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Frith, K., Chen, J., and Chung, M. National Technological University, Sinapore and Institute of Technical Education, Singapore. Advertising Practioners' Educational Prerequisites: Differentiating The Needs Of Creatives From Non Creatives

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ABSTRACT

Singapore's advertising industry is one of the clusters identified as an important growth area in the country's creative economy. The growth of the media industry, in particular the advertising industry has thus added urgency to call for higher institutions in Singapore to help nurture a pool of creative manpower by providing a well-rounded and comprehensive relevant education on advertising. An effective education policy is therefore a prime instrument in facilitating developments in this industry. A joint research initiative was conducted with the participation of a few advertising companies in Singapore. These included both creative agencies as well as media buying firms. The research served to examine the formal education needs of both creative and non-creative advertising professionals.

From the study, we found that the education requirements for creative and non-creative education are similar, but not identical. Industry practitioners viewed that practical exposure are important for both groups of professionals. However, for creative education especially, this aspect took an additional importance as the most notable and common responses were the invitation of industry practitioners to conduct classes, undertaking real life projects and obtaining a global perspective via the engagement of renowned international advertising professionals or going for overseas internships. The study served as a springboard to a more exhaustive study in the advertising industry within Singapore as well as in comparison over a cross-section of countries, providing an insight into trends, different supporting factors and conditions for creativity in relation to the advertising industry.

INTRODUCTION

The growth of the media industry, in particularly the advertising industry in the recent years has added the urgency for higher institutions in Singapore to provide a comprehensive and relevant education on advertising. It is also one of the key industries identified by the Government as an important growth area. Tan and Gopinathan (2000) state that an effective education policy is a major factor in nurturing social economic developments through the development of human creativity and skills.

Education for advertising professionals has not developed as rapidly as expected in Singapore. The advertising industry must identify the rapidly changing trends in the market as well as identify the new factors that influence consumers. Higher Educational Institutions providing courses on advertising must also take the heeds of these market changes. An effective education policy is therefore a prime instrument in facilitating developments in this industry.

A joint research initiative was conducted with the intent of understanding the advertising industry by getting invaluable insights provided by both the creative and media planning companies. The research served to examine the formal education needs of both creative and non-creative advertising professionals. The study involved interviewing these executives based on a survey questionnaire. Analysis of the date was conducted by quantitative means via descriptive statistics.
Definition of Creativity

"Creativity is the thought process that gives rise to out-of-the box solving techniques, creating a unique approach to questions that will almost certainly result in answers that differ from the others. What stands out is that answers though unconventional, are related to the core issue at hand." Chen (2005)

The Wikipedia Encyclopedia defines creativity (or creativeness) as (1) a mental process involving the generation of new ideas or concepts, or (2) simply the act of making something new. The definitions highlight two aspects of creativity. First there must be something new, imaginative, different, or unique – also generally referred to as 'divergence'. Smith and Yang (2004) states that the divergent item produced must solve a problem or have some type of 'relevance'. Creativity in advertising usually possesses two characteristics: divergence and relevance or effectiveness. The 'product' or response will be assessed as creative to the extent that it is novel and appropriate, useful or valuable response to the task at hand (Amabile 1983).

Table 1: Conceptualization of ad creativity in chronological order

Source	Divergence factor(s)	Relevance factor(s)
Jackson and Messick (1965)	Unusualness	Appropriateness
Sobel and Rothenberg (1980)	Originality	Value
Amabile (1983)	Novelty	Appropriate, useful, valuable

Creative Economy in Singapore

Florida (2002) states that countries are turning from industrialized to knowledge economies with human creativity. With technological progress, organizational changes and intensified global competition, there is a creation of more 'thinking and creative' jobs.

According to Ministry of Information, Communication and the Arts (MICA), Singapore, global spending on media and entertainment exceeded US$1 trillion in 2001 and is expected to grow to US$1.4 trillion in 2006 with a projected compound annual rate of 5.2 percent (MDA 2002). The local media industry, covering broadcasting, cinemas, publishing and printing services, music recording, digital and IT-related content services, had an annual turnover of $10 billion, contributing 1.56 percent to Singapore's GDP and employing 38,000 people. MICA and its partners had drawn up a Creative Industries Development Strategy, which is intended to spearhead development of the Creative industries cluster embracing the arts, design and media. In order to strengthen the creative industries clusters, a total of $200 million will be invested to enable industry players to create new economic value through innovative differentiation of products and services.

Under the Media 21, initiatives that are a part of the Creative Industries Development strategy, MICA has six strategic fronts to address. The key approach is to capitalize on Singapore's existing strengths to level up and leapfrog our competitors. One important thrust related to the subject of this paper is an initiative to augment media talents through working with various tertiary institutions, providing media training at the universities and polytechnics levels.

The landscape of advertising education

The greatest challenge taking place in the field of advertising education is that there are so many changes in the industry with it been constantly redefined, re-mediated, and reassessed by the market and culture at large. Educators need to constantly redefine and assess their expertise and approach to the field due to the fundamental shifts. In the best scenario, this element may encourage phenomenal innovation and growth of knowledge. However in the worst case, such changes may also lead to confusion, mediocrity in teaching and research, and a professorial cohort losing their common vision of the field (Department of Advertising Faculty, the University of Texas

by Austin, 2000). Most advertising school's curriculum has two areas of emphasis for advertising majors: Management and Creative. The Management track teaches strategic planning, ad media placement, research, and campaign promotional idea generation. The Creative track is designed for students interested in the written and visual components of the advertising strategy, including copywriting, print and broadcast production, traffic and creative services.

This thus leads in to the prevalent issue of where an advertising program should be conducted. According to the study conducted by Lee and Ryan (2005), 39.2% of the respondents preferred a journalism/communication program, followed by 25.5% respondents who preferred independent/stand alone department in a university. 21.6% of the respondents prefer the program to be housed in a business/marketing program. The study also has another interesting point. 51% of their respondents also feel that securing a Bachelor's degree in advertising is at least "somewhat valuable" in preparing them for a successful career in advertising. The findings however disclosed that there are at least 49% who don't see advertising education as an important element in ensuring career success in the advertising profession.

Advertising Education in Singapore

In order to prepare and build media exposure and experience for aspiring media professionals in their career, Media Development Authority (MDA), Singapore had introduced the Media Education scheme and Capability development scheme. This scheme aims to provide a rigorous and comprehensive education and training for existing students and professionals in the media industry. MDA also works with the Ministry of Education to embed media training into school curriculum through creative writing and drawing at pre-school, primary and secondary levels. Focusing on the development of the software will drive the nation growth to the next level and ensure that Singapore will become a truly global city. MICA will also advance Singapore's creative capacity with the establishment of the Arts school in 2007. The school will nurture a new generation of talent who use technology to deploy creativity on top of a strong arts foundation covering visual, performing and literally arts. (Media 21 2003). Other initiatives such as the Creative Community Singapore and the Creative Youth exchange are support which seeks to facilitate the expression of creativity and ideas from creative talents.

One of the initiatives launched by the government to ensure economically competitiveness and the transition to a knowledge economy is one that focuses on university admission criteria. The committee on University admission system recommended in its 1999 report that the admission criteria move beyond considering only the results obtained in the General Certificate of Education (Advanced) level examination. Instead student's results in the scholastic assessment test, their results in project work at school, and their participation in extra curricular activities will also be considered.

Research Questions and Method

To investigate the needs of the creative versus the non creative, the following research questions were generated:

- What do industry practitioners view as a well-rounded education in the creative area of advertising?
- What do industry practitioners view as a well-rounded education in the non-creative area of advertising?
- What more can higher education institutions do in cultivating prospective advertising professionals?

A questionnaire survey was designed via the online survey monkey (http://www.surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=702921737299) and conducted with the 4As Member Agencies.(Association of Accredited Advertising Agents Singapore). A solicitation email was sent to 50 agencies in this list, which represented at least 20 of the world's major international agencies and over 40 local advertising agencies. The head of the agencies then send the email to his or her staff to conduct the survey. Surveymonkey.com (2006).

The respondents included those in the creative and non creative fields of advertising. Those in the creative departments included copywriters, designers, art directors, producers and creative directors. Practitioners classified as “non-creative”, comprised of professionals in client servicing, public relations, media planning and research. A total of 83 individual responses were received for the study.

FINDINGS

Background of Respondents

Of the 83 practitioners who completed the survey, 38.1% (N=32) of them were male, whilst the other 61.4% (N=51) were female. 45.8% were within 21 to 30 years old (N=38). The other 36.1% (N=30) were within the 31 to 40 age range, with the final 17.8% (N=15) aged above 40 years old.

9.6% (N=8) of the respondents came from education backgrounds at the Secondary School level or lower. 37.3% (N=31) of them were either from the Diploma or Junior College level. 44.6% (N=37) of the respondents held degrees, while the other 8.4% (N=7) possessed graduate degrees. 65% (N=54) received their formal education in Singapore, whilst 34.9% (N=29) were educated overseas. Of the 54 respondents who received tertiary education, 44.4% studied a communications major, 20.4% of them majored in design and the remaining 35.2% of them came from a business-related background.

43.4% of the respondents (N=36) were currently in creative-related work, whilst the other 56.6% (N=47) of the respondents were non-creative practitioners. 36.1% (N=30) of the respondents held Management positions and higher, whilst the other 63.9% (N=53) were either creative professionals or were executives in their respective organizations.

Comparison of Perceptions by Different Age Groups

A majority of the respondents who were aged 21 to 30 years old felt that it is valuable (42.1%, N=16) for Creative Professionals to own a Bachelor Degree. However, it seems that with experience, the perception on the value of the degree diminishes. The bulk of the respondents who were above 31 years old felt that a degree will not valuable at all [31 to 40 years old (36.7%, N= 11) and 40 years old and above (46.7%, N=7)]. This could be due to their perception that other educational aspects might be more useful than the degree itself.

Regarding the importance of bachelor degree for Non-Creative Professionals, a majority of the respondents across the different age groups felt that it is valuable for them to have a degree. There was little variation between the three age groups who felt that having a degree is valuable for people looking to work in a non-creative area of advertising. One possible reason could be that the respondents felt that the degree would useful in assisting them to achieve better results due to the nature of their jobs, which might possibly need more theoretical grounding than creative work.

Majority of the respondents across the three age groups felt that it is important for creative professionals to enter creative-related competitions. This could be due to the reason that the competitions will allow them to receive more exposure and to compare their works with their peers. This point was especially emphasized by respondents from age group of 40 years and above (73.3%, N = 11). Furthermore, this group valued this aspect of education more than the other two age groups.

Similarly, the majority of the respondents across the three age group felt that it is valuable for potential creative professionals to have a completed portfolio. From the data, it could also be seen that more professionals aged 31 years old (Between 31 to 40 years old [(43.3%, N = 13) and 40 years old and above (53.3%, N = 8)] and above felt that it was very valuable for potential creative professionals to have a completed portfolio.

Comparison of Perceptions by Creative and Non Creative Professionals

We felt it was also important to understand the perceptions of creative and non-creative professionals and carried out an analysis of the data based on there two groups. A majority of the

Creative professionals (55.6%, N = 20) felt that it is not valuable to own a Bachelor Degree. However the Non-Creative Professionals perceived the value of a Degree as important for Creative Professionals (41.7%, N = 20) to be successful in their line of work. This might be because they could have related their own experiences and perceptions in the non-creative field. However, they are not likely to understand the needs of a degree as well as the creative professionals themselves.

The bulk of the respondents from both Creative (63.9%, N = 23) and Non-Creative fields (60.4%, N = 29) felt that it is important for potential Non-Creative Professionals to possess a relevant Degree. One possible reason could be because the respondents perceived that knowledge and skills in Non-Creative field (e.g. media buying, media planning and Public Relations) had to be learnt and were valuable in their future line of work.

From the statistics, we can see the difference in importance of creative related competition between creative professionals and non- creative professionals. There was a larger percentage of the Creative Professionals (72.2%, N = 26) than Non-Creative Professionals (41.7%, N = 20) who felt that it is very valuable for a person to take part in such competitions, possibly because they could assist the person in the creative career. This could be due to the practical exposure gained by them which will be useful before formally entering the Creative Field.

Majority of the Creative Professionals also appreciate the importance of a completed portfolio more than the Non Creative Professionals. However, the large number of respondents from the Non-Creative Professionals (50%, N = 24) who felt neutral or feel that a completed portfolio would not be useful, might be in the creative field, and thus may not be able to understand the usefulness of a completed portfolio. On the other hand, professionals already in Creative field, may be more able to appreciate the value of a completed portfolio, due to their first hand experiences.

Comparison of Perceptions between the Degree Holders and the Non Degree Holders

We also felt that it might be interesting to study the perception of professional who were degree holders versus the non degree holders and examine if there were any key differences. Majority of the Degree Holders (70.5%, N = 31) were either neutral or positive about the value of degree for Creative Professionals. However, most of the Non-Degree Holders (50%, N = 20) had negative perception of the usefulness of a degree for Creative Professionals. This could be because that this group of respondents did not own a degree themselves, and thus do not see the need to own one, especially if they are already successful in their respective careers. Alternatively, they might feel that owning a degree might not be very useful in their line of work.

The respondents gave very different answers as compared to the earlier observation. A majority of the respondents, both Degree Holders (66%, N = 29) and Non-Degree Holders (57.5%, N = 23) felt that it is important for Non-Creative Professionals to own a bachelor degree. This could be due to the nature of work and the path of progression for non creative professionals which might be different from the creative professionals.

Most of the respondents, Degree and Non Degree holders included, felt that it will be valuable for creative professionals to participate in creative-related competition. However, there was a comparatively bigger percentage of respondents, Degree Holders (18.2%, N = 8) versus (2.5%, N = 1) Non Degree Holders, who rated the participation of such competitions negatively.

Both Degree and Non Degree holders mostly agreed that it is valuable for creative professionals to have completed portfolios prior to joining the creative profession, with 70.5% of the Degree holders (N = 31) and 70% of the Non-Degree holders having a positive rating on that aspect of education. There was also no significant difference in the distribution of responses between the two groups.

Comparison of Perceptions by Overseas and Locally Educated Professionals

Lastly, to obtain further insights for the study, we also tried to analyse whether there were any differences in the perception of locals and foreign graduates. It can also be seen that the locally educated professionals felt that it is valuable for Creative Professionals to have a degree, whereas overseas-educated professionals were more neutral about this aspect of education. This could be

because the locally educated professionals were more conscious of the need of a formal degree. This is based on the general Singaporean belief that a basic degree is a prerequisite to a good career. Furthermore, a significant portion of the overseas-educated professionals could be expatriates. This point could not be identified, as the nationality of the respondents was not asked in the original survey itself.

Majority of the respondents (both Overseas Graduates (53.3%, N = 16) and Local Graduates (66.7%, N = 36)) felt positively in possessing a degree. This could also be because the respondents perceive that the main foundation in the Non-Creative field (e.g. media buying, media planning and Public Relations) could be gained from getting a degree. This is necessary before the potential professionals benefit and appreciate the relevance of hands-on experience. From the data, we could see that a higher percentage of the respondents who were Overseas Graduates felt that was a stronger need for would-be creative professionals to take part in Creative Competition as compared to the local graduates (66.7% to 48.1%). This could be due to the differences in the foreign education pedagogy as well as a different point of view gained from overseas exposure.

Aspects of Improvement on the Delivery of Advertising Programs

The industry practitioners interviewed felt that students should also work towards improving their employability whilst studying, before seeking employment in the industry. Amongst the steps that they could take would include seeking internships in their area of interest (N=70). Developing of their own creative portfolios was ranked second (N=49). This was closely followed by participating in industry competitions (N=40). The total number of responses was more than the 83 industry practitioners who were interviewed, as the respondents were asked to tick all options that they found applicable. Some other open-ended responses were also provided by the interviewees. These suggestions include:

Description	Frequency
Internship is important	2
Develop personality and character	2
Getting a mentor for guidance	1
Understand and be involved in creative works	2
Gaining relevant experiences overseas/ locally	4
Having passion and the willingness to learn	5
Integrate marketing knowledge with advertising	1

Respondents, when asked to on how to better train future advertising professionals, felt that adopting a multi-disciplinary approach towards advertising was the way to go (N=66). The second most important aspect was the provision of internships (N=65). 36 of the responses were directed towards having advertising-centric courses (Refer to Table 19). Other responses include:

Description	Frequency
Getting experienced industry practitioner to teach	3
Specializing in a certain area of advertising	1
Getting regular guest speakers from industry	2
Integrate academic and industry creative works; more realistic curriculum	4
Focus more on new media	1
Encourage creative thinking	2
Focus on more practical aspect	3
Understanding consumer behavior and market trends	1
Have longer and different Internship/ overseas Internship program	3
Tie up with industry partners for projects	2

Relative Importance of the Different Aspects of Creative and Non-Creative Advertising Education

Based on the feedback of the respondents, it was found that a degree was relatively more important for the non-creative aspect of advertising, as compared to the creative aspect of advertising. For non-creative individuals in the company, a correlation analysis was performed to determine the relationship between the value of school experience in the respondents' job and the value of possessing a non-creative degree. It was found that respondents, who felt that possessing a degree was valuable, also felt that their school experience was relevant to their current job responsibilities in the non-creative field of advertising.

Ranking	Mean
1	Internship (4.1)
2	Non-creative degree (3.6)

The determination of the relative importance of the non-creative degree and internship can be determined by the mean. From the rankings, it can be seen that professionals who had gone for internships, found it slightly more useful than the degree. This can be seen from the higher mean that the internship has, as both were ranked the same when the median was used.

Ranking	Mean
1	Internship (4.1)
2	Portfolio (4.0)
3	Competition (3.6)
4	Creative Degree (2.8)

For creative professionals, we found that when measuring their relative importance based on the mean, we can see that Internship is ranked first, followed by Portfolio, Competition and Creative Degree.

CONCLUSION

Limitations of the Study

Although the study has highlighted important issues pertaining to the knowledge transfer and learning approach for the higher education institutions to integrate into their respective course curricular, the study is not without its limitations. Industry players interviewed were selected only based from those who had replied positively to the invitation to participate in the study.

The next limitation is that more non-creative professionals answered the questionnaire rather than creative practitioners themselves. This was due to a two-fold reason: the organizational structure of these companies, which meant more non-creative staff in particular clients servicing as well as the creative professionals at these firms have a comparatively higher workload as compared to the non-creative employees as a resultant effect of the first reason. Finally, due to the relatively small sample of respondents, we are unable to generalize the findings of the views of the entire advertising industry in Singapore.

Research Implications

The education requirements for creative and non-creative education are similar, but are not identical. For example, a basic degree is more important for people intending to enter the non-creative as compared to creative areas in advertising. There are also other aspects that constitute up a positive schooling experience, besides solely a tertiary education. For students who aspire to succeed in a non-creative area in advertising, the important aspects in order of priority are:

- A relevant non-creative degree like communications or business:
- An internship for students to obtain an insight on the workings of company in the advertising industry.

On the other hand, the attributes required for a well-rounded education to groom creative professionals were comparably different. They are:

- An internship in order to gain invaluable on-the-job experience;
- A completed portfolio to demonstrate to perspective employers one's creative potential and learn the design creation process first hand; P
- anticipating in advertising competitions
- A creative-related degree

These points refer to informal education, as they are not done during the normal classroom hours. More importantly, they reflect a practical learning approach, in which industry practitioners view is the most important to creative education. In the open-ended section of the survey questionnaire, the most notable and common responses were the invitation of industry practitioners to conduct classes, undertaking real life industry projects and obtaining a global perspective via the engagement of renowned international advertising professionals or going for overseas internships, if possible.

As previously mentioned, we also found that most of the interviewed respondents did not have the privilege of undergoing an internship (63.1%). For those who had an internship, their attachment duration was between 1 to 3 months (54.8%). However, they felt that to benefit more from the attachment experience, the duration should be extended to between 4 to 6 months (67.9%).

These points summarize and try to provide the rationale to why a degree is perceived be industry practitioners as more important to non-creative as compared to creative professionals. Schools should also ensure that a formal internship program is in place for students to receive on-the-job training as well as learn skills that are not-commonly taught in schools. Examples of these include project management and the actual brainstorming process in the idea-generation stage of the creative process. These were amongst the feedback and suggestions that was provided by the industry practitioners. The university could also take a multi-disciplinary approach towards the creative process. This includes other areas of design such as multi-media production, which includes forms of new media.

From the perspectives of different groups of professionals (such as younger vs. older professionals, overseas vs. locally educated and degree vs. non-degree holders), managers will be able to have an overview picture based on the relative importance that they attach to the different aspects of both Creative and Non-Creative advertising education. In particular, the findings derived from Creative and. Non-Creative Professionals are especially useful for Singapore educationists when catering advertising related courses to future batches of students.

It is recommended that the current study serve as a springboard to a more exhaustive study in the advertising industry within Singapore as well as in comparison over a cross-section of countries. This study's analysis gives an insight into the trends, different supporting factors and conditions for creativity in relation to the advertising industry. Thus further analysis on the other areas of Singapore's Creative economy (for example art and theatre) can be carried out in tandem with other countries so as to assist Singapore develop a unique identity and nurture its creative manpower within a education system that best suits its needs.

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