



## Variability of creativity judgments

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### ABSTRACT

The Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT), developed by Amabile [Amabile, T.M. (1982). Social psychology of creativity: A consensual assessment technique. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 43, 997–1013], is frequently used to evaluate the creativity of productions. Judgments obtained with CAT are usually reliable and valid. However, notable individual differences in judgment exist. This empirical study shows that creativity judgments for advertisements vary, depending on (1) the level of two underlying components of creativity – originality and appropriateness, (2) the creative ability of the judges, i.e. variations in their ability to be original, and finally, (3) instructions or training that they received about the topic of creativity assessment. Effects of advertisements' appropriateness and judges' ability to be original on individual differences in creativity judgments are discussed.

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### 1. Introduction

Researchers have tended recently to adopt a consensual definition of creativity which emphasizes two criteria: creativity is the capacity to realize a production which is new and, at the same time, adapted to the context (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Lubart, 1994; Sternberg & Lubart, 1995). The novelty of a production is characterized by its original and unexpected nature. Adaptation has been conceived in terms of appropriateness (e.g., Runco & Charles, 1993; Runco, Illies, & Eisenman, 2005), usefulness, value (e.g., Ford, 1996), or resolution with respect to problem constraints (e.g., Besemer & Treffinger, 1981).

In spite of its multidimensional nature, creativity has been mostly assessed as a unidimensional construct (Sullivan & Ford, 2005). Since two decades, Amabile's Consensual Assessment Technique (CAT; Amabile, 1982, 1996; Hennessey & Amabile, 1999) has been commonly used to evaluate creativity of productions in different domains (e.g., Hickey, 2001; Baer, Kaufman, & Gentile, 2004; Dollinger, Urban, & James, 2004; Lee, Lee, & Youn, 2005). For Amabile (1982), the procedure requires selecting appropriate judges, which have some experience with the domain of endeavor, and asking them to assess independently productions relative to one another. Judges should not be given any specific criteria for creativity assessment; on the contrary, they are asked to use their own subjective understanding. Despite the obvious success of CAT, further research is needed to

understand what characteristics of the productions, the judgment task, and of the judges themselves, could influence creativity assessment (Amabile, 1996). The main objective of the current research is to investigate the extent to which individual differences in creativity ratings of advertisements are due, first, to judges' differential reliance on two underlying dimensions of creativity – originality and appropriateness – and the integration of these in a global judgment of creativity; second, to characteristics of the judges – e.g. variations in their personal creative ability – and third, to different instructions that judges received about the topic of creativity.

#### 1.1. Information integration in creativity judgments

Although the definition of creativity emphasizes, as mentioned above, originality and appropriateness, few studies have varied these dimensions experimentally (e.g., Hammaker, Shafro, & Trabasso, 1975; Hood, 1973; Malgady & Barcher, 1979; Runco & Charles, 1993). To our knowledge, the experiment conducted by Runco and Charles (1993) is the only one to have investigated how both originality and appropriateness contribute to judgments of creativity. These authors created experimentally three sets of productions allegedly obtained in a divergent thinking test. Their results showed that creativity ratings increased either when the proportion of original and appropriate ideas simultaneously increased, or when the proportion of original but inappropriate ideas increased. But, on the contrary, creativity ratings tended to decrease when the proportion of appropriate but common ideas increased.

The importance of both underlying dimensions in creativity assessment of real-world productions, such as advertisements, is not

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well known. To our knowledge, very few studies have investigated this issue, and mostly by means of multivariate analysis of ratings. For example, using subscales of the Creative Product Semantic Scale (CPSS; Besemer, 1998; Besemer & O'Quin, 1986, 1999; O'Quin & Besemer, 1989), White, Shen, and Smith (2002) observed that advertising professionals and members of the general public could agree on advertisement ratings for originality and logic – one of the subscales of the resolution dimension which is conceptually very similar to appropriateness. In another study, in which advertisements were rated by means of semantic differential scales, Sullivan and Ford (2005) showed that originality and value (appropriateness) comprised a unified dimension closely associated with creativity ratings. However, for situations in which both dimensions are experimentally varied, the question remains if, in rating creativity of advertisements, judges could differentially rely on both characteristics.

Following Runco and Charles's (1993) recommendation, the present research investigates the mechanism by which judges integrate information concerning originality and appropriateness in their ratings of creativity. More precisely, subjects were asked to rate the creativity of a set of advertisements purposely selected to represent various levels of originality and appropriateness previously scored by experts. We hypothesize that creativity ratings will increase as the originality level of productions increase (Hood, 1973; Runco & Charles, 1993). Although it is assumed that their appropriateness level will also modulate creativity ratings, it is hard to formulate any particular hypothesis concerning this specific effect. We can only speculate that to be judged creative, an advertisement should be sufficiently appropriate (by definition); but not too much, to avoid banality. Moreover, if subjects integrate information on originality and appropriateness to determine their judgments, an interaction between these two factors should be observed.

### 1.2. Individual differences in judgments related to the creative ability of the judges

If the characteristics of productions constitute one source of judgment variability, personal characteristics of the judges themselves could lead to individual differences in creativity ratings. For advertisements, White et al. (2002) noticed that such ratings were significantly linked with certain demographic variables (such as age and gender), and with other descriptive variables (professional experience in advertising and reading newspapers). Moreover, raters' creative ability may lead to individual differences in creativity judgments and could interact with some characteristics of the productions to be judged. For example, Hood (1973) investigated the link between judges' originality, measured in an Unusual Uses Test, and their ratings of originality for productions obtained with an alternative form of the same test. His results showed that creativity ratings of judges who were low in originality were more affected by productions' originality levels compared to judges with moderate originality, or high originality who did not discriminate well the creativity of productions and for whom mean ratings were lower. These results suggest that highly original judges could have developed a very restrictive conception of creativity which leads them to consider that only extremely original productions are creative. The present research will try to replicate this interaction between judges' originality and productions' originality in creativity ratings. However, there is no theoretical reason to suppose that raters' originality will interact with advertisement appropriateness.

### 1.3. Individual differences in judgments related to instruction

The CAT postulates that if the judges possess some expertise in the domain in which the productions are evaluated, they will sponta-

neously recognize the creativity in the work (Amabile, 1982, 1996). Amabile (1982, p. 1002) even stated that "if appropriate judges independently agree that a given product is highly creative, then it can and must be accepted as such". Numerous studies indicate that creativity assessment with the CAT is usually reliable under various experimental conditions (e.g., Amabile, 1996; Baer, 1994; Baer et al., 2004; Hennessey, 1994; Hennessey & Amabile, 1999). Nevertheless, judges' expertise level is an additional source of individual differences for judgments of creativity. First, it is notable that sometimes interjudge agreement can be inferior for expert than for non-expert persons (Dollinger et al., 2004; Hickey, 2001). This result could be interpreted as evidence that expert judges develop their own subjective understanding of creativity based on their experiences within the domain of production. Second, it is not surprising that inter-judge agreement could be rather low for non-expert judges. In an attempt to compensate this lack of agreement, Dollinger and Shaffran (2005) proposed to train non-experts judges to calibrate their ratings before asking them to evaluate creativity of productions. This training consisted simply in giving psychologist judges a set of drawings to illustrate prototypical levels of creativity according to expert (artist) judgments. With this small procedural modification, the authors found that interjudge reliability improved for psychologists, compared to results obtained in a previous study (Dollinger et al., 2004). These findings raise the more general question of the effect of instructions and training on judgments of creativity, even if the CAT procedure normally proscribes this approach (e.g., Amabile, 1982).

This third source of variation for creativity judgment can be experimentally studied if we assumed that judges will be more inclined to take both originality and appropriateness into account in conditions that make explicit the relevant dimensions on which to base their creativity judgments. Thus, compared to a situation in which no conceptual framework for creativity was imposed, the respective importance of originality and appropriateness in determining creativity ratings should increase when judges are presented with a normative definition of creativity and explicit criteria for judgments, moreover when they are trained to judge both criteria before assessing creativity. If this hypothesis is correct, the three judgment situations will interact with both originality and appropriateness characteristics of advertisements in creativity ratings.

## 2. Method

Hypothesis concerning the effects of productions' characteristics, judges creative ability and instruction will be tested by means of mixed factorial design, with three between subjects factors (gender, the two levels of raters' originality and the three experimental situations) and two repeated factors (the three levels of advertisement originality and the three levels of advertisement appropriateness). Gender was introduced in the design to check if this variable influences creativity judgment.

### 2.1. Subjects

Participants were 95 volunteer advanced undergraduates or recent graduate students at the University of Paris – France – (Mean age=27.7 years; SD=4.9). Approximately one third of them deliberately decided to attend a course on creativity.

### 2.2. Material

#### 2.2.1. Test of divergent thinking

Participants' creative ability was assessed with a divergent thinking task from the French version of the *Torrance Tests of Creative Thinking* (TTCT; Torrance, 1976): the unusual uses of a cardboard box task. In this task, subjects were asked to find as many different uses as

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