
REFLECTION ON THE CREATIVE PROCESS IN MEDIA COMMUNICATION AND MARKETING

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(Received 13 June 2016, revised 25 August 2016)

Abstract

When compared with a creative process used in other fields (e.g. in Art, or partially in Science) a creative process in the marketing agency is characterized by its particularities and it is affected by many factors. These factors include the context, different types of pressure, and the perception of a process by the creator. It also gives valuable information regarding the supporting elements, and the inhibitors of the creative production. We carried out a qualitative type of research focused on the reflection of a creative process by creatives and future creatives. The results brought us inspiring information how to optimize creative process in the practice of communication agencies/companies.

Keywords: creative process, marketing agency, reflection, creatives

1. Place and importance of creativity for marketing and media communication

G.M. Zinkhan long-time editor of the journal *Journal of Advertising* states that: “*Creativity is included in all stages of a decision-making process (particularly in idea creation); creativity is decisive for marketing decisions and planning*” [1]. Marketers tend to create advertisements that would be creative for the following reasons: creativity is considered as a competitive advantage [2], creativity sells [3], it is easier to remember and popular [4-6], it evokes more positive attitude to the advertisement [7] and it causes higher level of interest of a consumer [8-11]. To create such creative advertisement, it is important that the process runs optimally. We call this process creative and it has got its own patterns.

2. The creative process

We base our paper on the following approaches to the creative process: from Fišer's three-component model of creative potential of the communication and advertising agency [12], from the principals of systematic approach of H.E.

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Gruber [13] and a phase approach of the creative process analysis of G. Wallas [14] and his followers. Wallas' description of the phases of the creative process is recognized also by current experts in this field besides the fact that many of them tried to add/replenish this model of process, or tried to create models of the creative process on the basis of their own researches [15]. In spite of these efforts, most of them confirmed validity of Wallas' principle (for more information, see Fichnová [16]).

Creative process *is a sequence of thoughts and activities resulting in a creative product; it is also a process of living of internal stimulation of a subject and processing of stimuli coming from external and internal environment.* According to E. Szobiová [17], this process also results in changes of basic mental functions and formation of specific conditions connected with creativity. When describing the creative process, it is necessary to realize that although the creative process principles *are universal in the way as defined by us, its specific course can differentiate a lot in separate fields of creative industry.*

Our assumption is based on the opinion of M. Csikszentmihaly [18] that *creativity is a domain issue* – so it is strongly bound to the field, where a creative person works. For this reason, the field of creativity is also bound to the creative process. Knowing of process principles can lead to its optimizing what is particularly desired in a marketing agency.

These phases can be multi-twisted and repeated in a specific creative process. Some phases can be omitted. This should be taken into account in optimizing and planning the creative process in media and advertising agencies, where they often work on several projects at the same time – *phases connected with different tasks will coincide with each other* – a question is whether it will be only their interference or a positive transfer.

2.1. New vs. old in creative process in media communication and marketing agency

When compared with a creative process used in other fields (e.g. in Art, or partially in Science) a creative process in the marketing agency is characterized by its particularities. We present an overview of these particularities in Table 1. According to it, in optimizing a process it is possible to focus particularly on: team work management, identification of rationalization possibilities and optimizing of the time factor (it can relate both to classically understood phases and phases of the creative process - a phase of incubation offers very inspiring themes in this respect), and of course work process with using of methods supporting generation of ideas (e.g. brainstorming, etc. [19-21]).

As it is evident from the literature overview, creative process in marketing agencies (MA) and communication agencies (CA) has got *many limits*. One of them is *determined time (deadline)* until when a final product must be prepared and submitted to a client, or when media or marketing campaign prepared by creatives must be launched. Therefore, creatives working in a communication agency can perceive different forms of pressure of the surrounding during the

creative process. A relationship of a pressure, stress and performance is not expressly linear, its course is expressed by Yerkes-Dodson law; the shape of a performance curve is reversed U letter, while optimum performance is neither at low, nor at high load, but on the contrary it is in a certain middle level of stress which leads to maximum performance. It *applies in case of more difficult tasks*; course of the curve is different in case of simple tasks.

Table 1. Enumerative determination of creative process particularities in the classically understood interventions and creative process in marketing and communication agency.

No.	Classically understood creative process	Creative process in marketing and communication agency
1.	Mostly individual work	Mostly team work
2.	Usually unlimited time in advance	Limited time
3.	No accurate financial budget in advance	Accurately defined financial budget
4.	It is not defined in advance how and which criteria the final product must fulfil	Precisely defined criteria of the advertisement (based on consumer research, pre-tests, eye tracking tests, etc.)
5.	Target group is not clearly defined (sometimes it is not defined at all)	A target group for which the product/idea/service is promoted and the advertisement (or marketing communication) is created is defined
6.	Processes are not/or does not have to be defined	Defined work processes - e.g. exerted methods of simulation of ideas production
7.	Beginning of the creative process indicated from inside of a personality, autotelic	Creative process indicated from outside, directed to a purpose
8.	Spontaneous	Controlled
9.	Within the intentions of R.D. Gehlbach [22]: secretiveness - openness at the level - process - product - it is creativity opened in both dimensions	Within the intentions of R.D. Gehlbach [22]: secretiveness - openness at the level - process - product - it is creativity closed at least in one dimension

Despite the fact that this research was not related to creativity, there is an assumption that also a curve of creative performance could have the similar course, because tasks requiring creative thinking are considered as more difficult. However, a relationship of creative performance and stress is even more difficult because of many factors entering this relation. A research of M. Baer and G.R. Oldham [23] shows that a course of performance can be also *affected by support of the environment*. The authors investigated connection of a creative performance with experience of a time pressure in carrying out creative jobs and at the same time a feeling of support *versus not support of the*

environment (team work and communication). Creative performance of creatives who were not supported by their environment continually decreased under the time pressure in inverse proportion to the increasing time pressure (higher the time pressure is; lower the creative performance was carried out by the creatives). There was a connection of creative process with time pressure recorded in the form of reverse U curve in case of creatives who could rely on support of their environment.

This research is only seemingly in contradiction with description of the creative process from the author M. Csikszentmihaly [18, p. 94] who describes the creative process also in relation to arousal, while according to him, there are two extremes - very low level of arousal, it means boredom, and above-limit level of arousal evoking fear from possible lack of success of our creative effort. The curve has a linear course and a centre indicates a flow channel (the author calls experience as Flow). *Challenges*, as well as *our abilities* are very important in this process.

2.2. *Creative process optimizing*

Based on concepts of M. Rhodes and Model of Creative Sources prepared by J.S. Dacey and K.H. Lennnon [24], optimization of creative process in MA and CA should be carried out on all levels: from support and development of a creative personality and his/her skills (*personality*) [25], removal of barriers of creativity and optimizing creative climate together with control style of management, *surrounding*, through *optimization of separate phases of creation* (methods, processes) in such a way that activities will result in a creative product. A problem of preparatory phase in our conditions is discussed in the work of D. Pavlù [26]. In earlier research [27] we dealt particularly with a phase of incubation that plays a key role in creation of new solutions. There is only a little time for incubation processes, as well as for the whole process of creativity in the communication agency, and so efforts for its optimization or optimization of a whole creative process are very up-to-date (it also applies to other fields of human creativity, where a time designated for production of ideas is limited). Even standardized tests of creativity are usually designed in such a way that a subject has only limited short time for production of creative ideas (e.g. TTCT, KREATOS, and others), what is sometimes criticized with regard to known classical research that it is unusual or even distant that original ideas will appear in inventive tasks with increased time; they were not dependent on time [28]. Even activities being carried out during the breaks, *can have impact on creative process*. We deal with this issue in our work - results of the research indicate that a system of work in the marketing agency, when during incubation of the first task the creatives carried out preparation of a campaign for another client, proved to be contra-productive to the degree of creativity of a final product [28]. However, in this paper, we deal only with a part of these factors, and particularly with a way how creatives themselves reflect the process - their reflection can bring more stimuli for optimization of the process itself.

2.3. Creative process - its reflection by creatives and future creatives

A creative process is affected by many factors (see above mentioned Model of Creativity Sources of J.S. Dacey and K.H. Lennon [24]). One of them is a perception of the process by a creative himself/herself. It also gives valuable information of qualitative type regarding a character, course, supporting elements, and inhibitors of the creative production. From these reasons, we carried out qualitative type of research focused on reflection of a creative process.

2.3.1. Research questions

P1) How does a creative process take place? P2) What are positive factors that influence creatives according to subjective testimony? P3) What are negative factors that influence creatives according to subjective testimony? P4) Where/when or under what circumstances does a surveyed group of creatives get original ideas most often?

2.3.2. Research file

Respondents in our research were employees of marketing and media agencies, employees of communication departments and students of both external and internal study of marketing communication and advertising. Number and age of probands: N = 74, average age was 24 years and 4 months; the oldest respondent was 49 years and 6 months old and the youngest one was 22 years and 8 months old.

2.3.3. Research process and methods

In the form of written self-reflection, the respondents described a typical creative process (as they perceive it by themselves and as it usually happens) connected with creation of drafts advertisements within the communication or marketing agency. In addition to a written description respondents also depicted graphically their own creative process. This procedure as a method of self-expression in the Social sciences is used in other similar research projects with a relatively significant success [29-32] and as states N. Donin [33] it is as necessary as well as difficult. This method includes the aspects of *introspection* (observation of the own internal processes connected with the creating), *retrospection* (observation of the own past processes based on the recall) and *self-analysis* [32-35]. Respondents describe their own remarks about themselves and their approach to the creating. The method has several advantages: a) researcher has insight into how respondents themselves perceive the own internal processes related to their creative activities, which are not accessible to extrospection; b) respondent is not 'primed' by issues formulated in advance, for example in the questionnaire, so you can get the information that the researcher

does not presuppose, where answers are not affected by the investigator or limited by the set of options; c) it is used mainly in areas which are insufficiently explored (and creative process between them undoubtedly belongs). The disadvantage is the high subjectivity [35, 36], but if the objective of the research is to find out just how respondents perceive their own creative process, it's the appropriate risk. The respondents in our research prepared the written material at home and sent it within set time period by e-mail. We used a method of content analysis and its quantification modification [27] for analysis of the material. The unit of analysis was the written reflection and its graphical depiction. The categories of analysis were created on the basis of the items identified in the analysed reflections. Each identified item was included only into one of the categories to allow the execution of the frequency quantification.

2.3.4. Results

In their written answers of free (opened-type) character related to creative process in the marketing communication, many respondents state that they start a creative process with preparation of an environment, studying of materials, obtaining of information and inspiration. 33.33% of respondents look for inspiration on Internet and 18.51% in books. Only a negligible amount in nature, journals, films of competitors, and elsewhere. Ideal time of creation cannot be clearly specified - respondents prefer creation in different times (uniform distribution). Many of them help themselves with refreshments. Very positive method for generation of original ideas is discussion with other people (70.37%). However, this discussion must follow the phase, when the creatives thought about a task alone and in piece (85.18%). Time stress is inspiring only for 29.5% of respondents. According to creatives, negative factors include: phone calls, social network and the noise of the environment. According to the reflection, simultaneous work on several projects has negative impact on continuity, efficiency and originality of the creation process. The above stated results show that although many employees of marketing and communication agencies expect that they will deliver creative *performance within very strictly and well-defined time*, their creative process must respect these barriers very strictly - most of them consider this stress to be *a significant obstacle in their creativity* (what is identical with thesis of so called creativity barriers; this topic is discussed in more details for example in work of Fichnová [27]). Respondents also stated inadequate using of methods of ideas production (non-observance of rules) within the agencies induced by management (e.g. criticism at the time of production). Work in office or in a determined workplace is proving to be ineffective; according to reflections, none of the respondents stated office or his/her workplace as a place where he/she gets ideas and solutions. However, communication with colleagues seems to be very effective. The most often place, where creatives get ideas are particularly outside (on the street), on public transport, when driving a car, during a lunch, sport activity or in other activities. Large part of respondents presented their creative process in a graphic way.

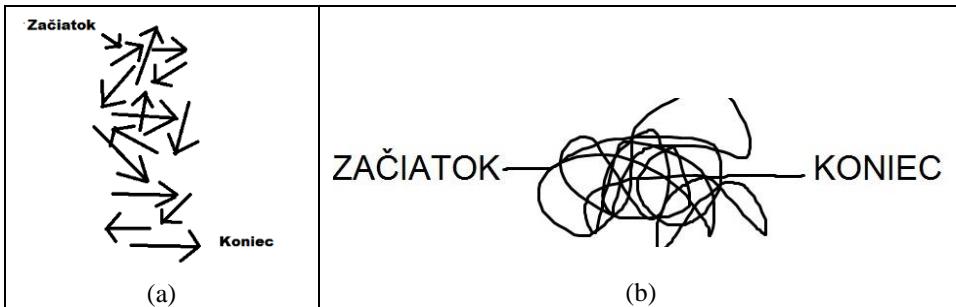


Figure 1. Woman: (a) an employee of marketing department of a development company, 26 years and 2 months; (b) a student of external study program, 24 years and 3 months.
Text written in both figures: 'start' and 'end'.

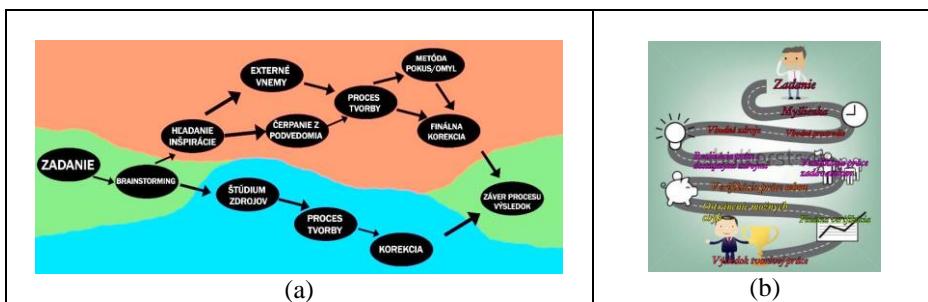


Figure 2. (a) Man, a graphic artist and 3D designer, 22 years and 11 months;
(b) Woman, a graphic designer, 24 years and 8 months.

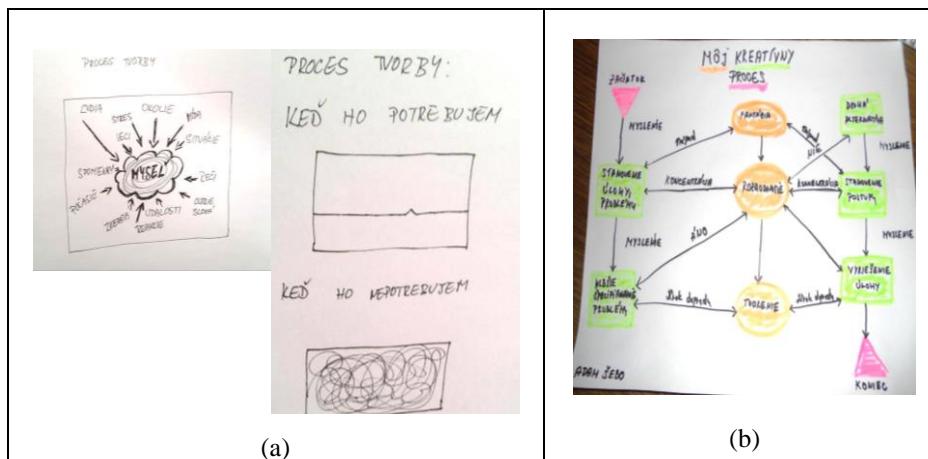


Figure 3. (a) Woman, department of marketing communication, a visual merchandiser, 22 years and 2 months; (b) Man, a student of external form of study, 25 years and 8 months. Text in the figures (form left): central in cloud "my mind", on second picture "creative process when I need something create (a straight line), when I do not need (scrawl)", and third picture: "My Creative Process" with all stages in detail.

Examples of schemes - self-reflection of a creative process by respondents from marketing agencies, departments of marketing communication and students of marketing communication and advertisement from own research are presented in Figures 1-3. Their reflections show the complexity and inter-individual variability of creative processes (some subjects perceive the creative process as a dynamic and chaotic one – see Figures 1 and 3a, others as a systematic one with the exact continuity of definable steps which can be also named – see Figures 2 and 3b). And they are not only useful for proposals of optimization of creativity process, but also inspiration for further investigation of this phenomenon.

The reflections bring also a new look on the individual components of creative process and suggest that the models and processes valid in the classic approach to the process (see Table 1) are not applicable in the conditions of the marketing or communication agencies without modification and specialisation.

3. Conclusions

The creative process in the marketing agency (MA) and media communication agency (CA) has got its domain particularities as follows:

- Creative process in MA and CA is different also in terms of the system: problem - process - product; it means it is creative although there is no divergence in all three stages in Gehbach's understanding of creativity model. This was demonstrated in Table 1 where we compare the classic creative process and creative process in the advertising agency, and we pointed out the application for the specific conditions of advertising agencies.
- Middle level of arousal/stress is suitable for optimum performance and course of a creative process (as shown by the reflections of respondents).
- Creative brief is important part of a creative process in the marketing agency (as was reflected by our respondents – it imposes the primary conditions for the induction of the creative process – and its 'limits' – topic, direction, target group, environment, etc.).
- Incubation forms significant part of the creative process both in marketing and communication agencies and it can be optimized. Respondents stated relatively often the 'postpone of the work' and 'relax', by which they unknowingly induced their process of incubation, typically followed by the phase of illumination – respondents stated that their resolutions and ideas appeared in the time of relax (shower, walking, lunch, etc.). The length of this phase was different by the respondents - hence the organization of work in marketing and communication agency should respect these differences (which in the reflections of respondents happens only in a small number of agencies, 'breaks' are typically set uniformly and in advance, not to individual needs).

- OA reflections of a creative process showed that agencies do not always use methods of stimulation of idea production in compliance with the rules in practice (which is also mentioned in a number of reflections, where respondents negatively perceived the anti-creative leadership of their boss in the agency).
- According to creatives, time stress and simultaneous work on several projects could be contra-productive (respondents quite often critically evaluated their impact on their own creativity).

The above stated refers to a fact that the creative process is very complex and has domain specificities and can be optimized (for example the timetable, inclusion of relaxation, established methods and leadership on the part of superiors and, in particular respect for the individual variability of each creative). I would like to express my confidence that besides a need to connect theory with practice in the direction of transfer of practice into the content of education, also a process ensuring transfer of scientific knowledge into a good practice is necessary.

Acknowledgement

This paper was supported by the grant KEGA 017UKF-4/2015 ‘Ambient communication as a new alternative of marketing communication in the states of Visegrad Group - preparation of a modern course book intended for universities’ and the grant KEGA 035UKF-4/2015 ‘Socialization and educational functions of marketing discourse as a reflection of media culture’.

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