

The Role of Creativity in Marketing

The Power of Divergence:

How Brands Use Creativity in Branded Content & Entertainment

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Abstract

Creativity is a truly essential skill in business (Yang & Smith, 2004, p.935; El-Murad & West, 2004, p.188; Till & Baack, 2005, p.47; Smith et al., 2007, p.819; Smith et al., 2008, p.47; Yang & Smith, 2009, p.935; IBM, 2010; Shirkhodae & Rezaee, 2014, p.591; Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014, p.176; Baack et al., 2016, p.169; Rosengren et al., 2020, p.39). Nowadays, this is becoming more and more visible. However, the main elements of it and what it is, remain still unclear. Therefore, this research focused on the distinctive nature of advertising creativity within branded content & entertainment. By analyzing award-winning campaigns from the 2022 & 2023 Clio Awards, this study went beyond one definition of creativity and showed that creativity is not only one thing.

This study took a qualitative approach, where both a directed content and a visual analysis was used to go beyond the explicit message of the advertisements. This in-depth exploration allowed for the decoding of implicit meanings and the identification of techniques used to engage audiences. Smith's et al. (2007) model on advertising creativity and more specifically, divergence provided a framework for analyzing the main creativity elements (p.830).

The results of this research revealed that there are three main elements of creativity that play a huge role. Originality, synthesis, and artistic value are the key elements in creating creative branded content. Marketers, advertisers, etc. should be aware of these elements and explore them in-depth. Moreover, the main recurring themes such as raising awareness to social & environmental issues also played a significant role and created a deeper connection with viewers. Therefore, "Impactful" could be an extension of the Smith et al. (2007) model and be the sixth element of creativity (p.830).

Lastly, this research highlighted the effectiveness of qualitative methods, which in comparison to quantitative methods, are more able to capture the richness and complexity of branded content, specifically in portraying the innovative elements that contributed to the award-winning as well as successful advertising campaigns.

KEYWORDS: *Marketing, Creativity, Branded Content & Entertainment, Advertising*

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1. Introduction

In today's world, the traditional ad formats we are used to are constantly competing for audience attention. With attention spans that are shorter than ever, traditional ads are struggling to break through the noise. To stand out from the crowd, brands need to differentiate themselves and embrace creativity. Whilst traditional advertising is not becoming boring and downplayed, new marketing tools are emerging, and Branded Content and Entertainment (BC&E) has become a powerful strategy that offers a more engaging and captivating way for brands to connect with their consumers.

To begin with, many researchers consider creativity as one of the most crucial skills, components & tools in marketing and for a company's future success, as it increases the effectiveness of online advertisements (Yang & Smith, 2004, p. 935; El-Murad & West, 2004, p. 188; Till & Baack, 2005, p. 47; Smith et al., 2007, p. 819; Smith et al., 2008, p. 47; Yang & Smith, 2009, p. 935; IBM, 2010; Shirkhodae & Rezaee, 2014, p.591; Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014, p. 176; Baack et al., 2016, p. 169; Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 39; Sab'ah et al., 2022, p. 166). In the constantly evolving marketing field, there is an increasing use of online advertising and marketing, which can highly saturate the market. It is predicted that online media consumption will increase and grow even further in the next few years. According to Moldovan et al. (2019), digital media consumption will be over 80% in 2030 (p. 102). This is quite high and needs to be taken into consideration. The increasing popularity of online marketing not only offers many opportunities, but it also is a huge challenge for marketers. While it offers wider reach and increases brand awareness, it also bombards consumers with content, making it a struggle to grab their attention and spark some engagement.

Moreover, due to the growing online advertising field, people are being constantly exposed to ads, branded content, and new information online, and that is why companies must prioritize creative, unique & captivating selling propositions to stand out and win over customers. In general, creativity and advertising are two concepts that are typically seen as going truly well together. However, Turnbull & Wheeler (2017) describe that the real meaning behind creativity in advertising and how it can be applied still remains unclear (p. 177). Also, in their article the authors state that the concept of creativity is not clearly defined.

It is significant to remember that creativity is something that depends on the individual and remains in the eye of the beholder. Therefore, we need to keep in mind that this can make the concept a lot more complicated and difficult to understand. Rosengren et al. (2020) described advertising creativity as something that is used as a synonym with "originality" but has stronger effects (p. 40). Of course, the authors explain that the meaning behind creativity goes beyond that. According to Smith & Yang (2004), in order to achieve creativity, they believe that divergence is truly important, but relevance should be also taken into account (p. 36).

To stand out from the crowd in the industry, many agencies try to show off their skills and creative minds by taking part in Creativity Festivals. For instance, some of the most prestigious and well-known awards in the world are the “Lions” or the “Clio” Award. Winning one of these awards shows creativity, success, professionalism, uniqueness and respect in the industry (Tippins & Kunkel; 2006, p. 3; Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 164; Choi et al., 2018, p. 153; Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 39).

Thus, it is pivotal to understand not only the importance but also the vagueness of the meaning of creativity. What is more, it would serve a great purpose to investigate this topic further, and contribute to the marketing field. Therefore, it is significant to specifically dive deeper into the role of advertising creativity in branded content and entertainment. Belch and Belch (2013) argued that a successful advertising message heavily relies on creativity in the message creation and development phase (p. 395). The authors determined that creativity is and will be crucial in the future of marketing communications. Also, Moldovan et al., (2019) mention that success of viral campaigns is usually due to ad creativity (p. 104). Therefore, it can be concluded that advertising, specifically BC&E and creativity go hand in hand.

Moreover, it is expected that by 2025, the global branded content market will hit \$402 billion worldwide (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 1). With the constant disruptions that businesses have to face, this research helps to explore creative approaches so viewers can have a unique brand experience.

Creativity is not only essential, but it is also the driving force behind brand differentiation and has a positive influence on the brand and it improves brand reputation, viewing intentions, likability, purchase intent, positive affect and in general, effectiveness (Smith et al, 2009, p. 946). This shows that it is truly important to research this topic more. Furthermore, industry experts see creativity as a key driver of advertising success, highlighting its ability to boost effectiveness, efficiency, and profitability, ranking second compared to market share and its impact on long-term brand value (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2017, p. 176). Therefore, it is one of the key elements for success as it can have a direct effect on a firm’s performance.

1.1 Academic & Societal Relevance

Previous studies, such as Saputro and Prihandono (2018) have emphasized the need for further research on creativity in advertising, for instance, explorations that go beyond traditional media like television (p. 208). As we, consumers, spend more time online, especially on the internet (Sheehan & Morrison, 2009) the study of creativity in online advertising becomes even more important (p. 40). There has been research on advertising creativity, but it mainly focused on traditional aspects like persuasion, ideation, memorability, and emotional impact (Ghaffari et al., 2019, p. 243; Sab’ah et al., 2022, p. 166). Many researchers have investigated the dimensions of advertising creativity, and for example, it has been defined as original, artistic, that creates a

“effective surprise” and a “shock of recognition (Amabile, 1996, p. 21) as well as meaningful, emotional and novel (Ang & Low, 2000, p. 835). Moreover, studies have explored how storytelling can have a positive impact and improve the creative effectiveness of ads (Kim et al., 2016, p. 311). Good storytelling should have a clear context and purpose, be universal, simple and have a good structure (Peters, 2018). Also, using humor in advertising can be seen as an innovative approach, because it aims to differentiate a brand through laughter, while standing out from the competition (Olenski, 2018, para. 5). Furthermore, Till & Baack (2005) mention that it is important to investigate the features of the award-winning ads to see if they are more novel (p. 55). They also mention that creative ads may be differentiating, regardless of novelty. Despite existing studies on creativity in marketing, there is a lack of in-depth research on creativity in branded content & entertainment online, as to other forms of advertising. That is why it is significant to explore this topic further. As already mentioned, creativity is increasingly seen as a critical driver of the performance of a company now and in the future, however, there still exists a major gap in the empirical research on the specific role it plays. Since creativity is an interesting term, this research will contribute to establishing a better and clearer picture of what creativity is, the main elements of creativity as well as how it is portrayed in marketing, specifically, branded content and entertainment. Therefore, this research aims to fill the gap by focusing on the main creativity elements and how advertising creativity is portrayed in award winning branded content and entertainment. This study aims to address this, providing valuable and industry-specific insights as it connects theoretical concepts with real-world applications.

In today’s fast-paced world, it is essential to understand the societal impact of creativity in advertising but more especially, in branded content. There is already much research that focuses on advertising but very little when it comes to advertising creativity in branded content & entertainment. As already mentioned, it is a crucial tool for marketing managers that improves the effectiveness of online advertisements. Moreover, it is known that ad creativity plays a pivotal role for successful brands. The field of marketing has increasingly recognized the influence of creativity on consumer behavior and brand perception, yet specific investigations into the distinct role of advertising creativity in branded content are limited. Therefore, I would like to contribute to the field and provide a unique and distinct perspective.

Finally, this study is of high social relevance because the results can contribute to an in-depth and thorough understanding of this topic of advertising creativity in branded content & entertainment, offering valuable knowledge and strategic insights for managers, brands, marketing companies and online advertising departments on how they can utilize creativity in branded content to build strong brand awareness, create positive brand attitudes, improve overall reputation and maintain high brand loyalty. Managers and advertising companies, etc. can implement the outcomes of this study in their own campaigns and branded content they create. Lastly, by understanding the elements of creativity

in branded content, viewers and potential customers can become simply more aware consumers. They can learn to identify genuine storytelling from the manipulative marketing tactics that are well-known, and this allows them to make more informed decisions about products and support brands that share their values. This clearly builds a stronger connection and foundation between the consumer and the brand.

1.2 Research Question

While the ad creativity theory by Smith et al. (2007) emphasizes both divergence and relevance for creative advertising, this study will mainly focus on the main elements of divergence within branded content & entertainment, specifically for Clio award-winning ads (p. 830). Focusing on both creativity pillars is work that would require more time but unfortunately, the time limit constricts me from going into both divergence and relevance in-depth. Relevance is also significant, however, analyzing it might be more appropriate for a separate study that could focus on brand impact or audience reception. More importantly, what we need to take into consideration, is the fact that branded content & entertainment for Clio Award winners, compared to traditional ads, already have a built-in layer of relevance by nature, as they connect with audiences through storytelling or interactive experiences, inherently establishing a baseline level of relevance to the brand, its message and values. Making a deep dive into the aspect of “relevance” would be less suited for my current research objective. Therefore, in my analysis, I will focus on how these ads push boundaries and achieve creative excellence through divergence. By closely examining the five key elements of divergence (originality, flexibility, elaboration, synthesis, and artistic value) and how they are portrayed in branded content & entertainment, I believe that I can gain a more objective, consistent and comprehensive understanding of the main creative elements used within the chosen Clio award-winners.

Therefore, my research question is:

“What are the main elements that define creativity in Branded Content & Entertainment of Clio Award Winners?”

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Technological Change

To begin with, there has been a technological change happening for the last 30 years, which can be described as convergence (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 2). According to the author, convergence refers to the blurring of boundaries between different media industries. This is relevant as we are bombarded by information and advertising in multi-channels everyday. Also, the same type of information can come through many mediums, which is another reason for which attention is weakened and ads become boring and simply unattractive. This phenomenon is driven by the growing desire to have content accessible. What is more, consumers are no longer glued to a single screen, but they can easily switch and migrate across different devices as well as platforms to look for content that they want. It is the interdependence of communication systems and internet access that made large companies lose their control of broadcasting (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 3). Therefore, consumers can choose, change and block the content that they are consuming daily. Moreover, it is known that with the rise of participatory culture, it empowered and transformed consumers from passive receivers of information to active creators and collaborators, therefore, fostering a dynamic learning environment. We, as participants, understand that knowledge is dynamic and ever evolving, and therefore, the interaction becomes a driving force for sharing as well as expanding our overall collective understanding. That is why, there needs to be a change in the advertising approach to get the attention from viewers.

This digital revolution paradigm is an integration of the digital and analog world and clearly changed how we consume content and the way that brands also communicate with us through many forms of entertainment. Karson & Korgaonkar (2001) describe that online advertising is way more flexible than doing it the traditional way (p. 54). Lastly, advertising online gives the opportunity to use text and/or audio, be interactive, and available 24/7 as compared to traditional advertising.

2.2 Branded Content & Entertainment

As literature stipulates, Branded Content and Entertainment became two different categories. While there is a distinction between Branded Content and Branded Entertainment, this study will analyze them together. The reason is because the Clio Awards groups them under the single category “Branded Entertainment & Content” (Clio, 2024).

2.2.1 Branded Content

Over the last few years, branded content has become an alternative or complement to traditional forms of advertising (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 178; Schaffer, 2024). Traditionally, advertising felt more like a one-way street of shouting messages, which eventually

leads to consumer scepticism. To regain the trust that got lost, communication professionals and marketers are creating Branded Content, which is also advertising but a different form of it. Branding is basically what the company and business stand for, which are the values, meanings, intentions and branded content can be used to show these essences. When somebody says traditional advertising, we usually think of newspaper & magazine ads, billboards, radio ads, etc. The main target of traditional advertising is to prioritize quantity over quality and push the ads to as many audiences as possible regardless of their relevance and consumers' interest in the product, message or service. These are the differences between the two.

Looking at branded content, Munoz (2021), as cited in Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito's book (2023), describes it as

communication assets produced or co-produced by a brand that, through formats that fulfil a role of entertainment, information and/or utility, distributed outside the advertising space, connect with and/or create an audience that voluntarily devotes its attention, viewing, listening or participation, thanks to the relevance of the content; thus building an integrated communication territory with the potential for seriality, which strategically promotes the role and values of the brand. (p. 24)

What is more, it encompasses brand-related videos, posts, images, news and stories, online games, and brand-related virtual gifts and cards (Waqas et al., 2021, p. 106). Thus, the goal is to deliver brand messages to consumers engagingly via relevant content platforms rather than traditional advertising media. While there are many techniques that exist, there is one that is as old as humankind itself, storytelling. Savar (2013) writes that "People relate best to stories" (p. 18). Stories are truly powerful, not just for conveying brand values, but also for captivating our emotions. Besides improving brand reputation, they are also becoming part of consumers values (Savar, 2013, p. 18). Advertisers can elevate the art of storytelling to such a level that makes not only the message blend in but also consumers perceive it as engaging and exciting rather than boring advertising. That is why, we ought to view it as a more comprehensive concept of advertising at the same time communicating brand values to consumers through strategies that are rooted in leisure, entertainment, information and education (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 13). Also, Sánchez Cobarro (2018) believes that branded content & entertainment strongly lays its foundation as an innovative communication model, presenting new ways of commercialization through pull-type communication techniques (p. 45).

What is more, the most important thing is that branded content focuses on portraying the brand values rather than the product itself (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 4). This means that an emotional connection is being built with the consumers and the brand over time. So, the focus shifted from simply promoting the product to crafting an engaging message that aligns with customers' values and builds a stronger relationships that has a lasting impact while driving purchase intentions.

A good example that shows how branded content can be creative and exciting, that I still remember till this day, is when I was attending high school in Vienna, and during the lecture we watched Felix Baumgartner's Red Bull Supersonic Freefall stunt, where he broke the record in skydiving from space. (Red Bull, 2024). The highest exit (jump) altitude was 38,969.4m. He literally showed everyone watching that "Red Bull Gives You Wings", as their slogan promises. This makes it more engaging to consumers, as they are not told what to do but because of the nature and engaging branded content, there is a higher possibility that they will be more willing to buy, as they are simply made more aware of the brand and want to be a part of it. In the case of the RedBull example, it leaves people deeply captivated and speechless seeing something so rare, unique and unlike anything encountered before. So, consumers do not feel that they are being sold to as we do not portray this as an ad, but it is! That is why and how it works so well. The RedBull example can even motivate other people to push their limits, do something extraordinary, and overcome difficult obstacles.

So, what is the key and secret to branded content success? Creating engaging experiences, so that viewers lose themselves in the moment and forget they are interacting with the brand. Basically, offering genuine value for the viewers' time, the content needs to feel like a worthwhile investment and not an interruption. People choose to consume the specific content because they want to and not because it is pushy. That is why branded content is a powerful tool to achieve many strategic objectives which go far beyond simply entertaining viewers.

To sum up, first, branded content can boost brand awareness, as it has engaging content that increases the brand's visibility, making a lasting impression on the viewers and increasing the company's or brand's recognition. Second, branded content drives desired behaviors, as it can subtly encourage consumers towards some actions that are aligned with the brand's medium or even long-term goals, such as visiting the website, trying out a product, or engaging with the brand on social media. Third, it fosters lasting connections, as effective branded content can spark positive emotions, nurture a dialogue and stronger connection with the audience, and therefore, create a sense of loyalty and trust that goes beyond advertising. Fourth, it builds the brand's credibility through compelling narratives that can improve not only the brand's image but also the positioning. Fifth, branded content highlights differentiation, because good content can showcase some of the unique characteristics which set one brand apart from other competitors, and this builds a strong brand preference.

In this research, I will use the definition from Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito's book (2023) that

Branded content is born as a non-traditional advertising communication strategy for creating informative, educational, entertainment, and purpose-driven content, mainly originated by the brand. Such content fully integrates the brand's values and provides a relevant experience for the consumer without necessarily seeking an immediate purchase stimulus. Branded content is provided to consumers for free or a fee. It is delivered through traditional or digital

channels in all forms of communication (text, images, video, videogame, audio, art, new technologies, or through a live experience). (p. 13)

2.2.2 Branded Entertainment

Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito (2023) defines branded entertainment as “the expression of branded content to the field of entertainment content in all types of communications, formats, and platforms.” (p. 16). According to Loggerenberg et al. (2019), “Branded entertainment is a communication effort that employs a compelling authentic narrative to achieve brand resonance.” (p. 13). What is more, there is a significant difference between the branded entertainment approach and traditional advertising. While it does not focus on immediate sales or direct product pitches, it leverages the power of storytelling. Through engaging narratives, branded entertainment is subtly conveying the values of the brand, showing aspirational lifestyles, and even inspiring audiences to connect with universal ideals. In a crowded marketplace where there are so many similar products, branded entertainment offers a powerful tool for differentiation. Also, if a brand focuses on building a strong brand identity, it can create products that are more personalized, and therefore, the brand creates a longer lasting connection with its consumers. Furthermore, according to Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito (2023) in branded entertainment content there needs to be high quality both in the experience and content that can compete with the standard that are present in the entertainment industry (p. 173). What is more, the author believes that effective storytelling stays longer in the viewers memories, basically, has a long-term impact on the viewers memory and the emotions connected with this are creating a longer lasting bond between the brand and the viewer. All this fosters trust and loyalty to the brand (Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito, 2023, p. 174).

In this study, the terms “branded content & entertainment (BC&E)”, “branded content (BC)”, “branded content ads” and “branded entertainment” are going to be used interchangeably. What is more, according to Van Loggerenberg et al. (2013), the terms “branded entertainment” and “branded content” are used by the industry as well as academics substitutably as well (p. 3). The authors state that branded entertainment is more often referred to as simply, content that is crafted around the brand and usually, this is funded by the marketer, while the industry uses the term branded content for that. It could be in the form of naturally and organically integrating the brand through creating original content.

2.5 Creativity

We all recognize creativity, but can we truly define it? The literature shows many definitions, describing creativity as novel, divergent from the norm, unique, original, meaningful, value-added, and even acceptable.

First of all, Glaveanu (2012) describes that the concept of creativity, originates from the Indo-European root "ker" or "kere" (to grow) through Latin "creatio" or "creatus" (to make grow), essentially implies "bringing something new into being" (as cited in Weiner, 2000, p. 8) (p. 69).

According to El-Murad & West (2004), creativity usually is described as "creative thinking", "imagination", "innovation" or "problem solving" (p. 189). The authors also mention that Leo Burnett (1968) described creativity as "the art of establishing new and meaningful relationship between unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable and in good taste, but which somehow presents the product in a fresh new light." El-Murad & West (2004, p. 190). What is more, Amabile (1996) offers a valuable additional element, as according to the author's perspective, if the resulting product or response to a task is heuristic rather than algorithmic, then it can be considered creative (p. 35). All this means that there is not one single, clear and established way to achieve creativity.

Stolarick & Florida (2006) offers a diverse and multidimensional perspective on creativity (p. 1801). He emphasizes that creativity is not solely about generating new ideas, as it is also a reflection of an individual person's background, experiences, and values. This perspective highlights the role of synthesis, where creativity involves combining existing knowledge and perspectives in novel ways (Stolarick & Florida, 2006, p. 1801). What is more, the author suggests that creative work often possesses a subversive nature. It can challenge established norms and perspectives, paving the way for a more innovative and potentially superior approach.

Singh & Gautam (2019) emphasize that creative advertising stands out as the most effective and efficient approach, leaving a lasting and memorable impression in the targeted audience (p. 149). However, it is also argued that it lies in the eye of the beholder which means it depends on each person as well as the culture we are living in (Smith et al., 2007, p. 820). Moreover, researchers mention past research that emphasizes the crucial role of creativity in crafting impactful advertisements (Ang & Low, 2000, p. 849; El-Murad and West, 2004, p. 188; Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 164). This not only improves viewing intentions but can also lead to more favorable purchase intentions (Yang & Smith, 2009, p.945). On the contrary, Till and Baack, (2005) mention in their study that advertising creativity does not have an effect on purchase intent but may actually put value to the advertised brand (p. 55). Therefore, it can improve attitudes toward the ad, the brand being promoted and the overall ad effectiveness (Sheinin et al., 2011, p. 13) and sales (El-Murad & West, 2004, p. 188).

Some researchers believe that creativity is the “soul” of an ad and a significant contributor to the overall effectiveness (Kadry, 2015, p. 1085; Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 51). Creative advertising has emerged as a powerful tool in this regard, by boosting attention, ad processing, and ultimately, ad interest. There is a vital relationship and connection between advertising and creativity. Studies have consistently shown a positive correlation between creativity and advertising effectiveness. More specifically, research highlights how creative elements in advertising can increase attention spans, encourage deeper processing and memory of the advertising messages, and also generate greater interest in the product or service that is advertised (Baack et al., 2016, p. 171; Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 51). Also, Ang & Low (2000) found that unexpected details have a positive effect on creativity in advertising (p. 849). What is more, Smith et al. (2008) states that creative ads are simply more interesting and attract more attention (p. 59). Therefore, it is highly important and can be considered the essence of an ad.

Another indicator of highly creative advertising is recognition by industry professionals. Many agencies in the industry compete with each other every year to be the most creative in the industry (Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 39). One example of how they are doing it, is winning prestigious advertising awards, such as The Clio Award, The One Show, Communication Arts Awards, or Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity. These awards can serve as a mark of creative excellence (Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 166). For example, the Clio Awards specifically evaluate entries based on their ability to generate novel ideas and present advertising messages in unconventional ways (Tippins & Kunkel, 2006, p. 2). Researchers often utilize such awards as a measure of creative advertising effectiveness. Award juries, for instance, consisting of industry experts and judges, offer a broader perspective compared to student ratings (Baack et al., 2008, p. 88 as cited in Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 165).

Additionally, there are advertising papers like Adweek and Advertising Age, which focus especially on the concept of creativity in advertising. Adweek is the go-to resource for brand marketing professionals, offering them a comprehensive platform with valuable insights, news and analysis. Adweeks content, equips industry leaders with crucial knowledge as well as strategies they need to be better and improve their skills. What is more, for instance, Ad Age (Advertising Age) includes topics about branding strategies, advertising campaigns, consumer trends, digital and social media marketing, etc. Furthermore, Ad Age showcases also the world’s most inspiring ads, best commercials across consumer culture and creative brand ideas.

When judging the Branded Entertainment & Content medium, Clio asks their jurors to keep several things in mind. Since they specifically judge the creativity of the work (aside from the Creative Business Transformation and the Creative Effectiveness mediums which are weighted 50% on creativity and 50% on results), they first review Clio’s definition of creativity with the jurors. Clio

defines it as the application of an idea that is unexpected, imaginative, or otherwise unconventional. It should be work that propels their specific advertising industry forward (A. Yaraghchi, personal communication, April, 2024).

Since Clio's jurors are individuals, whose own creative work embodies the best of Branded Entertainment & Content work, they ensure that each juror has an in-depth understanding of the industry's evolving marketplace. With that being said, as they judge the work, they recommend they ask themselves "Is this work bold? Is it innovative? Is it inspiring?", "Am I jealous of this work? (In a good way) Do I wish I had done it?", and "How is this work propelling the industry forward? What do I want to signal to the industry by awarding this work?" (Clio, 2024, para 1). The Clio Awards bring together leading creatives to judge and choose the entries for the Grand, Gold, Silver, and Bronze Clio statues. During the Advertising Week in New York, the Clio Awards are celebrating the best work of the year (Clio, 2024).

However, Choi et al. (2018) argue in their study that even professionally recognized creativity, for instance, the Clio Award does not guarantee an advertisement's success in the marketplace (p. 161). So, beyond having a huge impact on captivating people's attention and sparking the initial interest, it is important to mention that compelling creative advertisements can even translate into increased purchase intentions, according to the author. Yang and Smith (2009) propose that such advertising fulfills a consumer's desire for novelty and unexpected elements (divergence) (p. 946). This, in turn, fosters positive feelings (positive affect). Positive affect can have an influence on how consumers process and respond to information. As a result, when creative advertising evokes positive emotions, it can lead to improved brand awareness (cognitions), more favorable brand perceptions (attitudes), and ultimately, a stronger tendency to purchase (Yang & Smith, 2009, p. 946).

Furthermore, brand awareness plays a critical role in consumer decision-making, as high brand awareness contributes to brand equity, offering companies a valuable advantage in the marketplace (Huang & Sarigollu, 2012, p. 27). Essentially, brand awareness reflects a consumer's ability to recognize and recall a brand or its likelihood to come to mind when thinking about a specific product category. Research consistently demonstrates the link between creative advertising and increased brand awareness. Studies show that creative advertisements lead to higher brand recognition levels, brand awareness and unaided recall (Baack et al., 2008, p. 175; Till & Baack, 2005, p. 54). This increased attention may therefore translate into improved brand awareness for the advertised product or service. However, they mentioned that brand attitude and purchase intent are likely more ingrained and need more time to be changed. As already mentioned, using creative ads can lead to significantly more favorable evaluations and purchase behaviors rather than normal ads. Although single exposure to creative ads may not affect consumers' preexisting brand attitude in single

exposure, results of Shirkhodae & Rezaee (2014) study indicates that being exposed many times to creative ads provide advantages for familiar brands (p. 602).

What is more, Rosengren et al (2020) explain that the effects of ad creativity have a stronger influence in high-involvement contexts and when it comes to the effects, there are stronger ad responses for unfamiliar brands (p. 13). Since consumers are not yet familiar with the brand, the initial goal of advertising is to capture attention and initiate the brand awareness process. Creative advertising, with its ability to pique curiosity and hold attention, is particularly valuable in this context. Also, when ads are more visually complex, then they are looked at for longer periods of time (Morrison & Dainoff, 1972, p. 400). This means that it stimulates consumer curiosity and encourages them to delve deeper into the message and the advertised brand and product. Ideally, the ad will engage the consumer long enough to hold their attention and establish brand awareness, potentially sparking further exploration and moving the brand into the consideration set (Smith et al., 2008, p. 50).

The intense competition in the advertising landscape makes it incredibly difficult for brands to break through the clutter and persuade consumers to choose their offering (Yang & Smith, 2009, p. 935). Therefore, consumers can hold negative attitudes toward traditional advertising. Fortunately, creative advertising offers a powerful solution to these challenges. By incorporating originality and unexpected elements, creative ads stand out from the crowd, grabbing viewers' attention due to their unexpected nature (Till & Baack, 2005, p. 49). Moreover, being creative in advertising can be a challenge due to subjectivity. Whether something is perceived as creative depends on the judgement of the observer (Amabile, 1996, p. 19). In simple terms, something is considered creative in advertising as the audience interprets it as such. What is more, El-Murad & West (2004) mentions that fear can inhibit or block creativity (p. 194). Mostly this is because of the degree of risk perceived, which can involve the risk of ridicule, risk of failure as well as the exposure of limitations.

According to Rosengren et al. (2020), when thinking about advertising creativity, the word “originality” is commonly used as a synonym (p. 40). Even though it is required, it is not a fully sufficient condition for creativity. However, a more fitting approach involves a dual definition that considers both originality and appropriateness as measures (El-Murad & West, 2004, p. 189). Miceli and Raimondo (2020) present a comprehensive review of articles on creativity in marketing and present a synthesis based on Rhodes (1961, p. 307) 4P’s creativity framework, that focuses on Person, Product, Process and Press (p. 86). What is more, the authors note that a majority of articles in social and cognitive psychology (39.7%) favor a bipartite definition of creativity, which highlights both originality/divergence and usefulness/appropriateness/relevance (Miceli & Raimondo, 2020, p. 90). As clearly visible, there is not one clear definition of creativity, however, for this study it is important to narrow it down. Smith et al. (2007) mention that usually, the definitions are different across people,

but they have a similar aspect (p. 819). To put it in simple words, there is a meaningful and valuable connection between “previously unrelated things” which sheds a new light on the product or a unique perspective.

Lastly, according to Ashley & Tuten (2014) creative strategies can be categorized as either primarily emotional/transformational or primarily functional/informational (p. 18). Additionally, they can emphasize unique selling propositions, brand superiority (pre-emptive, comparative), or undifferentiated product class (generic). Moreover, creative strategies may also align the brand with experiences and insights (resonance, experiential), desires that consumers have (image), as well as feelings (joy, love, humor, sexual desire, fear). Functional messages are processed rationally while transformational messages appeal to the psychological characteristics of the target audience. In branded content, creative strategies serve as the bridge between the marketer’s message and the consumer’s needs, aligning what is said with what the audience wants to hear (Ashely & Tuten, 2014, p. 18).

2.6 Creativity Model

The following section is dedicated to presenting the creativity framework by Smith et al. (2007) which highlights the various related factors that impact the creativity of an ad (p. 830). This model consists of Divergence and Relevance. I will dive deeper into it and explain what it is about, as the Divergence and the 5 elements of it are used as the guide for this study. In my research, I examine the 5 elements of Divergence following the Model of Smith et al (2007, p. 830), as Divergence and Relevance are the main pillars of overall creativity (Singh & Gautam, 2019, p. 149). I believe this model is a good fit for this study because it gives a truly insightful, clear and thorough explanation for creativity. However, there might be always a possibility that other elements of creativity might arise and could be then added to the model.

2.6.1 Divergence

When it comes to literature about creativity, Guilford (1950) was the first researcher who focused on the concept of divergence in advertising (p. 444). According to Smith & Yang (2004), ad creativity is commonly defined based on divergence, emphasizing the novel, unique, different original, or unusual elements within an advertisement (p. 32). Smith et al. (2007) determined the most important factors from Guilford’s (1950, 1956) and Torrance’s (1972) research to understand how divergence is achieved. Firstly, the authors identified seven main indicators of divergence and seven secondary indicators of divergence (p. 823). However, Smith et al. (2007) looked into this topic deeper and found the five most significant factors of divergence and two factors of relevance (p. 820). The major goal of this research is to study these five factors of divergence and dive deeper into them. The authors described that “divergence” includes these five levels: originality, flexibility, elaboration, synthesis, and artistic value. Moreover, according to Smith et al. (2007), divergence is defined as “the

extent to which an ad constraint brand or execution ideas that are different, novel, original, unique, unusual, etc.” (p. 820). What is more, divergence can be not only connected to novel aspects but also surprising elements or rare aspects that are moving away from the obvious ways of thinking that we have.

When it comes to Originality, this dimension includes elements such as, for instance, communicating ideas that are rare or have surprising features. One example of that could be the Coca-Cola “Happiness Factory”. This ad focused on visualizing a unique perspective from the inside of a vending machine. Looking at Flexibility, it is important to look for diverse perspectives or the presentation of multiple ideas that are changing from one topic to another. Jacob Krönung’s “Time for Chatting” ad is a good representation of this. What is more, Elaboration is all about providing unexpected details or expanding simple ideas to become increasingly sophisticated and compelling. An example of this could be the Ehrmann Yogurt “Strawberry Tongue” ad which focuses on the small details. Another dimension of divergence is Synthesis, which focuses on combining and connecting two usually unrelated objects or ideas. Here, the Wrigley’s Juice Fruit Squish “Juicy Fruit Ranch” ad can illustrate this, as it connects an animal and chewing gum. Lastly, Artistic Value dives deeper into the inclusion of artistic impressions or interesting elements such as shapes, colors or vivid descriptions, and the use of figurative language. It basically completes the aesthetic appeal, which includes the designs, sounds, language, etc. This can be portrayed in Danone Fantasia “Flavor Trip” ad (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013, para 8-12).

Lastly, as previously explained, creative ads are more likeable, and people remember them better, so they are more memorable. As divergence is viewed by practitioners as the most defining aspect of ad creativity, in this research, I will mostly focus on assessing the five elements of divergence in the chosen videos and diving deeper into them by giving examples for each element.

2.6.2 Relevance

According to Smith & Yang (2004), while divergence remains a central aspect of creativity, researchers believe that relevance (appropriate, meaningful, useful) is also important to mention (p. 36). In marketing, emphasis on the relevance component of ad creativity has existed for a long time, exploring how an ad becomes "personally relevant" to consumers and influences ad processing and response. Also, Smith et al. (2007) describe that relevance is “the extent to which at least some ad/brand elements are meaningful, valuable or useful to consumers” (p. 820). The authors outline two ways to achieve relevance. The first one is "Ad-to-consumer relevance," where execution elements are meaningful to consumers (e.g., using specific music to resonate with Millennials, GenZ), and the second one is "Ad-to-Brand relevance," where the advertised brand or product category is relevant to potential customers (e.g., portraying the brand in relatable and familiar circumstances). Moreover, Relevance can have a connection to the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM), as in advertising,

"elaboration" refers to how much thought an audience member puts into a message. This includes trying to understand it, remembering it, and deciding if they agree with it (Kumar & Khanna, 2022, p. 242). Here, high relevance encourages viewers to actively process the message, think critically about how it relates to them and their personal experiences, and make connections with the brand it represents. A simple example could be eating with family around the table, or the smell of cookies, etc. This could lead to stronger brand recall and positive brand associations. Smith et al. (2007) describe that creative ads have both divergence and relevance (p. 820).

As already mentioned above, as I will be looking specifically at the Clio Awards, I will be focusing mainly on divergence and the five factors of it (originality, flexibility, synthesis, elaboration, artistic value) and not on relevance, as this would require much more time and the time limit constricts me from focusing on both divergence and relevance in-depth. Moreover, Ang & Low (2000) findings show that when it comes to the brand or product category, novelty is more crucial than relevance (p. 851).

To sum up, for branded content & entertainment ads to be creative, there need to be elements that are unique and relevant in the context of marketing. For this study, I will look at all chosen ads as they already have high relevance, due to the fact that these are the Clio award winners and therefore show status and are relevant in the marketing industry. What is more, BC&E is in general relevant, as it is based on storytelling and connecting with the audience based on the mission, vision and significant values. Therefore, it makes sense that all the chosen BC&E ads are high in relevance because the brand incorporates the main values in their core message. That is the foundation that is used in branded content & entertainment strategies, to build and maintain a strong relationship with consumers based on their beliefs. Instead, focusing on divergence, I will dive deeper into the concepts that suit my current research objective better and simply make sense to do. I will examine the five elements of divergence and based on that I will try to find what makes an BC&E ad creative and successful. In my research, I will specifically focus on the Clio Award Winners of the most recent ceremonies, 2022 & 2023. I believe that these will serve as a good basis to evaluate what makes Branded Content successful and captivating.

3. Research Design & Method

This section presents the research design and methods used to answer the research question. To ensure transparency, it provides a clear description of the research design, process, and data analysis methods to answer the research question.

3.1 Research Design

For this study, a qualitative research method was carried out, both a qualitative content and visual analysis of 20 branded content videos. In general, it is known that qualitative research provides thorough interpretations and dives into the content, that is why it was clear from the start that this study will have a qualitative nature. The data collection focused on exploring and analyzing Clio award winning ads in the category of branded entertainment & content for Gold, Silver and Bronze that have been selected from last two years 2022 & 2023, specifically in the category “Branded Entertainment and Content”. The creative elements and how they are portrayed in the branded content videos are the subject of this study. The qualitative content and visual analysis will be explained in more detail in the next parts of this chapter.

These two qualitative research methods are a perfect fit for this study delving into the topic of creativity in award-winning branded content. Unlike quantitative approaches that mostly focus on statistics and numbers, qualitative research dives deeper into the subject and aims for a rich and comprehensive understanding of the topic. This method and international context give this study the possibility to gain a deeper understanding of ad creativity in branded content & entertainment, the meaning of it and how it is shown in the Clio Winners.

3.2 Sampling - Clio Award Winners

Choosing Clio Award Winners is a good fit with my Research Question, as Clio is an annual, prestigious international awards competition in the field of creative business. Also, as already mentioned in the theoretical part, winning one of these awards is a sign of success, uniqueness, respect in the industry and professionalism. (Tippins & Kunkel; 2006, p. 3; Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 164; Choi et al., 2018, p. 153; Rosengren et al., 2020, p. 39). Since theory does not give a clear definition of creativity, I am allowing specialists to describe these existent criteria on creativity and how they are represented in practical examples. I started my research by looking through the internet, and found the Clio Awards using “google scholar” and the Erasmus University Library “sEURch” Engine, searching for “creativity awards”, “creative branded content awards”, etc. In 1959, Clio was founded to celebrate creative excellence in advertising (Clio, 2024). This specific Award was selected as it honors the best work and talent of the industry in many specialized fields, for instance, entertainment, fashion, sports, music, and health. There are also mediums, which range from Audio, Branded Entertainment & Content, Design, Direct, to Film, Out of Home, Public Relations, Student

Content, etc. (Clio, 2024). Every year, creative talents from all over the world are brought together at the Clio Awards. Here, these creative leaders join their forces in an exclusive judging process to choose the winners that are deserving of the prestigious Clio statues (Grand, Gold, Silver, and Bronze). However, the Clio Awards are not just about this one night. As they are a recognized leader in the industry and the world of advertising, Clio is trying to keep creativity alive all year long. They are achieving this through Ads of The World, which is a global database of advertisements, and Muse by Clio, that is a platform dedicated to creative content.

Furthermore, according to Kilgour et al. (2013), an indicator of highly creative ads is winning an ad creativity awards such as the Clio, One Show or Communication Arts Award (p. 166). Thus, receiving either of these awards represents credibility, trustworthiness and a high standard of achievement for the advertising industry and many researchers refer to it (Choi et al., 2018, p. 153; Tippins & Kunkel; 2006, p. 3; Kilgour et al., 2013, p. 164). This proves that Clio is not only a valid source, but it is also reliable. Therefore, Clio is a perfect fit for this study as it is an established and significant player in the industry, honors the best work and talents, is relevant and is recognized for creative excellence by other researchers, scholars, companies, brands, marketers and people in industry. What is more, choosing and analyzing Clio Awards makes this research high in validity and reliability, as not only peers but also experts have recognized Clio for its exceptional performances of creativity and its high standards.

3.3 Sample Size

For this study, secondary data was collected and analyzed, specifically short, branded content videos. This included 20 videos in total of Gold, Silver, and Bronze Clio Award Winners from the recent two years (Appendix A). Criterion sampling was used, which is a purposive sampling method to pick the data from a larger collection for analysis based on specific predetermined criteria or characteristics (Etikan et al., 2016, p. 2). This technique allowed me to focus on data that has certain indicators which are relevant to the overall research objectives. The winners were selected by looking specifically at the two most recent years, 2022 and 2023 Clio Awards Winners. To find the specific award winners, I chose the category “Branded Entertainment & Content”, which is assigned by Clio on their website. What is more, the videos were picked by making sure they are about 2-3 minutes long. 10 videos from 2022 and 10 videos from 2023 were selected. From the ten 2022 winners, one Gold winner, four Silver winners and five Bronze winners were chosen and analyzed. When it comes to the 2023 winners, there were three Gold winners, four Silver winners and three Bronze winners. The winners were from all over the world, ranging from Neuilly-sur-Seine, London, Taipei, Detroit, São Paulo, Dublin, Paris, Hamburg, New York and Vienna to Toronto/Montreal/Vancouver, Sydney, Madrid, Lexington, Düsseldorf, Milan, and Amsterdam. To sum up, it was important to have a diverse

portfolio to analyze the creative elements as well as the branded content thoroughly and in-depth. The full list with all details can be found in Appendix A.

3.4 Operationalization

To operationalize creativity, the five factors of divergence in Smith et al. (2007) research served as the main guide (pp. 823-830). Divergence is conceptualized as “the extent to which an ad constraints brand or execution elements that are different, novel, original, unique, unusual, etc.” (Smith et al, 2007, p. 820). Based on this theory, the five categories were developed, which are explained below. The research question that has been used to frame the research problem was: “What are the main elements that define creativity in branded content & entertainment of Clio Award Winners?” The concepts of creativity and branded content & entertainment were operationalized and the definition from Rodríguez-Rabadán Benito’s book (2023) has been used:

Branded content is born as a non-traditional advertising communication strategy for creating informative, educational, entertainment, and purpose-driven content, mainly originated by the brand. Such content fully integrates the brand’s values and provides a relevant experience for the consumer without necessarily seeking an immediate purchase stimulus. Branded content is provided to consumers for free or a fee. It is delivered through traditional or digital channels in all forms of communication (text, images, videogame, audio, art, new technologies, or through a live experience). (p. 13)

What is more, Ad creativity is often defined by divergence, meaning that it emphasizes new, unique, or unexpected elements that break away from the norm (Smith & Yang, 2004, p. 32).

For this research, Leo Burnet’s (1968) description of creativity was used, as cited in El-Murad & West (2004, p. 190) and Smith et al (2007, p. 820) research. He described it as “the art of establishing new and meaningful relationship between unrelated things in a manner that is relevant, believable and in good taste, but which somehow presents the product in a fresh new light”. Also, Clio’s definition was used for this study that creativity is the application of an idea that is unexpected, imaginative, or otherwise unconventional. But mainly, this research looks at creativity from the perspective of divergence and the 5 elements that are involved. Originality, Flexibility, Elaboration, Synthesis & Artistic Value (Smith et al, 2007, p. 830).

In this study, creativity, especially divergence was explored through 5 perspectives, flexibility, originality, elaboration, artistic value, and synthesis. High Flexibility implied that the ad shifted from one idea to another and contained different ideas. When analyzing Originality, the focus was on finding the rare, and unique features of an ad and investigate whether it challenged stereotypes. Moreover, elaboration is all about the unexpected details that are contained in an ad and

if it finishes basic ideas in a intriguing way. When it comes to artistic value, interesting ideas that come to life, both graphically and verbally making unique and aesthetically pleasing branded content were analyzed. This could be for instance, sound, verbal, vivid descriptions but also visual elements. Lastly, synthesis focused on the unusual connections, of items, ideas and other objects, etc. that are usually unrelated. I looked at the differences across the chosen Clio Award Winners to highlight the most pivotal insights.

3.5 Visual Analysis

Visual analysis is the essence of art history writing. From art magazines to scholarly works and even student research papers, it is a technique that is used to understand artwork in a detailed as well as concise way. The goal of a visual analysis was to understand the artist's choices. By breaking down the artwork and examining its individual components, I could gain a deeper appreciation and understanding of the whole. What is more, a visual analysis can also dive deeper into the artwork's context and explore the potential interpretations of the deeper meaning behind it.

The Machin & Mayr (2012) approach is a good tool to analyze visuals, as it gives an opportunity to discover the underlying meanings of visual elements in the selected branded content videos and thus, was a good fit for this study (p. 163). The framework can be found in Appendix B. It explores the aspects of denotation and connotation, where denotation refers to the explicit, literal representations while connotation refers to the implied, deeper meanings and cultural connections. Also, denotation is all about a descriptive perspective, basically, describing what can be seen in the video, while connotation focuses on the "meaning potential" that is hidden in the video. (Machin & Mayr, 2012, p. 51). Asking the right question and looking further into the meaning of the branded content was important.

Drawing from Machin & Mayr (2012), we can understand that objects are intentionally placed to convey specific messages (p. 163). They aren't random decorations – each one contributes to the overall impact of the ad. Similarly, settings create a context that reinforces the ad's message. This context can communicate ideals, behaviors, and even cultural references.

To understand this visual language, we can focus on salience. This refers to how certain elements are made to stand out, grabbing our attention and directing it towards key meanings. Machin & Mayr (2012) identify seven tools that create salience (p. 163). Cultural symbols, which are familiar icons or objects with established meanings. Then, Size, which are larger objects naturally draw our eye. Next, there is Color that can evoke emotions and associations. Moreover, Tone focuses on the overall mood or feeling created by the image's colors. Then, Focus is where the camera or artist directs our attention. Furthermore, Foregrounding is all about placing an object closer to the viewer to

emphasize its importance. Lastly, Overlapping is when layering objects can create a hierarchy of importance.

All this strongly relates to semiotics and psychology of color, as already mentioned in the theory chapter. In the 20th century, Swiss linguist Ferdinand de Saussure introduced semiotics, the study of signs and symbols (Kauppinen-Räsänen & Jauffret, 2017, p. 104). His work helps us understand how seemingly ordinary objects can carry complex meanings. This concept is not only used in branding but also in advertising and has semiotics symbols and signs in it. Semeîon (Greek) refers to signs, a core concept of semiotics. These carefully created messages can influence our emotions and thoughts. Ferdinand de Saussure offered an interesting approach to understanding signs and symbols through the signifier and signified. Signifier is the physical form of a sign, like the sound of a word or the image of an apple. Signified is the concept or idea that the signifier represents. We can think of it as the meaning we associate with the sign. This strongly aligns with the Machin & Mayr approach (2012) where we not only look at the denotative meaning - standard definition, recorded in a dictionary and known to all speakers but also connotative meaning - associated meanings, may be more complex (p. 163). For example, let's consider the flower, lily. Denotatively, it's a beautiful flower with various shapes and colors. But the connotation gets interesting. In Western cultures, lilies often symbolize purity and innocence (think wedding bouquets). However, in some Eastern cultures, lilies can represent death or mourning. This highlights how a word, theme etc. or in this case, flower, can hold vastly different meanings depending on context and cultural background. That is why Colors and semiotics were used thorough analyzing the branded content, as it is a great fit for this study. So, we not only look at what is shown to us but also comprehend the deeper meaning of it.

By analyzing the five creativity elements with this method, the hidden messages within advertisements were decoded and it was possible to understand how objects, settings and salience contribute to their persuasive power, but also which elements of divergence are most important.

3.6 Qualitative Content Analysis

When it comes to the Qualitative content analysis, it has emerged from the quantitative content analysis, which is already long known in media and communication research (Krippendorff, 2019, p. 15). It is a research method used to interpret and analyze the content of textual data. While the traditional content analysis is quite efficient at analyzing large datasets by counting words and phrases, it can miss the deeper meaning. It rather focuses on what was explicitly said (manifest meaning) and not on the underlying message (latent meaning).

A qualitative content analysis goes beyond the surface, meaning to uncover these hidden layers. It explores how words, phrases, etc. work together in context to create specific interpretations

and messages. Content analysis focuses on exploring the “why” behind the “what”. You can think of it as it does not only count how many times a word appears in the branded content video, but it also analyzes what hidden messages it might convey. As Puppis (2019) points out, QCA considers the relationship between the text and its environment, interpreting meaning considering the context and understanding the creator’s intent (p. 33). Moreover, a content analysis is a research tool that can be used to examine the presence of certain words, themes, or concepts within qualitative data and find the real meaning. “Codes can represent topics, concepts, or categories of events, processes, attitudes or beliefs that represent human activity and thought” (Forman & Damschroder, 2008, p. 48). Codes capture the most pivotal idea of a segment of text and enable researchers to condense the data and identify patterns. Moreover, codes can be generated deductively, from the theoretical framework of the study, or inductively, from the data. As Forman and Damschroder explain, “although there are studies that use codes developed either deductively or inductively, content analysts most often employ a combination of both approaches. This means using a priori deductive codes as a way to ‘get into’ the data and an inductive approach to identify new codes and to refine or even eliminate prior codes” (2008, p. 48).

Therefore, the qualitative content and visual analysis are a great fit for this research, as it is possible to analyze the presence, relationships, and meaning of certain themes, or concepts, as well as reveal differences and patterns in branded content.

For the qualitative content analysis, specifically, directed content analysis, which is based mostly on deductive codes based on the literature, I used the divergence perspective to understand how the theoretical characteristics which are attributed to creativity are applied in the awarded branded content. Most importantly, the 5 divergence elements of creativity by Smith et al. (2007) have been used as codeframes to focus on when analyzing the branded content (p. 830).

3.7 Data Collection & Analysis

For both the qualitative content & visual analysis, the videos and text were analyzed using the advertising creativity theory that offers a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of the most crucial concepts and thus, is the best fit for this research topic. It defines creativity on the criteria of divergence, as relevance is not explored in this research. I created a database of characteristics drawn from the different research then created a codebook mainly based on Smith’s et al. (2007, p. 830). It has been used to explore which and how these criteria are portrayed in the creative branded content. This framework gives a deeper understanding of the branded content & entertainment videos and the creative elements of it. However, a factor that might affect the reliability and validity of my findings is subjectivity. Thus, this can be a limitation of my research.

Moreover, for the visual analysis, I also analyzed the branded entertainment & content videos using the help of Machin & Mayr's (2012) VCDA tools (Appendix C) that involve denotation, connotations, (objects, salience, and setting included or excluded correspondingly) (p. 163).

In order to do both analyses, based on the research question, I located the data on the Clio website and developed search and sample criteria mentioned earlier, then the 20 branded entertainment & content videos were downloaded and transcribed and wrote down in Word. The BC was analyzed one by one, using the model mentioned below, by watching the video and reading the transcript at the same time. What is more, for the qualitative content analysis, I have used Microsoft Word & Google Docs, I color coded and systematically analyzed each branded content and recorded my insights and interpretations. Furthermore, it was important to compare, contrast and look for potential relationships, similarities and differences between the elements in the branded content videos and ask how creativity is portrayed in the data. Patterns and trends were examined, attention was paid to the ideas, the colors, significant changes in the data and focus on, for instance, original, flexible and unique features and ideas of the Clio Awards Winners of branded entertainment & content and how these have been used in the ads.

This research used deductive coding based on Smith et al. (2007) theory about creativity, as the basis for the qualitative content analysis and was also used, as a framework for the visual analysis of the branded content & entertainment winners (pp. 823-830). Therefore, a directed content analysis has been chosen with predetermined codes. This way, the elements that are most crucial that most often occurred in BC could be understood in an easy way.

Originality - the Branded Entertainment & Content is rare, surprising or moves away from the obvious and common. (uniqueness of the ideas, or features of the product)

Is the ad out of the ordinary? Is the ad unique? Does the ad break away from stereotypical thinking?

Flexibility - the Branded Entertainment & Content has different ideas that move from one topic/subject to another (product is linked to many different uses)

Does the ad contain ideas that moved from one subject to another? Does the ad contain different ideas? Does the ad shift from one idea/topic to another?

Elaboration - the Branded Entertainment & Content provides numerous details. It finishes, extends and details basic ideas so they become more intricate or sophisticated.

Does the ad contain many details? Does the ad finish basic ideas so that they become more intricate? Does the ad contain more details than expected? (more concepts than most branded content ads)

Synthesis - the Branded Entertainment & Content connected or combined objects or ideas that are normally unrelated.

Does the ad connect objects that are usually unrelated? Does the ad contain unusual connections?
Does the ad bring unusual ideas/items together?

Artistic value - the Branded Entertainment & Content has striking visual, verbal, sound elements.

Is the ad visually/verbally distinctive? Does the ad make ideas come to life graphically/verbally (striking colors, shape, lines, vivid descriptions)? Is the ad artistically produced?

For this case, visual and verbal elements were taken into account. While analyzing the content, I referred back to my RQ throughout the coding process. This ensured that the codes were consistently applied in order to capture the main elements which are directly relevant to the deeper understanding of creativity in BC. What was the purpose of the branded content? The characteristics and creative elements in the branded content were noted down. In addition, literature on color and semiotics allowed me to dive into the symbolic meaning of the verbal & visual elements. It considered how colors, objects, figures, etc. conveyed specific messages or ideas. Semiotics helped to understand the specific visuals almost like a language, decoding the signs used by the creator. Lastly, as mentioned earlier, this also fits right in with Machin & Mayr's approach, where we consider both the literal meaning and the deeper messages. After comparing the results from the content and visual analysis, I found three most crucial elements out of the five that were present in the analyzed branded entertainment & content most often.

What I enjoyed during the qualitative content analysis & visual analysis is that it allowed me to explore the implicit meaning-making and focus more on the interpretations and not only focus on the explicit meaning. As Forman and Damschroder (2008) put it, “there are many ways to go about interpreting data, but almost all will include re-organizing it, writing descriptive and interpretive summaries, displaying key results, and drawing and verifying conclusions (Miles & Huberman, 1994)” (p. 56). Using this interpretative approach of the qualitative content analysis & visual analysis allowed me to stay open to the idea that creativity in branded content is not (doing) only one thing and can be portrayed in many ways.

3.8 How it all connects

The two methods that were chosen for this study were appropriate and suitable methods and a good fit, as they allowed me to explore the BC&E in-depth, and find the implicit meanings behind the visuals and text. Thanks to these methods, I decoded the implicit meanings, where I went beyond the surface level, basic meaning of the videos and analyzed the fundamental message through visuals, and storytelling. Moreover, by analyzing all videos, I was able to uncover the main themes and patterns

related to how creativity is actually portrayed in BC. Furthermore, thanks to both methods I gained rich insights from the in-depth explorations that I could share in this study. When looking at the bigger picture, I believe that a qualitative approach was most appropriate for this study as quantitative methods might struggle to capture the full picture because branded content is a rich media format.

Psychology suggests that we process visuals first, followed by text (Paivio, 1990, pp. 68-70). In Paivio's book (1990) "Mental representations: a dual coding approach" the fundamental theory proposes two separate information processing systems, one for visual information and one for verbal information (pp. 68-70). Visuals are processed holistically and quickly, grabbing the audience's attention initially, while text requires more analytical processing. This means grabbing the audience's attention with visuals initially. Then, we engage their analytical side by providing text and potentially even audio, which activates more senses. We can think of it like this, visuals are the initial spark, the "what" we see. Text acts as the explanation, the "why" behind the visuals. While some aspects of text, like layout and font style, can be visual, the core content requires reading and activates a different part of the brain. Therefore, combining visuals and text is powerful. It engages multiple senses and brain functions, leading to a more comprehensive and impactful experience for the viewer. The information is essentially amplified by being presented in multiple ways. Using both methods and approaches, I could provide a more comprehensive and in-depth analysis of this topic, and thoroughly analyze not only what we see and hear but also the real meaning behind it.

3.9 Reliability & Validity

Since this study uses a qualitative approach, it is important to establish credibility. Credibility reflects the trustworthiness of the research and ensures the findings accurately represent the data. Two key factors contribute to credibility, which are reliability and validity (Shenton, 2004, p. 63).

Validity concerns the accuracy with which the research results actually reflect the phenomenon I studied. Reliability, on the other hand, focuses on whether the study's findings would be consistent if they were repeated under similar circumstances. In this case, the research design and data collection methods were clear, transparent, and well-documented. This minimized the influence of "accidental circumstances" in the results (Kirk & Miller, as cited in Silverman, 2013, p. 360). The details of all the branded content videos are listed in Appendix A also including links to the sources. To ensure more reliability, I also wrote notes, peer reviewed and had member checks. Writing notes definitely helped to check what I had already done, what needed to be done and the most pivotal information. All this improved the reliability of my research.

In the next parts, I document the results, key findings, valuable insights and conclusions that have been drawn from the qualitative content & visual analysis. Based on that, I was able to answer my research question.

4. Results & Discussion

4.1 Main findings

The examined Branded Content & Entertainment expressed 3 recurring elements of creativity that were most often present and visible. From the qualitative content and visual analysis, it became clear that the main elements of divergence were originality, synthesis and artistic value. These three were most often observed in the branded content. 90% the BC&E was highly original, 75% had high synthesis and 60% had highly artistic value. The least occurring factors were flexibility and elaboration, as the BC showed less than 50% of high elaboration and flexibility. This clearly supports the findings that creativity is beyond just being novel, and original and that it is not only one thing.

Also, it became clear that originality plays an essential role. It is great in combination with another element, however, it is not enough to drive effectiveness on its own, as it is known from previous research. It needs another dimension of divergence to perform at a high level. What is more, a significant observation found was that the results showed a recurring scheme of using synthesis in connection with originality. Combining synthesis and originality was a pattern in the BC ads, as 75% of the analyzed videos showed both elements and this was the strongest connection.

What is more, half of the BC focused on raising awareness to social or environmental issues. This strongly connects to creating not only a rare but also impactful message for the viewers. Therefore, from my research results, “Impactful” could be an extension to the Smith et al. (2007) model and be another element of creativity (p. 830). Also, 40% of the BC ads used humor and fun elements (positive appeal) to connect with their viewers. Last but not least, all ads portrayed some kind of UGC and news reports or headlines in them.

In the next sections, I am focusing on each of the five elements in more detail and provide examples from the results of how these have been portrayed in the BC.

4.1.1 Element 1: Originality

Both the qualitative content and visual analysis revealed a strong emphasis on originality in these award-winning ads. Visually, many ads had surprising and rare ideas that broke away from the typical advertising formats, habit bound and common place. The qualitative content analysis identified a prevalence of clever storytelling, such as surprising plot twists or humorous/serious dialogue, that surprised viewers and challenged their expectations. For example, Chevrolet, Commonwealth, McCann (Detroit) “Apple Pie Hot Dog” (2022) campaign & Dove (London & Ogilvy UK) “Toxic Influence” (2023) campaign showcased originality in both its visuals and the words, creating a unique and impactful message. These BC ads have ideas that are surprising, rare and

unique. Moreover, they break stereotypes and habit bound thinking. Both, however, show originality in their own contrasting ways, which is interesting to investigate further.

The Chevrolet “Apple Pie Hot Dog” campaign grabs attention and involves nostalgia in their message and BC. This campaign took the classic American jingle "Baseball, Hot Dogs, Apple Pie & Chevrolet" and brought it to life with a bizarre yet intriguing food creation, literally the Apple Pie Hot Dog. This surprising and rare idea instantly sparked curiosity and conversation, which can be portrayed as highly original content because it connects with the viewers based on America’s history. In addition, in the BC, the campaign dived deeper into the inspiration (the jingle), the mastermind behind the creation (Guy Fieri), and the multi-faceted approach to promotion (recipes, UGC, news reports, headlines). The campaign took the classic American baseball, apple pie, and Chevrolet, from the classic jingle and reunited them together through the unexpected lens of a hot dog. This created a unique, surprising and memorable experience that resonated with viewers beyond just promoting a car brand. This also evoked feelings of nostalgia and national identity, making the overall campaign more relatable. The “Apple Pie Hot Dog” is portrayed as a symbol of Americana.

Moreover, by providing instructions, the campaign allowed the viewers not only to try and imagine the taste and appearance of the food but also potentially recreate it themselves at home, or with friends and share their reactions with the world. “We made sure everyone could try it. Pop it in the oven, 350, 18 to 20 minutes. And there you have it, the Apple pie hot dog.” And the world reacted to that “Oh, my God. Hit the spot.” This out of the ordinary idea broke typical food stereotypes and habit bound thinking. The focus is on the novelty of the food item and the emotional connection it builds with viewers through nostalgia and humor. The use of humor in the descriptions “it’s like Martha Washington gave birth in my mouth” and playful exaggerations "Guy Fieri has done the impossible", "I could eat this all day long", and “Sorry, we the people. This is our Constitution now.” adds to the campaign's entertainment value.

Overall, the Chevrolet “Apple Pie Hot Dog” campaign is in my opinion a truly successful and original example of using novelty and a touch of absurdity to grab viewer’s attention and also connect with consumers on an emotional level. It created a sense of fun and playfulness into brand association, leaving a lasting impression long after the initial surprise wears off.

On the contrary, a truly original BC&E ad was Dove (London & Ogilvy UK) “Toxic Influence” (2023) campaign which tackles the pervasive issue of unrealistic beauty standards shown and maintained by social media. This creative campaign used deepfakes, a technology that manipulated the videos to create a sense of shocking realism. This means that they took the appearance of somebody and let them say whatever they wanted them to say. Firstly, the ad started by highlighting the widespread presence of unrealistic beauty advice on social media in general, focusing on its detrimental impact on young girls' self-esteem. “Toxic beauty advice is trending online and it’s

killing (the self-esteem of) our girls.” Crazy short clips of young girls appear on the screen “Hey, guys. Your teeth are uneven. You can always file them down”. Moreover, statistics about the rising self-harm rates for young girls and teenagers in general, reinforced the urgency of the problem and proved that this became a normal thing, which should definitely be not normal. “It has become so normalized that they don’t even realize it’s toxic.”

Secondly, deepfakes come into play, showcasing mothers and daughters reacting to this unhealthy and manipulative beauty advice. Basically, they used deepfakes to make mothers give "toxic beauty advice" that their daughters hear online every day, tackling the social issue of unrealistic beauty standards. For instance, the mom’s said things like “Baby Botox is amazing. You’re never too young to start.” or “Fake eyelashes are so easy to glue on - if you kite your eyelashes off.” and “You’re not hungry - You’re just thirsty.” Witnessing these reactions firsthand created a powerful emotional connection with the viewers, emphasizing the unrealistic expectations and potential dangers young girls face online every single day.

Furthermore, this specific campaign did not just highlight this truly vital issue, but more importantly, it also offered an effective solution. Slowly, the message shifted towards showing young girls and parents the importance of truly open communication between them, which is promoting self-worth and a healthy body image. It mentioned “It’s scary to me that my kids are watching this, and they think that’s how they have to look. I can’t prevent them from seeing this, but I can talk to them about it.” While doing that, it not only addresses the social issue of toxic beauty advice harming girls’ self-esteem, but it also subtly promotes Dove’s value of positive body image.” A girl’s greatest influence will always be her mother. Let’s change beauty.” This unexpected tactic grabs viewers’ attention and forces them to confront the unsettling nature of manipulated beauty advice. What is more, the emotional reactions of mothers and daughters seeing this fake content and understanding the huge issue that we are facing, further emphasized the message, creating a sense of not only empathy but also urgency to address this crucial issue, as it occurs all over the world and many young girls do not know where to go and who to talk to.

Lastly, it is pivotal to mention that this campaign demonstrated the significant impact that creative and unconventional branded content can have, in comparison to traditional methods. It can go beyond simply selling products as it is raising awareness to social and environmental issues to connect with consumers on a deeper level. This way it is truly original and sparks conversations while promoting a positive change in the world.

4.1.2 Element 2: Synthesis

To begin with, both analyses revealed that many Clio award-winning ads achieve creative impact by connecting seemingly unrelated ideas or objects through synthesis. Visually, some ads juxtaposed contrasting elements to create a new meaning or evoked specific emotions. When doing the qualitative content analysis, I identified those moments where the script brought together unexpected concepts or themes, which was often related to the brand's overall message. This was done in a fresh way. A truly representative example of that could be, Spinneys and The Lebanese Breast Cancer Foundation "The Bread Exam" campaign (2022) and also the VisitLEX "Horse Kicks" (2023) campaign used synthesis through both visuals and words, creating a unique, memorable and impactful association with the brand.

When it comes to "The Bread Exam" (2022) it avoided the typical imagery of breasts or medical procedures associated with breast cancer awareness campaigns. Instead, the branded content used the culturally relevant and truly familiar activity of baking bread which was a metaphor for self-examination. The visuals portraying hands represented care and self-touch, while the dough represented the body and the need for further self-examination. This BC used multiple close-up shots of hands kneading dough, creating a unique and unexpected representation of self-examination. This approach truly broke away from stereotypical thinking and allowed the message to resonate in communities where directly discussing our body, or breasts, might be taboo. This issue was clearly highlighted in the beginning of the BC "Our society considers it taboo and embarrassing. You feel that it's still a closed topic. I don't know how to self-check, no one ever talked about it." Moreover, "Khabazte" became a coded language for a silenced topic. The word "Khabazte" symbolizes self-checking and literally means "Have you baked this month?"

This ad brilliantly connects two seemingly unrelated concepts using symbols and metaphors. It connects an influential traditional baker, Um Ali and a gynecologist using the similarities between their gestures to demonstrate the steps of a breast self-exam without ever showing, nor mentioning breasts. Later in the video, the pink ribbon is visible which also symbolizes the courage to fight breast cancer, hope for the future, as well as the goodness of people and businesses who support the breast cancer movement (Cherry, 2022, para. 3). It not only honors those who have died but also all the survivors! The text on the screen, the font color is white however, some words are highlighted in light pink. This shade of pink symbolizes femininity, innocence, peace, healing and warmth (Cherry, 2022, para. 4). The ad uses simple, yet powerful visuals to deliver its core message. The use of warm colors (browns, beiges) for the dough and background creates a sense of warmth, security, and nurturing. In psychology, these colors can evoke feelings of trust as well as well-being, which aligns with the overall campaign's message of self-care and women empowerment. Therefore, in this case, color

psychology further strengthened the overall message, empowered and created a stronger connection with the viewers, especially women.

While using hand movements involved in baking bread (kneading, pressing), the BC subtly represents the motions of a breast self-exam while also promoting Spinney's flour in a truly unusual and unexpected way. Moreover, "The recipe was distributed on Spinney's flour packaging, printed on bread wrappers, demonstrated in Souks and Spinney's stores. The campaign was praised by the Lebanese president and international media." Semiotically, this clever synthesis is a shift from the signifier (body) to the signified (self-care) through the sign (bread) allows the message to be conveyed indirectly, bypassing cultural taboos and be understood globally.

Overall, The Bread Exam campaign effectively combined elements of simplicity, cultural relevance, and community. The close-up shots, warm lighting, diverse representation, and inclusion of UGC featuring women recreating the recipe, added a layer of authenticity and social proof to the campaign while also creating a sense of connection with the viewer and encouraging them to engage with the message of self-examination. To sum up, this simplicity allows the metaphors to be easily understood across cultures and avoids striking graphic representations, it is completely the opposite. It demonstrates the power of branded entertainment to raise awareness and spark conversation about a sensitive topic in a creative and culturally relevant way while connecting two completely unexpected ideas.

In contrast, VisitLEX's "Horse Kicks" (2023) Branded content ad is another good example of synthesis, where they created a truly unusual connection by combining two unrelated ideas, which is basically, horses and shoes. This campaign took an unconventional approach to promote Lexington, Kentucky (the "Horse Capital of the World"). They launched a line of custom sneakers for horses, called "Horsekicks", which is clearly an unusual, ridiculous and humorous concept that got everyone talking on social media. The campaign, a collaboration with local artist Marcus Floyd, garnered international media attention and even a celebrity customer (NBA star Luka Doncic). While the horse sneakers themselves were a playful exaggeration, the campaign's humor and creativity resonated with audiences. "We are not horsing around" was used as a humorous element, which is a funny metaphor. Also using slang "yay or nay" can attract younger audiences and make them laugh. Moreover, they mention "You can even get your horse sneakers to match your own. They have horse sneakers from Nike, New Balance and even those gross toe shoes that everyone's embarrassed to wear in public." This encourages potential customers to buy and also take part in the trend. "These kicks will cost you \$1200. Per hoof. Wow, that's a lot of money. But do you want your horse to look poor? I didn't think..."

In addition, the world reacted "for those that don't know, I am in Lexington, KY, and this is some crazy crowd. Look at those stuff like sneakers for horses. Can you guys see this? Seriously,

Lexington, what is happening? Oh my god.” Beyond the entertainment value, "Horse Kicks" also showcased Lexington's artistic talent (Floyd's work) and commitment to community, more specifically the charitable donations. “...also pledged to donate 10% of all future Horse Kicks profits to local charities.” Overall, this weird and quirky campaign successfully put Lexington on the map and highlighted the city's unique personality.

4.1.3 Element 3: Artistic Value

Both analyses emphasized the importance of artistic value in elevating the creative impact of branded content ads. Visually and verbally the ideas came to life in distinctive ways. Sometimes through the use of colors, shapes, sizes, etc. or sophisticated cinematography, and innovative editing techniques. Also, insightful descriptions and impactful deliveries improved not only the overall artistic value of the branded content but also connected on a deeper level with the viewers. For example, Warner Music Group (Dublin) & Rothco, Part of Accenture Interactive (Dublin) “Saylists” (2022) campaign, and Activision (Los Angeles) & DAVID (Madrid) “Scratchboards” (2023) campaign showcased highly artistic value through stunning visuals and insightful descriptive, creating a compelling narrative.

The “Saylists” (2022) campaign leveraged popular music's repetitive nature to create fun and engaging speech therapy tools. "We created an algorithm to analyze popular music for patterns of repetition that are helpful for speech therapy. Songs where particular sounds occur in particular patterns that are helpful for overcoming an impediment". This is a vivid description and moreover it goes on “Apple Music then conducted the single largest data analysis of song lyrics scanning millions of tracks, like the songs with therapeutic value.” The visuals show divergent songs on the screen highlighting specific words, as shown by, “A say list of songs for t or k, d, ch, f and more.” The focus of the description is on the benefits for young people with speech impediments. This fresh approach personalizes therapy and caters to young people. The campaign grabs attention by presenting a surprising solution (music) to a common problem (speech impediments). Viewers likely found the concept unexpected and intriguing, wanting to learn more about how it works. The video connected to the brand's values (music) by using music as a creative solution for a social issue (speech impediments). An example could be, "Let's say lists come in... It's boooooooring!!!!!! except when it happens in music." In general, the BC had a fun, and encouraging tone and a dynamic pace.

In the case of the “Saylists” (2022) campaign, the visuals perfectly assisted the words to promote the overall concept. The visuals used striking colors, like blue, green, purple, red and pink. Sometimes, the color blue can represent calmness and relaxation (Cherry, 2024) while red and pink symbolize warmth creativity, innovativeness, but also imagination and caring (para. 1-7). However, there is a deeper meaning behind this, as according to Kauppinen-Raisanen & Jauffret (2017) “red is a functional color that fits products filling utilitarian needs and blue is a sensory-social

color that meets those needs.” (p.114). That is why these colors are used in this connection to this functional product. Lastly, the color purple might also symbolize wisdom, imagination and sophistication while green is a symbol of hope, health, growth and freshness.

The BC also portrayed moving speech bubbles, cartoon characters and overexaggerated big red lips were visible. However, it also used white lines and geometric shapes, for instance squares, rectangles, and circular shapes to connect with younger audiences. Moreover, it used personification as in one scene a plasticine world was visible, which had a moving mouth and was wearing headphones. What is more, oversized lips that are opening and closing were a symbol of overcoming the speech impediment. They were in the foreground of the video. In general, this ad was verbally and visually distinctive as well as complex, which portrayed highly artistic value. Lastly, “Saylists” is a prime example of using creativity to address a social issue. It demonstrates how technology and entertainment can be used to actually make a positive change in our world and started by focusing on children.

Whereas, “Scratchboards” (2023) also showed highly artistic value in a slightly different way. Activision's "Scratchboards" campaign for the remastered Tony Hawk's Pro Skater game has bridged the gap between the physical world of skateboarding and the digital world of video games in a truly clever way. In skateboarding, it is normal that the more someone uses their skateboard, the more they scratch it. Activision has created unique and limited-edition skateboards with hidden game codes embedded beneath the surface, which mimicked scratch-off lottery tickets. “In skateboarding, the more you skate and slide, the more you scratch your board. So, to promote the remastered version of the game, we created limited edition decks that work just like lottery scratch cards.” All three deck designs had the features of a typical scratchcard, including metallic colors, lucky charm symbols, and hidden prizes. What is more, the top layer was covered in special paint, which can be scratched off to then reveal a second hidden layer with in-game reward codes on it. This highly surprising and visually distinctive concept grabbed attention and resonated with skaters, who are their target audience.

Moreover, collaborating with the Birdhouse brand and showcasing legendary skaters using the Scratchboards added credibility and a sense of community. The campaign resulted in a significant increase in sales and pre-orders, demonstrating the effectiveness of this interactive and nostalgia-driven approach. The video opens with a relatable story from a real skater about the game's inspiration which creates this nostalgic and sentimental connection “The only reason I really started skating was because I played Tony Hawk's underground and I love that game, with my whole heart.” The game is presented as a cultural touchstone that inspired a generation of skaters. Potential consumers are likely intrigued by the interactive nature of the Scratchboard decks, which blends their love of skateboarding with the game.

In addition, highly artistic value was not only shown in the insightful and nostalgic descriptions but also in the visuals. What truly grabbed attention were the game visuals included in the BC. It started by taking the viewer into the world of games by displaying the word “Loading” on the screen. Through the BC, the viewer feels immersed and literally “in” the game or being the one selecting and picking options. There are short clips from the classic game and transitions of the game and real life which align perfectly and encourage you to skate and play. Moreover, many untraditional techniques are used. There are fisheye lenses, low angle and dutch angle shots. Also, there is a mix of wide and close up and fast shots on the individuals who are skating. Another essential aspect is the font and color, which makes this BC highly distinctive and visually striking as it is a combination of yellow and orange. These colors represent warmth, energy and attract attention (Kauppinen-Raisanen & Jauffret, 2017, pp.105-107). Therefore, they can represent optimism, happiness and innovation. In essence, "Scratchboards" went beyond the traditional game promotion, where they created a desirable physical product that reignited the nostalgic excitement for the Tony Hawk's Pro Skater franchise.

4.1.4 Element 4 & 5: Flexibility & Elaboration

When it comes to Flexibility and Elaboration, these two elements were less visible in the Branded Entertainment & Content in the 2022 & 2023 award winners. Nonetheless, I believe they are also crucial and should be mentioned in order to understand them better and see how they have been portrayed in award-winning branded entertainment & content.

Element 4: Flexibility

The analyses revealed that branded content ads demonstrate flexibility in how they move between ideas or storylines. Some BC ads transitioned seamlessly between different scenes or locations, while maintaining a cohesive narrative flow. A representative example of this could be the “BVG Hempticket – Come home, calm down” branded content ad, which showed different perspectives, locations and situations of people during the hectic and busy Christmas time, however one thing is common, stress. They took the very real problem of pre-Christmas stress in Berlin, which is relatable to all people across the planet and offered a seemingly unbelievable solution, edible hemp tickets infused with calming cannabis oil. While the tickets themselves weren't actually psychoactive, the outrageous concept sparked global conversation and media buzz. It had different ideas and shifted from one type of subject matter to another.

For example, it started by showing a tired and exhausted mother in the city, carrying not only many bags but she was also dragging her child behind her on a snow sledge. Eventually she could not stand it anymore and she let the heavy bags in her hands fall to the ground. Another scene showed a man in a car, who was trying to park the car, but he could not focus as there were three young children in the back of his car playing the flute and being loud. The next scene portrayed an older man at the

bus station who was waiting with his walking frame/rollator, this means he could not really move that much. However, the same scene also showed a young girl who came with her small dog that chose exactly the rollator of the older man to pee while staring him directly in the eyes. Lastly, a scene showcased a man who is rushing with his newly bought Christmas tree into the metro and the top of the Christmas tree falls off as the door closes and cuts it away. All those people have something in common even though their lives are completely different. They are irritated, stressed and have had enough! So, it indirectly addresses holiday stress but offers a playful, fun but also unexpected solution. Therefore, the campaign used a surprise schema to grab viewers' attention.

Moreover, the analysis highlighted the use of humor to bridge seemingly different subject matter and ideas and even social issues. The use of playful connotations for the hemp tickets and BVG itself contrasted with the stressful connotations of the Christmas season. This surprising and entertaining approach resulted in a highly successful campaign. Humor was used, as shown by "What have they been smoking?", "The run up to Christmas in Berlin is often anything but magical. Stress. You do have one option to help you, really good stuff.", The hemp ticket. It not only takes you home but might take away some of the tensions." also "it's getting crazier and crazier now", Really? Really!" and "How ripped is he?" while using fun and colorful visuals. Mostly, this was yellow and black as it connected directly to BVG and made the small details more memorable and associated with the brand.

This BC showed these different storylines but eventually it connected the different people and their issues, with a hint of humor and overall, into one by using the edible hemp ticket after an exhausting day at work, with kids, traffic, crowds etc. This is the flexibility that is truly visible. BVG positioned itself as a playful, innovative company that understands its customers' needs.

Element 5: Elaboration

Last but not least, both analyses suggested that effective branded content ads go beyond the surface-level and make simple ideas more interesting and catchier. The way to do that is by providing elaboration and going into detail when it comes to basic ideas. For example, Budweiser's "Messi: 644 Toasts to The Goalkeepers" was a perfect example of creating BC that has the ability to finish, extend and detail basic ideas so that they become more intricate and sophisticated. It showed Lionel Messi, a truly famous footballer, breaking the records through a unique lens, of his opponents, the goalkeepers. It was visible that this unexpected perspective grabbed the attention of many people all over the world and created a compelling narrative around sportsmanship, success, achievement and respect. Also, this could encourage viewers to go, check more information about this, and learn more about this incredible story. Visually, this was evident in the use of rich details within the scene composition, creating depth and emotional connection with the viewer through the use of deep and luxurious colors

(black and red) and the overall atmosphere. When doing the qualitative content analysis, there were moments where the script delved into the specific details or the intricacies of the product's features, which was the most important aspect when it comes to elaboration. Moreover, both the visuals and transcript elaborated on the planning, and execution stages and the impressive social media impact of the campaign, offering their viewers a deeper understanding of this campaign.

What is more, the campaign portrayed a basic idea of a bottle of beer, watching football and made an unexpected twist by adding unexpected details to the concept of drinking beer. Budweiser created 160 personalized bottles for each of the goalkeepers that were part of Messi's success. "We created a custom Budweiser representing each one of the goals and personalized it to the keeper it was scored against, partnering with the man himself on the plan." Also, it had fast-paced visuals to create excitement around a celebratory moment in sports and slow-motion and close ups on the beers for each of the 644 different goals, The number of the goal was written big in the middle of the bottle, getting special attention.

The beginning with such an significant history connection to Messi breaking Pele's record and scoring 644 goals, built a stronger connection with viewers and let them dive deeper into the brand values. "And what does each of these goals have in common? One thing. There's a goalkeeper standing in his way." The idea of drinking beer when watching football is basic but the elaboration on the fact to use history and create the personalized bottles for the goalkeepers that usually do not get much attention is clearly showing high elaboration. Moreover, this basic idea of drinking beer has been extended and become something more, finishing it with intricate details "We immediately shipped the beers to all of the keepers and when they arrived the keepers started a movement using the bottles to toast Messi's achievement. It became unmissable across sports, news and culture outlets, got picked up by the world's media and cut through into mainstream broadcast." Overall, this BE&C was celebrating the achievements and success of footballers and goalkeepers while focusing on basic idea of drinking beer while watching football and making it more sophisticated and intriguing.

4.2 Theoretical & Managerial Implications

To begin with, this study used the model by Smith et al. (2007) to discover the main elements of creativity in 20 Clio Award Winning ads (pp. 823-830). After diving deeper into each BC ads, analyzing and investigating these 5 elements in-depth, this research filled the gap in literature regarding the main elements of advertising creativity, which are originality, synthesis and artistic value, and how they have been portrayed in award winning branded content. As mentioned earlier, there has been some research already done but this was mostly focused on quantitative analysis and advertising, not branded content. Therefore, this research significantly contributes to the already existing literature by providing detailed insights to our current understanding of creativity and its role

in BC. What is more, by not only clarifying the main elements of creativity but also validating the research methods and underlying concepts as well as the theory used, this study can also serve a great basis for future research.

This research offers valuable insights and practical takeaways for marketers and advertising professionals. You can think of it as a roadmap. This study can help marketers in understanding the critical role of these specific creative elements when trying to create successful BC ads. The study focused on identifying the most impactful elements of creativity, which are originality, synthesis, and artistic value, and highlighting their power. These are the secret and key ingredients to create impactful and creative ads, mainly branded content. These elements are crucial in order to create ads that can effectively communicate brand identity, enhance the brand's image, and ultimately drive higher brand equity. So, when it comes to originality, marketers and advertisers should mainly focus on unique, rare and out of the common ideas. To improve their content they can also use synthesis which connects usually unrelated ideas or objects and has unusual connections. Lastly, artistic value makes the overall BC more impressive, as it focuses on distinctive striking visual or verbal elements.

This research was not only about the “what” of creativity, but also about the “how” brands bring their ideas to life! You can think of this as a peek behind the curtains, as this study revealed that successful brands use a vibrant color palette, symbols that have a deeper meaning, celebrities appear in the BC and there are also history connections that make the overall message more stronger. With this knowledge, marketing managers can become strategic artists that create unique campaigns enriched with these elements. What can be the results of that? BC that resonated not just with the viewers' hearts but their wallets as well, which are measurable outcomes that make a essential difference. More specifically, by understanding how creativity is portrayed in successful ads, like the Clio Award Winners, creative directors can have brainstorming sessions more often and develop more effective advertising strategies that will raise awareness to the brand. Also, this research offers a fresh perspective while empowering marketers to make better data-driven decisions in order to optimize their marketing campaigns.

However, this research is not just for big companies and established brands. More importantly, smaller and local businesses can make use of this valuable information for their own power and to develop new and creative strategies. Someone can think of this as a benefit for brands that struggle with revenue increase or simply low brand-awareness. Instead of relying solely on ad agencies, they can develop their own unique voice and stand out from the crowd. Just imagine local businesses creating and developing BC that is as engaging and memorable as anything on national TV.

Furthermore, by understanding the five factors of divergence in-depth, we can look at how these elements that characterize creativity are exhibited in award winning ads. Also, this shows that

managers should dive deeper into semiotics and the psychology of colors and understand that when telling a story, colors can have a huge impact on triggering specific psychological reactions in viewers. So, this research shows that colors are not just decoration, but powerful tools that set the overall tone of the BC, represent a brand and their association, but also draw focus to some pivotal details. The same applies to the use of lines and shapes, as strategically using these elements can make branded content pop while making the content more captivating and immersive. This also happens with the help of vivid, insightful descriptions or figurative language.

To minimize bias, I maintained memos and notes where I documented my coding decisions and interpretations. This allowed me to come back to my initial thoughts during the analysis and helped in general to maintain consistency and credibility. I have focused on a specific timeframe, which was 2022-2023 Clio award winners and a limited sample size of 20 videos. This could have an impact on the overall analytical generalization, which is basically making suggestions about the findings and their transferability, from a theoretical analysis of the existing theory. Therefore, future studies might explore a broader range of branded content & entertainment and also focus on comparing and contrasting advertising creativity across different platforms and not only focusing on the award winners. For example, future research might not only focus on Clio Award Winners but also branded content on YouTube, Instagram or TikTok. In addition, this analysis could then open the doors to new and exciting possibilities and reveal further trends or even interesting changes in how creativity is portrayed over time or across divergent media. Exploring a longer timespan could show how creativity has expanded in terms of the 5 elements of divergence.

Moreover, future research should also take into consideration other cultures, the cultural backgrounds and other geographical locations when looking at how creativity is portrayed and what are the main elements of it. Furthermore, an idea for future research would be to have longitudinal studies. This was explained above in the theoretical part, that in order to have an impact on people, they might need to be exposed to specific creative branded content for a longer period of time and investigate whether and how their perceptions of the brand change over time. I believe this could bring insightful and helpful results.

Last but not least, the resources and time for working on this master thesis were unfortunately limited. With more time, I could do more advanced data analyses and dive deeper into the second pillar of creativity as well. Therefore, future research could take both creativity pillars into account, as this would strengthen the results of this study. The other component of creativity, which is relevance could be analyzed by researchers by exploring audience perceptions of creativity using focus groups or surveys and investigate how viewers evaluate and respond to different creative approaches in BC&E.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, this research investigated the main elements of advertising creativity and how they are portrayed BC&E. Therefore, the answer to my research question “What are the main elements that define creativity in branded content & entertainment of Clio Award Winners?” is that creativity is portrayed mainly through the elements of originality, synthesis and artistic value. These were the three main recurring divergence components. Also, we should not forget to take flexibility and elaboration into account, to make the viewers more engaged. Moreover, the strongest and two most occurring elements in one BC were the connection of synthesis & originality, which focuses on not only making unusual connections by connection two unrelated ideas or items but also making surprising and out of the ordinary content. The two main underlying themes were focused on raising social awareness to social and environmental issues, and the use of humor/seriousness to connect with the viewers on a deeper level. However, we should also remember that creativity is many things and cannot be defined and portrayed clearly and in one universal way.

This study primarily used Smith et al.’s (2007) model on divergence as a theory of creativity (p. 830). In my opinion, it was a truly suitable theory for this research as it focused on elements like originality, flexibility, elaboration, synthesis, and artistic value, which are all relevant to creative expression and advertising creativity. This framework was not only well-suited for this research, but it also provided a structured lens to analyze the BC award winners. After all, the element “impactful” could be an extension of the model as 50% of the BC ads used social or environmental issues to raise awareness. Lastly, the Machin & Mayr’s (2012) denotation and connotation approach was a helpful tool to uncover the underlying meanings of the ads (p. 163). Overall, this research went far beyond just looking at the basic functionalities as it dived deeper into the innovative aspects and explored the creative elements of the BC in detail.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Information about the Clio Award Winning Branded Entertainment & Content

No.	Ent ran t Co mp any	Brand	Title	City	Year	Winne r Catego ry	Link
1	Mc Ca nn Par is	Spinneys And The Lebanese Breast Cancer Foundation	The Bread Exam	Neuilly- sur-Seine	2022	Gold	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/spinneys-and-the-lebanese-breast-cancer-foundation/the-bread-exam-112764
2	CO PA 90	Budweiser / AB InBev	Messi: 644 Toasts To The Goalkeep ers	London	2022	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/budweiser-ab-inbev/messi-644-toasts-to-the-goalkeepers-102529
3	Jun g von Ma tt AG	Berliner Verkehrsbe triebe (BVG) - AöR, Berlin &	The BVG Hempticke t – Come home, calm down.	Hamburg	2022	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/berliner-verkehrsbetriebe-bvg/the-bvg-hempticket-come-home-calm-down--113533

		Jun g von Matt AG, Hamburg					
4	BE TC	Distance, Paris & BE TC, Paris	Outlaw runners	Paris	2022	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/distance/outlaw-runners-114910
5	Uni ted Co m mu nic atio ns Gr oup _U niS urf Dig ital	BRAUN, HE NG LEONG HANG CO., LTD., Taipei & Uni ted Communic ations Group_Uni Surf Digital, Taipei	Who shaved Beard Chang's trademark beard?	Taipei	2022	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/braun/who-shaved-beard-chang-s-trademark-beard--107776
6	Co m mo nw ealt h// Mc Ca nn	Chevrolet, Detroit & Commonw ealth // McCann, Detroit	Apple Pie Hot Dog	Detroit	2022	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/chevrolet/apple-pie-hot-dog-110390

7	Rot hco , Par t of Ac cen tur e Int era ctiv e	Warner Music Group, Dublin & Rothco, Part of Accenture Interactive, Dublin	Saylists	Dublin	2022	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/warner-music-group/saylists-106171
8	BB DO	Capitol Records, New York & BB DO, New York	The Academic 'Not Your Summer'	New York	2022	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winners?program=clios&year=2022&mediums%5B1948%5D=5&category=13622
9	SE RV IC EP LA N AU ST RI A	Red Bull Athlete Dario Costa, Salzburg & WI EN NORD Serviceplan / NOW Serviceplan , Vienna Dario Costa, Red	The Tunnel Pass Project	Vienna	2022	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/dario-costa-red-bull-bmw-m-hamilton/the-tunnel-pass-project-115955

		Bull, BMW M & Hamilton					
10	Public is Co nse il	Carrefour, Massy & Pu blicis Conseil, Paris	The Healthy Map / Carrefour X Fortnite	Paris	2022	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/carrefour/the-healthy-map-carrefour-x-fortnite-112106
11	Ret hin k	Kraft Heinz, Toronto & Rethink, Toronto/M ontreal/Van couver	A.I Ketchup	Toronto/ Montreal/ Vancouver	2023	Gold	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/kraft-heinz/a-i-ketchup-140917
12	Le o Bur nett Au stra lia	Bundaberg Rum, Bundaberg & Le o Burnett Australia, Sydney	Bundy Mixer	Sydney	2023	Gold	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/bundaberg-rum/bundy-mixer-141024
13	Ma rcel	Back Market, Paris & Marcel, Paris	Hack Market	Paris	2023	Gold	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/back-market/hack-market-134966
14	DA VI D	Activision, Los Angeles &	Scratchbo ards	Madrid	2023	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/activision/scratchboards-142287

		DAVID, Madrid					
15	Cor nett	VisitLEX, Lexington & Cor nett, Lexington	Horse Kicks	Lexington	2023	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/visitlex/horse-kicks-133740
16	Ogi lvy UK	Dove, London & Ogilvy UK, London	Toxic Influence	London	2023	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/dove/toxic-influence-143204
17	Pu blic is Ital y	Heineken, Amsterdam & Publicis Italy, Milan	The Virtual Heineken Silver	Milan	2023	Silver	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/heineken/the-virtual-heineken-silver-138620
18	Saa tchi & Saa tchi	Mondelēz Europe, Zurich & Saatchi & Saatchi, Düsseldorf	Cheat Cookies	Düsseldorf	2023	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/oreo/cheat-cookies-142564
19	Ret hin k	Kraft Heinz, Toronto & Rethink, Toronto/M ontreal/Van couver	Vintage Drip	Toronto/ Montreal/ Vancouver	2023	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-content/kraft-heinz/vintage-drip-135756
20	Pu blic	Ukrainian WITness,	WikiTruth	Amsterda m	2023	Bronze	https://clios.com/awards/winner/branded-entertainment-

is Gr oup e BE NE LU X	Kyiv & Publicis Groupe NL, Amsterdam					content/ukrainian- witness/wikitruth-132740
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Appendix B: Codebook based on theory of divergence

Factor/Code	Description	Highly	Somewhat	Limited
Originality	Ideas that are rare, surprising, or move away from the obvious and commonplace, out of the ordinary. The ability to break away from habit-bound & stereotypical thinking.	The BC is highly unique, surprising and has original ideas, they are out of the ordinary, and/or break stereotypes & habit bound thinking. (the BC stands out from the crowd)	The BC is somewhat unique, surprising and has original ideas, they are somewhat out of the ordinary, and/or break stereotypes & habit bound thinking.	The BC is not unique, surprising and has traditional ideas, that are not out of the ordinary, and/or do not break stereotypes & habit bound thinking.
Flexibility	The ability to generate different ideas. The ability to shift from one type of subject matter to another. Ideas that fall outside logical or expected.	The BC is generating highly different ideas and/or is highly shifting between subjects.	The BC is generating somewhat different ideas and/or is somewhat shifting between subjects.	The BC is not generating different ideas and/or is not shifting between subjects.

Elaboration	The unexpected details. The ability to finish, extend, and detail basic ideas so they become more intricate, complicated or sophisticated.	The BC has highly unexpected details, details in basic ideas, making them more intricate, sophisticated or complicated	The BC has somewhat unexpected details, details in basic ideas, making them somewhat more intricate, sophisticated or complicated	The BC does not have unexpected details, details in basic ideas, making them more intricate, sophisticated or complicate
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.	The BC is highly connecting unrelated ideas/objects, has unusual connections and brings unusual ideas/objects together	The BC is somewhat connecting unrelated ideas/objects, has somewhat unusual connection, brings somewhat unusual ideas/objects together	The BC is not connecting unrelated ideas/objects, or has no unusual connections, or brings no unusual ideas/objects together
Artistic Value	Arranging verbally/visually distinctive ideas. Ideas come to life verbally/graphically. The ability to produce artistic impressions (produced artistically) or art of any kind.	The BC is highly distinctive in verbal/visual ideas, and brings the ideas to life visually/verbally.y	The BC is somewhat distinctive in verbal/visual ideas, and brings some ideas to life visually/verbally.	The BC is not distinctive in verbal/visual ideas, and does not bring the ideas to life visually/verbally. (conventional style)

Appendix C: Visual Analysis Framework

	Denotation	Connotation
Objects/Ideas		
Setting		
Salience (what calls attention in terms of color, tone, foregrounding, size, focus, overlapping, cultural symbols)		