

# THE CREATIVE ELEMENTS OF RADIO ADVERTISING

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## ABSTRACT

*Some authorities say radio is an old medium for advertising and it is not effective on consumers anymore. This harsh comment has reasonable in some way. Consumers are living in an audio-visual world and Internet based advertising tools are very popular among advertising professionals. But on the other hand, consumers still need music while driving and jogging and they spend lots of time doing those activities than ever before. The main problem is to attract their attention and creativity is still the most important way of it. From this perspective, understanding the creative side of radio advertising is important. This study is trying to identify the elements (characteristics and approaches) of award-winning radio commercials. 55th Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival Radio Lions Winners are chosen as the sample and analyzed.*

**Keywords:** Radio Advertising, Creativity, Creative Characteristic, Creative Approach.

## 1. Introduction

From the beginning of television era, everybody has talked about the death of radio. This is true in some way. People have preferred to watch TV instead of listening radio while they are at home. But today it is quite different. People are spending more time at their work place or at their car. They are spending more time at a gym or in a subway. In short, they are spending less time at their home. This is why mobile technologies are evolving very fast. A television or a desktop computer is now far away. Mobile devices with fast Internet connections are the new heroes on the block.

In this new era, radio is rising from its ashes. Today in Canada, 90% of all adults (18+) tune to radio in a given week and they listen for 17 hours. Teens are the most challenging group for radio, but almost 75% tune weekly (Pauchuk, 2014). Revenues from radio advertising down under are expected to grow at an annual rate of 3% for the foreseeable future in Australia (Ritson, 2014) and an online radio has more than 250 million registered listeners worldwide (From Broadcast To Unicast, 2015).

Another important concept in this study is creativity. Creativity is an important way of attracting the attention of consumers to the ad but it is more than that. In the past some argue that advertising is just for promoting the product and not for some “creative show off” (Daniels, 1974) but today Rosengren, Dahlen

and Modig (2013) support that advertising creativity may have unintended positive effects on consumers' perceptions of their own creativity, which would affect their ability to solve unrelated tasks. Advertising is becoming more and more dependent on consumers voluntarily exposing themselves to advertising and consumers can become more creative and derive greater value from their media consumption.

Today radio is changing as an advertising medium and consumers are also changing with new expectations towards advertising creativity. That's why it is important to understand the creative potential of radio advertising.

## 2. Creative Elements in Radio Advertising

The creative elements in radio advertising can be categorized in three dimensions. These are, execution, emotional appeals and creative approaches.

There are different and detailed categorizations in the literature about execution (Sewall and Sarel, 1983; Abernethy, Gray and Rotfeld, 1993). In order to reach clear findings, these are adapted for creative ads.

- **Announce:** The announcer is talking directly to the listeners.
- **Sing & Sell:** Music can be the part of the spot or dominate the ad as a jingle.
- **Testimonial:** An authority or a user can talk about the product or service.
- **Slice of Life:** There is a dramatic story about everyday life and it's problems.

Emotions have been viewed as a universal set of internal processes that are largely hardwired, arising when an event that is relevant to the concerns of an individual occurs (Darwin, 1896). Humor, sadness, excitement and fear are the most common appeals used in advertising context.

In order to operationalize the definition of creative approaches, first the concept of creativity must be examined. In the 70's creativity was a mysterious element of advertising (White, 1972) but today it is defined in terms of different factors forming an entire concept. Creativity can be defined as bringing a fully new solution to a problem. So there are two dimensions of creativity, divergence and relevance. Since advertising is a marketing communication tool, relevance refers to the appropriateness according to the target consumers and marketing objectives. On the other hand, divergence is not that easy to define. Divergence is a multi-layer dimension and it cannot be defined around single concepts like originality or newness. Smith and Yang (2004) conceptualized the determinants of divergence in a detailed perspective. If an ad has one or more of the following traits, it can be said that the ad is divergent\*.

- **Fluency:** The ability to generate a large number of ideas – more than expected.
- **Flexibility:** The ability to generate different ideas. The ability to shift from one type of subject matter to another. Ideas that fall outside the logical or expected.
- **Originality:** Ideas that are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace. The ability to break away from habit-bound and stereotypical thinking.
- **Elaboration:** Thinking of unexpected details. The ability to finish, extend, and detail basic ideas so they become more intricate, complicated or sophisticated.
- **Resistance to premature closure:** The ability to keep ideas open and resist quick, easy or obvious solutions. The ability to keep working is essential for the incubation processes to function.

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\* Smith and Yang (2004) listed humor in their divergence factors. Since this study is working on more than one creative element, humor is accepted as an appeal.

- **Unusual perspective:** Seeing things from a different or unusual outlook. Ability to produce internal visualizations (see beneath the surface), rich imagery, break or extend normal boundaries, and provide unusual contexts.
- **Synthesis:** The ability to bring together items by combining, connecting, or blending normally unrelated objects or ideas. Includes bold mental leaps and merging ideas freely without self-imposed restrictions.
- **Richness and colorfulness of imagery:** The ability to arrange shapes and colors in an attractive way. The ability to produce artistic impressions or art of any kind. High production value.
- **Fantasy:** The ability to generate non-real ideas, worlds, or creations, often marked by highly fanciful or supernatural elements.
- **Expression of emotion:** The ability to convey an idea through the feeling and use of emotional, poignant, and/or sensitive material.
- **Empathic perspective:** The ability to use an attitude or viewpoint that understands the thoughts and feelings of others.
- **Provocative questions:** The ability to use analysis and queries that are intended to incite, arouse, or elicit an interesting response.
- **Future orientation:** The ability to prospect or envision future possibilities; to see and express future events.

### 3. Methodology

This study aims to identify the creative elements of radio commercials. 66 Radio commercials that are the winners of 55th Cannes Lions International Advertising Festival Radio Lions category are analyzed by content analysis technique. Two judges (an advertising agency creative director and an academic) coded the commercials. For each radio commercial that are analyzed, the judges determined the characteristics and the appeals of the commercial. Judges gave a name to the creative approach of the ad if it is a “divergent” one. The reliability is measured on proportional agreement\* (Rust and Cooil, 1994).

The reliability of characteristics is quite high (.96 for execution and .98 for emotional appeal). The process of coding the creative approach on the other hand needed an extra effort. The judges gave a name to the creative approach that they identified by the framework of Smith and Yang’s (2004) divergence factors. The final reliability for creative approach is calculated after a discussion meeting and it is determined as .85.

### 4. Findings and Result

Findings showed that sound effects (SFX) are the most common execution element and humor is the most used emotional appeal among creative radio commercials.

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\*  $A = F_o / TOT$

$F_o$  = The number of pairwise interjudge agreements  $TOT$  = Total number of pairwise judgments

**Table 1: Execution and Emotional Appeal**

<b>Execution</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>SFX</b>	50
<b>Sing &amp; Sell</b>	27
<b>Testimonial</b>	18
<b>Slice of Life</b>	14
<b>Announce</b>	5
<b>Emotional Appeal</b>	<b>%</b>
<b>Humor</b>	59
<b>Sadness</b>	9
<b>Excitement</b>	9

As seen on Table 1, announce is not a popular execution element for producing a creative radio commercial and 77% of creative spots are constructed on an emotional appeal.

Judges determined and named four different creative approaches. These are, unexpected performance of music, product's voice, theater of the mind and audio wallpaper. There is more than one sample for each approach so they aren't spotted by chance. An example for each approach will clarify the naming\*.

### **Unexpected Performance of Music**

*Title: DRUMS*

*Advertiser: MARSHALL MUSIC*

*Product/Service: MUSIC EQUIPMENT STORE*

ANN: Hey, ever considered playing drums but thought "dude, it can't be easy?" Well, it can be.

You have your hi-hat, snare, bass, and crash.

Now try putting a face to those. Dick Cheney is your hi-hat. Dick! Pamela Anderson your snare.

Pam! Dolph Lundgren your bass. Dolph! And George Bush your crash symbol. Bush!

So it's...Dick! Pam! Dolph! Bush!

OK, let's just work on 8 beats. Dick's on all of them, like this... Dick! Dick! Dick! Dick! Dick! Dick! Dick! Dick!

Now add Pam! on 3 and 7. Dick! Dick! Pam! Dick! Dick! Dick! Pam! Dick!

Cool. All we need is some bass on 1, 2 and 8. Dolph! Dolph! Pam! Dick! Dick! Dick! Pam! Dolph!

And there you have it – "American Idiot" by Green Day.

Give drums a go at Marshall Music. That's right, Marshall Music, 65 Buitengragt Street.

Dolph! Dolph! Pam! Dick! Bushhhhhhh!

\* ANN: Announce, MVO: Male Voice Over, FVO: Female Voice Over, SFX: Sound Effects

**Product's Voice***Title: URETHRA* □*Advertiser: OFFIX* □*Product/Service: HIGHLIGHTER PENS*

MVO: (Whispered) In both women and men... □

(Shouted) the urethra, the tube through which we urinate...

(Whispered) is surrounded by... □

(Shouted) a ring of spongy tissue... □

(Whispered) which expands with blood... □

ANN: OFFIX Highlighters.

(Shouted) Highlight it.

**Theater of the Mind***Title: HANSEL & GRETEL* □*Advertiser: NAMPAK**Product/Service: CUDDLERS NAPPIES*

SFX: Crickets; owls hooting

FVO: When Hansel and Gretel came near the witch's house she laughed wickedly, saying, "Here come two who shall not escape me." And, early in the morning, she saw how sweetly they slept, with chubby red cheeks; and she mumbled to herself, "That will be good to bite."

Then she took up Hansel with her rough hand, and shut him up in a little cage with a lattice-door; and although he screamed loudly it was of no use. Then she turned to Gretel and shouted, "Get up, you lazy thing, and fetch some water to cook something good for your brother, who must remain in that stall and get plump and juicy; when he is fat enough I shall eat him."

We'll finish the rest tomorrow. Night night, Timmy.

SFX: Door creaking □

ANN: Cuddlers Nappies. Now super absorbent.

**Audio Wallpaper***Title: STUCK TUNE* □*Advertiser: A.W. FABER-CASTELL**Product/Service: UHU GLUE*

SFX: A short song (Song 2 by Blur), with the only lyrics being U-Hu, is played at the beginning and end of each commercial break. After several airings, we hear:

ANN: That tune stuck in your head is brought to you by U-Hu glue. U-Hu. Nothing sticks better.

**5. Conclusion**

If human voice is the most powerful persuasive tool, then radio can be accepted as the most powerful advertising medium (Moriarty, 1991). Producing a radio commercial is something like writing a musical play that is performed to an audience whose eyes are closed (Wells, Burnett and Moriarty, 2000). That's

why radio is a second-class medium for advertising professionals. Every copywriter loves to write a script for the TV but not for the radio. Also advertising festivals' juries don't find it "fancy" to evaluate the radio commercials (Sullivan, 2012).

Although radio is accepted as an important advertising medium, there are few discussions on "creativity in radio advertising". It is mentioned in Radio Advertising Bureau 2004 Conference, entitled "Getting Serious with Radio Creativity" that advertisers and agencies risk the effectiveness of their campaigns by spending less time on rushed creative for radio advertising, while concentrating on the creative for TV (Creative Wake-up Call for Radio Ads, 2004). Turkey's most prestigious advertising creativity festival removed the radio category from the contest in 2014. As mentioned in the introduction part, radio and its listeners are changing. More and more people are tuning to online radio channels and brands will focus more on this relatively cheap advertising medium in the very near future. This situation will cause a greater need of creativity for advertising agencies, in order to produce radio commercials for their customers that will differentiate from the competitors'.

One more important prediction is about the future of online radio advertising. Since radio is embracing new technologies related to mobile communication, it has unleashed the ability for DJs and stations to create incredible visual content for clients. As listeners grow to expect more and more content on demand, radio has adapted to a "listen, watch and share model" with the strong brand identities of stations and their DJs allowing truer, more valuable partnerships with advertising brands (Radio with Pictures, 2014).

It is a new era for radio advertising and it is important for advertising professionals and academics to understand this "brand new" medium's creative potential.

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*\* This research is presented by the author at Business & Economics Society International Conference (Acapulco, 3-6 January 2009) and revised afterwards.*