alternative option does not have to be realistic although it is assumed that the target audience will be familiar with it. A <i>situation</i> is a common-use scenario of the product in time and place (in our case a peaceful evening in the home of an old lady). The linking operator links one element from the situation space (the lady) with one element in the alternative space (barking).
<b>Scheme</b>	Note scheme in the Introduction.	



**Table 1** Continued

	I. The Pictorial Analogy Template: The Replacement Version	II. The Extreme Situation Template: The Absurd Alternative Version
<b>Specific Scheme</b>	Note scheme in the Introduction.	
	III. The Consequences Template: The Extreme Consequences Version	IV. The Competition Template: The Uncommon-Use Version
<b>Example</b>	A commercial for car loudspeakers showing a bridge on the verge of collapse when the loudspeakers of the car parked on it are turned on at high volume. The message is that the music can be played so loud that even the sturdy foundations of the bridge are threatened by its impact (BBD, Los Angeles, 1994, Cleo award winner).	A commercial for jeans showing a couple in a broken-down car being towed by a pair of jeans tied to the rescuing car.
<b>Description</b>	<p>The idea of this version is to present an extreme consequence of an emphasized product attribute. The absurdity of the consequence, even though presented in a serious manner, is eminently obvious to the viewer. Therefore, even a negative result (the collapse of a bridge) is conceptualized as an indication of the quality of the product. The following elements usually appear in this version:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Consequences based on a true fact: The extreme situation is created by taking a key attribute of the product to the extreme (e.g., the sound emitted by the loudspeakers causes objects—even a sturdy bridge—to vibrate).</li> <li>2. The absurdity and extreme unrealism of the consequences are obvious and recognizable by the viewer.</li> </ol>	<p>The idea of this template is to emphasize a product attribute by applying it to solve a problem in a context totally different to its intended use. The following elements typically appear in this version:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. A problematic scenario or issue.</li> <li>2. Ambiguity as to the product to be the subject of the ad when the problem or dilemma is presented.</li> </ol>

**Table 1** Continued

III. The Consequences Template:  
The Extreme Consequences Version

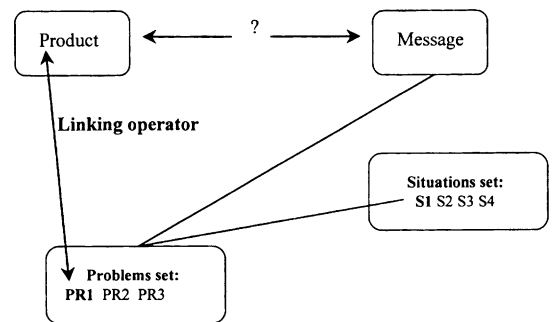
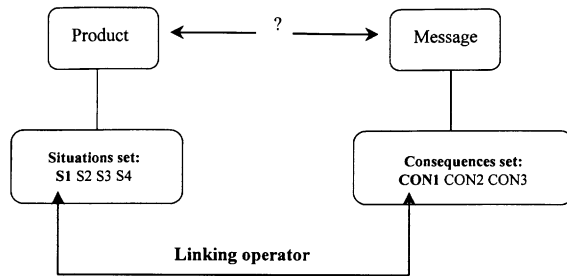
IV. The Competition Template:  
The Uncommon-Use Version

**Formulation**

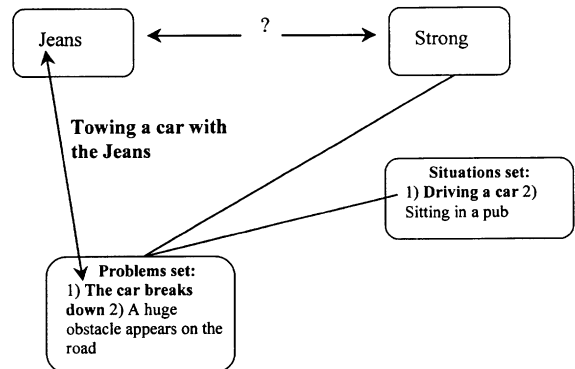
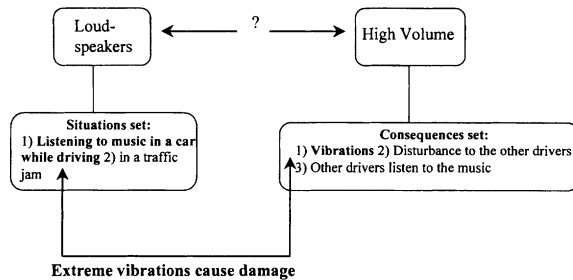
The specific scheme of the loudspeaker commercial consists of two sets: a *set of situations* and a *set of consequences*. A consequence is a phenomenon, action, or behavior which results from the product attribute appearing in the message. The consequence has to appear familiar and not unreasonable to the target audience (e.g., vibrations). It does not have to be absurd or extreme. The linking operator acts on the product and a selected item in the consequences set by taking the consequence to an extreme.

The specific scheme of the jeans commercial consists of two sets: a *set of situations* and a *set of problems*. The *problem* suspends the natural flow of events in the situation. The situation in our example is a couple driving a car. The problem is the breakdown of the car. The viewer expects to see "how it is going to continue from here". The problem will be solved by using the product; it is therefore important to invent the problem by thinking "backwards" so that the product attribute contained in the message will provide its solution. The link is the use of the product as a solution by exploiting the attribute (the strength of the jeans).

**General Scheme**



**Specific Scheme**



V. The Interactive Experiment Template:  
The Activation Version

VI. The Dimensionality Alteration Template:  
The Time Leap Version

**Example**

An example of the activation version is an ad containing a large black patch. When the viewer performs the action suggested in the ad, he/she would become aware of the necessity of an anti-dandruff shampoo (DDB, Needham San-Paulo, 1995).

A commercial for life insurance showing a wife arguing with her husband for canceling his life insurance. The whole scene takes place after he dies, and portrays the wife communicating with her late husband in the setting of a seance (a Cannes award winner in 1993).

**Table 1 Continued**

**V. The Interactive Experiment Template:  
The Activation Version**

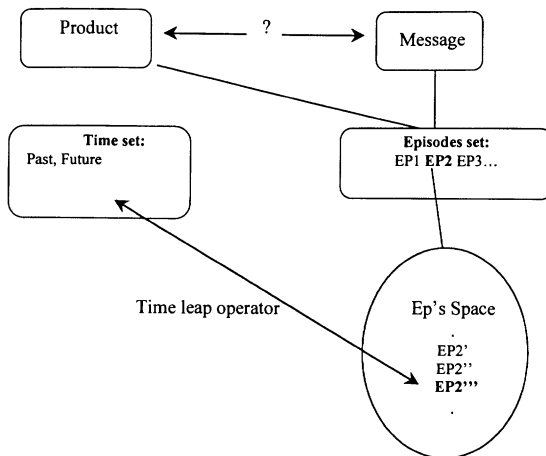
**VI. The Dimensionality Alteration Template:  
The Time Leap Version**

**Description** The consumer is required to perform a task or experiment in order to receive the message conveyed by the ad. The message is contained in the compelling result. Most of the ads in this category convey a message emphasizing a need or a problem that can be resolved if the product is used. The following elements typically appear in the activation version:

1. An experiment requiring *physical action*.
  2. The experiment is executable on the spot.
- The experiment's results highlight a general need rather than a unique quality of the specific brand.

**Formulation** The specific scheme of the anti-dandruff shampoo ad consists of two different sets: the *senses* set and the *experiment* set. The relevant senses set is drawn from the list of the five senses. The experiment set consists of test scenarios to ascertain need for the product. The linking operator requirement is that the experiment represented in the experiment space will be performed *physically by interacting with the media* (newspaper, radio, etc.).

**General Scheme**



The idea of this template is to present an ordinary situation (in this example, an argument about whether to continue investing in the product). The entertaining effect is achieved by shifting the scenario to the past or the future.

The specific scheme of the life insurance ad consists of two sets: a *set of episodes* introducing the message claim (e.g., EP2—a wife arguing with her husband) and a *times set* (past, future). First, the episode space is selected (e.g., wife, husband). Then an operator links an element from the time set and an element drawn from the episode space (e.g. the husband's life status is transferred into the future). Note that the invented situation in the different time frame has to be relevant to the product and its attributes and, therefore, in this case, the future is more appropriate.

**Specific Scheme**

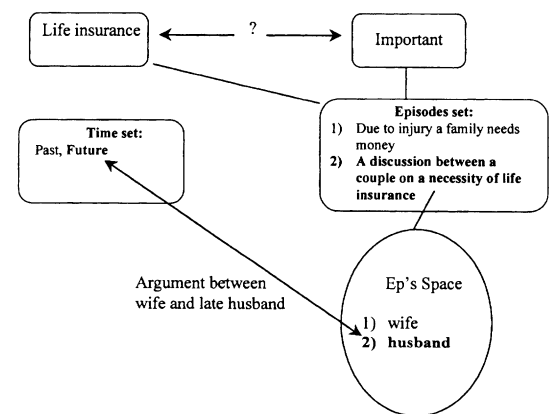
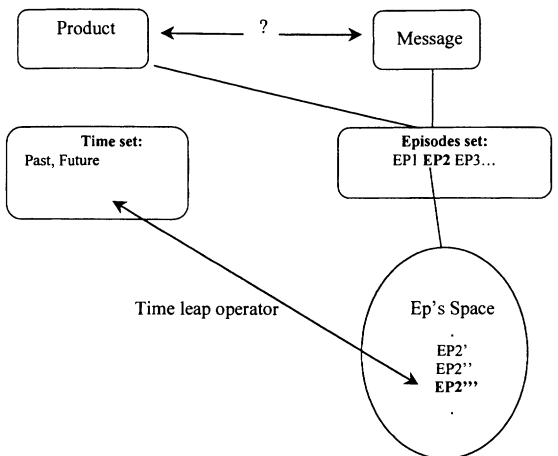
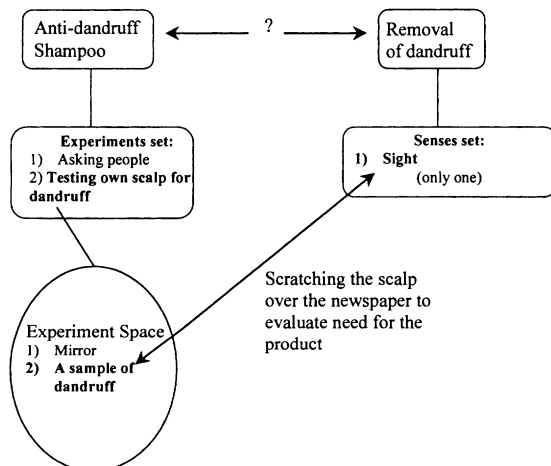
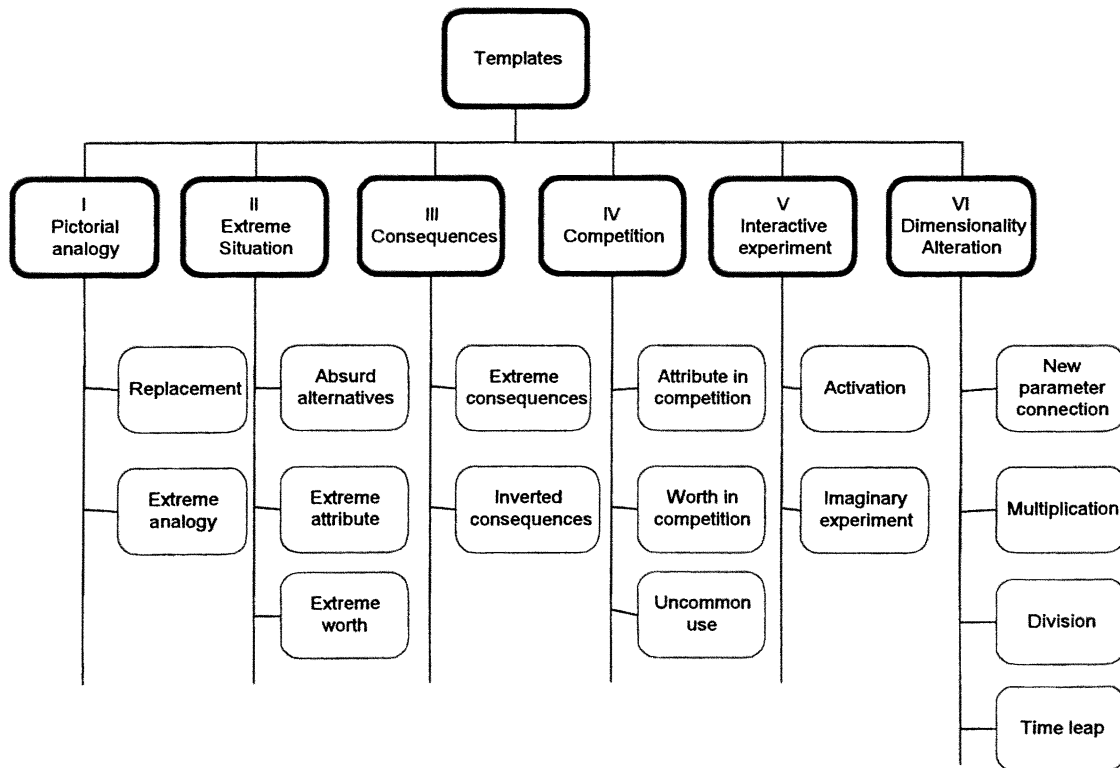


Figure 4 The Creativity Template Taxonomy



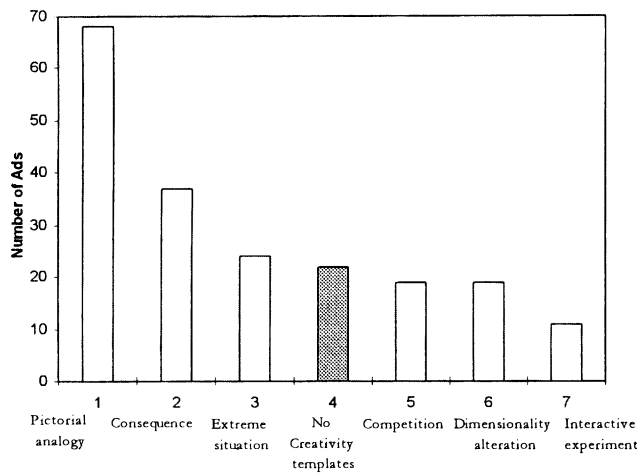
sion) or by just imagining the performance of such an experiment (the *imaginary experiment version*). The interactive experiment template is exemplified in Table 1 by the activation version.

*VI. The Dimensionality Alteration Template.* The dimensionality alteration template manipulates the dimension of the product in relation to its environment. It has four versions: The *new parameter connection* version, the *multiplication* version, the *division* version, and the *time leap* version. This template is exemplified below by the time leap version. In the *new parameter connection* version of the template, previously unrelated parameters become dependent (e.g., the speed of a new aircraft is demonstrated by reducing the size of the ocean). The *multiplication* and *division* versions are executed by multiplying the product and comparing the duplicates, or dividing the product into its components and creating some form of relationship between them. This template is exemplified in Table 1 by the time leap version.

**Template Distribution.** Following template infer-

ence, the distribution of templates among the high quality ads was examined. The template-ad classification was performed independently by two trained judges (different from the prior judges) who had experience of at least ten years in the advertising field. They were taught to identify linking operators, and then were given a list of possible spaces. Each template was illustrated by using five examples. Subsequently, they were given an exercise to test their ability to correctly classify the template. Each judge was asked to classify a set of ads (consisting of two ads per template version as well as nontemplates). The judges correctly classified more than 95% of the ads in this exercise. Following the training task the judges classified the ads. The interjudge agreement rate in the assignment of ads into the six templates was 94%, and disagreements were resolved by discussion. Of the 200 highly evaluated ads, 89% could be accounted for by the templates. Figure 5 summarizes the distribution of the ads by their creativity template.

Figure 5 The Distribution of Ads by Templates: Study 1



## Study 2: Examination of the Creativity Template Taxonomy

Study 2 was designed to examine the extent to which creativity templates categorize winning ads. Two classes of ads were sampled. One class consisted of award-winning and contest-finalist ads. The second class was composed of an array of undistinguished ads drawn from a set of magazines comparable to those in which the award winners and finalists originally appeared. In view of the high frequency of creativity templates in the group of highly evaluated ads found in Study 1, our hypothesis was that creativity templates would be more frequent in award-winning and finalist ads than in nonwinning magazine and newspaper ads.

**Stimuli.** To facilitate comparison between the findings of Study 1 and Study 2, the group of ads examined in Study 1 was termed Group 1 and the two groups of ads in Study 2 were termed Groups 2 and 3. Group 2 consisted of 200 ads appearing in an ad collection (*The One Show Album, 1991*<sup>2</sup>). Of the 14,000 ads submitted to the contest, 700 were winners and finalists. A subset of 200 ads was drawn from the winners and finalists set. Group 3 consisted of 200 selected

print ads appearing in the same magazines and newspapers as Group 2 ads and belonging to product categories comparable to Groups 1 and 2. In both cases selection was based on convenience sampling. None of the ads in Group 3 were award winners or finalists at least within the three years following publication as verified by examining the leading contest albums.

**Procedure.** All 400 ads were analyzed according to the creativity template taxonomy. The judges were given instructions consistent with the schemes described in Table 1. The categorization procedure for Groups 2 and 3 was conducted independently by two trained judges (with similar qualifications to those serving as judges in Study 1). The ads were presented in a random order and the judges were blind to the group assignment. The interjudge agreement rate was 95.5%, and disagreements were resolved by discussion.

**Results.** Table 2 shows the numbers of ads in Groups 2 and 3 that fit the creativity templates. For comparison, the explainable proportion of Group 1 (from Study 1) is also included.

The proportion of creativity templates decreased from 89% in Group 1 (the highest quality ads), 50% in Group 2, to 2.5% in Group 3 (nonwinning ads).<sup>3</sup> Comparison of the distributions of template-matching ads in the three groups indicated a significant difference between groups 2 and 3 (Mann-Whitney  $U$ :  $p < 0.01$ ) and only marginally significant difference between the two award-winning groups (Groups 1 and 2, Mann-Whitney  $U$ :  $p < 0.10$ ). It is interesting to note that in Groups 1 and 2 the *pictorial analogy* template and the *consequences* template combined accounted for the majority of the template-matching ads. In Group 1 the *pictorial analogy* template accounted for 38% of the template-matching ads and the *consequences* template accounted for 21%. In Group 2 the *pictorial analogy* template accounted for 40% of the template-matching ads and the *consequences* template accounted for 24%.

<sup>3</sup>The decrease in template-based explanation from Study 1 to Study 2 is not surprising given the more stringent quality requirements imposed in Study 1. Even though the prime objective of this research was to identify templates in the highest quality ads, search for new templates was performed in the groups included in Study 2 but it did not lead to discovery of other major templates.

<sup>2</sup>Given the wider sampling frame used in Study 1 than that of Study 2, the overlap in the selected ads was minor (only two ads), and its effect on the comparison was negligible.

**Table 2** Distributin of Templates by Ad Quality Group

Template		Highly Evaluated Ads	Contest Winning Ads	Non Winning Ads
		Group 1 (Study 1)	Group 2 (Study 2)	Group 3 (Study 2)
<b>Pictorial Analogy</b>	<b>(I)</b>	<b>68</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>2</b>
Replacement		44	26	1
Extreme analogy		24	14	1
<b>Extreme Situation</b>	<b>(II)</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>1</b>
Absurd alternatives		7	3	0
Extreme attribute		10	5	0
Extreme worth		7	3	1
<b>Consequences</b>	<b>(III)</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>0</b>
Extreme consequences		17	19	0
Inverted extreme consequences		20	5	0
<b>Competition</b>	<b>(IV)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>2</b>
Attribute in competition		5	3	1
Worth in competition		10	3	1
Uncommon use		4	2	0
<b>Interactive Experiment</b>	<b>(V)</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>0</b>
Activation		8	3	0
Imaginary experiment		3	0	0
<b>Dimensionality Alteration</b>	<b>(VI)</b>	<b>19</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0</b>
New parameter connection		4	4	0
Multiplication		6	5	0
Division		5	5	0
Time leap		4	1	0
<b>No Creativity Template</b>		<b>22</b>	<b>99</b>	<b>195</b>
Total		200	200	200

## Study 3: Examining the Impact of A Priori Knowledge of the Creativity Templates on Judgments

**Overview.** Following Studies 1 and 2 which detected and examined the appearance frequencies of templates in various ad quality levels, Study 3 was designed to examine how the utilization of creativity templates in the creative execution process affects outcome judgments. In the *first part*, three groups of individuals differing in the training that they received were asked to create ads. The first group was requested to generate ads based only on a brief (without additional training), the second group, in addition to the brief, was trained to utilize the free association method in generating new ads, and the third group, in addition to the brief,

was trained to utilize a creativity template. In the *second part*, the ads were rated by other individuals on several key advertising outcome scales. All the participants in Study 3 held an undergraduate degree and none of them were or had previously been employed in advertising related jobs.

**Part 1: Stimuli and Procedure.** Three groups each consisting of 20 participants (all indicated familiarity with brands in the three examined products, were blind to the group assignment, and were paid for participation) were randomly assigned to one of the three idea generation groups. The three groups did not differ in age, education and occupation. Training both in free association and in the creativity template was conducted by experienced moderators. Training time was comparable in the two training groups (less than two hours including practice tasks and idea generation). Template training involved the absurd alternatives version of the extreme situation template (applied later in the study for anti-dandruff shampoo ads), the interactive experiment template (for diet products ads), and the replacement version of the pictorial analogy template (for sneakers). In all cases template training involved examples drawn solely from products different from those used in the study.

The three groups were then asked to generate ad ideas for the three product categories. The number of ideas per category ranged between 32–46. To mimic a real-world creative execution screening procedure that typically involves deciding among the highest ranking ideas, all ideas were submitted to a creative director who was blind to the objective of the study and whose task was to screen the best five ideas in each category. The top-ranking ideas in each category were then used in constructing a questionnaire for Part 2 of the Study.

**Part 2: Stimuli, Procedure, and Judgments.** Three versions of the questionnaire were generated each containing the best 15 ideas presented in a random order (five per product category) relevant to the specific training condition (i.e., one version containing “no training” ideas, second version composed of “free association” ideas, and a third version comprising “template-based” ideas).

A different group of 36 individuals (paid for participation, and blind to the study objective and to the

origin of ideas) were randomly assigned to one of the three questionnaire versions. The three subgroups did not differ on the same demographic variables examined in Part 1. Each participant rated 15 ideas on five different scales. The first two scales assessing ad quality are frequently included as major items in advertising response scales (e.g., Edell and Burke 1987; Mitchell and Olson 1981): One scale reflects creativity and the other attitude toward the brand. They were also chosen in accordance with Finke's (1990) suggestion (in creativity research) to assess ideas both by their creativity and practical value. The other three scales were extracted from previous studies focusing on ad feelings. While studies on feeling responses typically involve relatively large inventories (e.g., Holbrook and Batra 1987, Edell and Burke 1987, Richins 1997), the current purpose was to capture the major dimensions proposed by Edell and Burke 1987 (see also Richins 1997), namely upbeat, warm, and negative, by key scales, given the load involved in rating 15 ideas. To this end, the list of responses loading on the three key feeling dimensions was examined. The scales "humor", "emotional", and "annoy" were chosen based on their loading on the three key dimensions and their classification as important in practice by a senior creative director. Instructions followed Edell and Burke (1987). All five scales were rated on five point scales (1 representing lowest value and 5 highest value).

**Results.** A MANOVA was performed with training as between-subjects factor (three levels of training—"no training", "free association" training, and "template" training) and the product as a within-subjects factor (three products—anti-dandruff shampoo, diet products, and sneakers) for the five judgments (the judgment factor)—creativity, brand attitude, humor, emotion, and annoyance. Table 3 displays the mean judgments. All main effects (judgment type, training, and product) and their two-way and three-way interactions were significant in multivariate tests (all Wilks' Lambda values were significant at  $p < 0.001$ ). In view of the present study's focal interest on the effects of the template approach, the analysis subsequently concentrated on contrasts and simple effects. The following results were obtained.

First, "template training" was found to be superior

to "no training" and "free association" training in all the comparisons pertaining to the two ad quality measures (creativity and brand attitude, see Table 3). This finding is based on simple effect analyses performed for each judgment within the judgment factor with two orthogonal contrasts, one assessing the value of training (by comparing the combined training groups with the nontraining group) and the other, comparing between the two training methods—the template approach and free association. The first contrast showed that, on the whole, training is effective. Except for one

**Table 3** Mean Judgments: Experiment 3

Extreme Situation Template (Anti-Dandruff Shampoo)					
	Creativity	Brand Attitude	Humor	Emotion	Annoyance
TRAINING TYPE					
<b>No training</b>	2.80	2.62 <sup>(1)**</sup>	2.40	1.83	1.57
<b>Free association</b>	2.08	2.28	1.45	1.62	1.63
<b>Template training</b>	4.02 <sup>(2)**</sup>	4.13 <sup>(2)**</sup>	3.57 <sup>(2)**</sup>	1.79	1.60
Interactive Experiment Template (Diet)					
	Creativity	Brand Attitude	Humor	Emotion	Annoyance
TRAINING TYPE					
<b>No training</b>	2.57 <sup>(1)**</sup>	2.38 <sup>(1)**</sup>	1.90	1.90	2.07 <sup>(1)**</sup>
<b>Free association</b>	2.77	2.77	1.93	1.97	1.43
<b>Template training</b>	3.82 <sup>(2)**</sup>	3.97 <sup>(2)**</sup>	1.85	1.30 <sup>(2)**</sup>	1.60
Pictorial Analogy Template (Sneakers)					
	Creativity	Brand Attitude	Humor	Emotion	Annoyance
TRAINING TYPE					
<b>No training</b>	2.24 <sup>(1)**</sup>	2.49 <sup>(1)**</sup>	1.32 <sup>(1)*</sup>	1.46	1.68 <sup>(1)**</sup>
<b>Free association</b>	2.81	2.86	1.69	1.68	1.27
<b>Template training</b>	3.60 <sup>(2)**</sup>	3.50 <sup>(2)**</sup>	2.18 <sup>(2)**</sup>	1.77	1.13

\*Significance at  $p < 0.05$ .

\*\*Significance at  $p < 0.01$ .

(1) Denotes difference between the two training groups and the nontraining group.

(2) Denotes difference between the template training group and the free association training group.

case (creativity judgment in the case of the absurd alternative version of the extreme situation template), all comparisons indicated that training improves ideation quality. The second contrast showed that the high value of training is primarily attributable to template training. In all cases template training was superior to training in free association (all six comparisons were significant at  $p < 0.001$  level).

Second, the above training effect does not generalize to the feeling responses. Training in two of the three templates bolstered humor reactions: Training in the replacement version of the pictorial analogy template yielded ads that were rated higher than free association training ( $F(1,177) = 102.01, p < 0.001$ ), and training in the absurd alternative version of the extreme situation template yielded ads that were rated higher than free association training ( $F(1,177) = 6.25, p < 0.001$ ). However, training in the activation version of the interactive experiment was not found to invoke humor relative to the other training method ( $F(1,177) < 1, n.s.$ ). In addition, none of the templates was found to enhance emotional reactions. In fact, training in the activation version of the interactive experiment even hindered emotional ratings ( $F(1,177) = 13.69, p < 0.001$ ). Finally, template training did not reduce annoyance compared to free association training, although a combined training effect of decreasing annoyance in two of the three comparisons was observed ( $F(1,177) = 9.61, p < 0.001$  in the case of activation, and  $F(1,177) = 18.49, p < 0.001$ ) in the replacement version of the pictorial analogy template.

Third, a noticeable finding emerges from the comparison between the no training and free association conditions. No clear indication was found that the free association method heightens creativity or brand attitude. Although this method is widely applied in advertising practice, the contention that it necessarily enhances effectiveness was challenged by several researchers (Perkins, 1981; Weisberg 1992). Some researchers claim that free association as well as other frequently used projective techniques may even reduce effectiveness even though they overcome group effects which typically characterize focus group methods (Diehl and Stroebe 1987, O'Guinn et al. 1998; Dominowski 1995). Nonetheless, in the present study

the free association method was shown to reduce annoyance reactions in the case of two of the three products ( $F(1,177) = 8.53, p < 0.01$  for diet products, and  $F(1,177) = 4.97, p < 0.05$  for sneakers).<sup>4</sup>

## Study 4: Examining the Impact of A Priori Knowledge of the Creativity Templates on Recall

Another form of assessing ad quality was a recall test. Three groups of 18 individuals were exposed to the same ads as in Study 3. Each group obtained the list of 15 ad ideas consisting of five "template-based" ads, five "free association" ads, and five "no training" ads, in a random order. A day later, they were visited again and asked to recall as many ad ideas as they could from the list seen in the previous day. The results showed that for all three product classes among the 54 respondents template-based ideas had the highest recall rate. Overall, 28.5% template-based ideas were correctly recalled, 20% were based on free association training, and 14.8% ads were drawn from the "no-training" set.<sup>5</sup> McNemar tests confirmed that the distinct order of the ideation methods (template training, free association, and no training) was statistically significant at the  $p < 0.01$  level).

## Discussion and Conclusions

The present research provides the theoretical reasoning and shows empirically that definable templates can be detected in high quality ads. Viewed from a micro perspective, individual advertisers may adopt idiosyncratic templates and use them in generating new ideas.

<sup>4</sup>An additional study was conducted comparing 24 ads generated by advertising *professionals* (art directors and copywriters) trained in the absurd alternatives version of the extreme situation template with 28 ads generated by professional counterparts. A competing training condition was not included in this study given the familiarity of professionals with the majority of the frequently used alternative methods, which could potentially render the comparison unreliable. The ads created by the trained professionals were rated higher by five judges who were unaware of the template approach (mean = 4.46) than the ads created by the nontrained professionals (mean = 2.83,  $t(50) = 5.48, p < 0.001$ ).

<sup>5</sup>This recall rate is consistent with an average of 20% obtained in day-after recall tests (e.g., Wells et al. 1992).



The present research lends support to a broader perspective which contends that the templates may be widely applied across products, messages, and target audiences. It serves to enhance the understanding of the emergence of quality ads as well as creativity in marketing communication.

The findings of the present study indicate the superiority of template-matched ad ideas in creativity judgments, brand attitudes, and recall. However, a differential impact was detected regarding the feelings invoked by the templates. This is not surprising in light of the cognitive processes that different templates are expected to invoke. For example, the interactive experiment (activation) template requires physical activity and effortful processing. Enhanced involvement is associated with high cognitive activity (e.g., Assael 1998) and thus, the interactive experiment is likely to be useful when the strategy is designed to cause a particular behavioral change which is less responsive to peripheral cues. The Absurd Alternatives and Replacement version are more useful when humor is the intended strategy. Hence, while generally, the templates appear to have a positive impact on recall leading to potential sales increase, the ways to achieve this goal are diversified.

These findings are a step toward defining a comprehensive model of the antecedents of outcome reactions to advertising stimuli. Improved understanding of the wide spectrum of reactions that connects the basic templates with end-user reactions is likely to be beneficial for both academicians and practitioners. Such a framework would create a synthesis between the activity of creative professionals whose focal interest is generating the ads, managers, whose main responsibility is strategy formulation, and the academic activity, which focuses mainly on the consumer reaction-end of the advertising process. Obviously, further research is required to shed more light on this important aspect of creativity templates.

Three important features of the template approach need to be emphasized. First, the templates are useful in guiding the creativity execution process; however, *they do not prescribe the outcome ideas*. In other words, they provide the framework for generating ideas although within the template constraints various ideas may be generated. Second, templates are less transient

than the ideas produced, but this does not mean that templates are permanent or that they are insensitive to changes over long term frameworks. Indeed, advertising reflects social norms and trends, and as such, long term social trends are expected to reshape the templates and provide conditions for the evolution of new templates. Nonetheless, the dynamics of template changes are expected to be much slower than the dynamics of changes in ad hoc idea generation. Third, from a theoretical viewpoint, it is also expected that the set of templates will always remain small: Only under this condition will templates maintain their generalizability and ensure adherence to the overall intention of the message and consistency with the chosen marketing strategy.

It is postulated that the template taxonomy provides the means to achieve "creativity expertise". Unlike the divergent thinking approaches, in which the required expertise is not necessarily related to the creativity process itself (e.g., individuals can be trained to be better moderators in brainstorming), the creativity template approach is trainable and has the capacity to directly improve creativity outcomes.<sup>6</sup> In fact, training individuals in creativity templates may result in higher levels of "creative expertise" (Alba and Hutchinson 1987). The template taxonomy facilitates the focused cognitive effort involved in generating new ideas, the capacity to access relevant information, and improved memorability of the reduced set of information needed to perform the tasks.

Our research identifies an infrastructure of certain regularities that may assist in screening and constructing creative ideas. If we can define these regularities a posteriori, we can reconstruct a priori ad skeletons, which consist of their main parameters and can be fed in only by those ideas that conform to these parameters. In this newly generated schematic world most of the ideas are likely to be perceived as creative, even though the well-defined rules and the exhaustive search used to obtain them do not easily reconcile with

<sup>6</sup>It should be noted that while Study 3 successfully demonstrated the value and potential of the template approach, it was applied on versions that constitute less than a third of the highest quality ads of Study 1. It is suggested that future research will validate the approach in its entirety and screen the most effective templates for training advertising creatives.

what we traditionally have viewed as “pure creativity”. Yet, in view of the numerous problems we are called upon to solve in our day-to-day lives, and if we accept that creativity is assessed by the way it is perceived by consumers, it seems that we ought to reappraise our fundamental approaches to creativity and even reevaluate their operational definition. Our experience with using templates both in the reported studies and in real-life applications among several leading ad agencies, indicates that creative activity prescribed by the well-defined, template-based processes, is a trainable, resource-saving, and effective tool. It simplifies and improves the decision-making process involved in designing advertising strategy. The template approach can be applied either by hiring personnel that is experienced in templates and employed by a consulting firm, or by training the agency’s own personnel to routinely evaluate past and current ads, and engage in creative activity.

In addition, the present investigation concurs with an emerging stream of research which deemphasizes the traditional treatment of visual and verbal modes in advertising as functionally distinct entities. Some of the qualities of pictures which, in the past, were believed to characterize verbal information, and some of the qualities of verbal information which were previously more closely associated with pictures, are being reexamined. One direction of this research is visual rhetorics. Scott (1994) challenged the assumption that pictures are merely reflections of reality, claiming that images represent complex figurative arguments. Relatedly, although bearing on verbal information, Unnava et al. (1996) argued against the concentration of consumer research on visual imagery as the only type of imagery, claiming that words differ in the degree to which they provoke imagery or influence reading and listening. The creativity template approach is in accord with this research trend in that it treats the message and its delivery as a whole rather than decomposing it into the functions carried by the visual versus the verbal modes. The Nike-Air and the barking lady examples serve to illustrate the complex figurative arguments that are conveyed by pictures. Moreover, in the anti-dandruff ad, imagery-provocation and informativeness are entirely independent of their

verbal and visual components; neither the visual component nor the verbal component can be understood as separate information entities but, in combination, they achieve a high level of imagery.<sup>7</sup>

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