

The Transformation of Advertising Creativity: From Traditional TV Production to Viral Digital Content

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Abstract: Advertising creativity has been profoundly reshaped by the migration of brand communication from television to digital platforms. Although this transformation is well documented internationally, systematic evidence on how creative strategies have adapted in emerging European markets such as Romania remains scarce, and it is unclear whether digital advertising follows a genuinely distinct creative logic or merely transfers televisual conventions to new channels. Here we show, through a content analysis of 40 commercials awarded at the Effie Romania and Internetics effectiveness competitions, coded on 17 narrative, strategic, visual, and distribution variables, that the two formats obey systematically different creative logics: television builds structured narratives, early brand identification, and aspirational, rationally balanced appeals, whereas digital advertising favors brand manifestos, empathic and intensely emotional appeals, deep adaptation to the host platform, and — counterintuitively — stronger local cultural anchoring. Conceptual originality, however, is equally high in both formats. These findings indicate creative complementarity rather than substitution between media, suggesting that advertising creativity now operates in a hybrid regime in which classical communication principles coexist with platform-first innovation.

Keywords: advertising creativity, content analysis, Romanian advertising, digital platforms, television advertising, viral content.

TITLU: Transformarea creativității publicitare: de la producția TV tradițională la conținutul digital viral

REZUMAT: Creativitatea publicitară a fost profund remodelată de migrarea comunicării de brand dinspre televiziune către platformele digitale. Deși această transformare este bine documentată la nivel internațional, dovezile sistematice privind modul în care strategiile creative s-au adaptat în piețele europene emergente, precum România, rămân puține. De asemenea, rămâne neclar dacă publicitatea digitală urmează o logică creativă cu adevărat distinctă sau doar transferă convențiile televizuale pe noi canale. Studiul de față a analizat conținutul a 40 de reclame premiate la competițiile de eficiență Effie România și Internetics, codificate pe 17 variabile narative, strategice, vizuale și de distribuție. Rezultatele arată că cele două formate urmează logici creative sistematic diferite. Televiziunea construiește narațiuni structurate, identifică brandul de timpuriu și folosește apeluri aspiraționale, echilibrate rațional. Publicitatea digitală favorizează, în schimb, manifestele de brand, apelurile empatică și intens emoțională, adaptarea profundă la platforma-gazdă și, contrainuitiv, o ancorare culturală locală mai puternică. Originalitatea conceptuală este, totuși, la fel de ridicată în ambele formate. Aceste rezultate indică o complementaritate creativă între medii, nu o substituție. Ele sugerează că publicitatea creativă funcționează astăzi într-un regim hibrid, în care principiile clasice ale comunicării coexistă cu inovația gândită în primul rând pentru platforme.

CUVINTE-CHEIE: creativitate publicitară, analiză de conținut, publicitate românească, platforme digitale, publicitate de televiziune, conținut viral.

Introduction

Advertising is among the fields that register social transformation most sensitively. Over the past two decades, the way brands communicate with their publics has changed profoundly with the shift from television to digital media, and this transition has involved far more than a change of distribution channel: it has redefined how creative ideas are conceived, produced, and received. The success of an advertising message no longer depends primarily on

production budgets or the audience share of a TV station, but on its capacity to generate authentic reactions, sharing, and engagement in a highly competitive attention economy (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2019; Jenkins 2006).

While the international literature has documented this transformation extensively, systematic empirical studies of how creative strategies have adapted in the Romanian advertising market remain scarce. The present study addresses this gap through a comparative content analysis of awarded Romanian advertising, asking how narrative, strategic, visual, and distribution-related creative choices differ between commercials built on a televisual logic and those built for digital platforms. The focus on campaigns recognised at *Effie Romania* and *Internetics*, competitions that reward effectiveness rather than creativity alone, provides a corpus validated both creatively and strategically.

The article proceeds in five steps. The first section condenses the theoretical framework, connecting classical theories of creativity to the specific demands of advertising. The second section traces the structural transition from the television model to the digital ecosystem. The third section presents the methodology: research questions, corpus, coding instrument, and analytical procedure. The fourth section reports the results of the comparative analysis, and the final section discusses their implications, limitations, and directions for further research.

1. Creativity in Advertising: From Classical Theories to Applied Dimensions

Creativity has resisted reduction to a single definition. Etymologically rooted in the Latin *creare* — to bring forth something new — it has been theorized alternately as a process, a cognitive ability, and a socio-cultural phenomenon. Classical process models, from Wallas's (1926) four stages of preparation, incubation, illumination, and verification to Osborn's (1971) seven-stage model, describe the act of creation as a structured yet flexible sequence; later critiques (Guilford 1950; Stein 1975) questioned the rigidity of these stages while retaining their core insight that creative outcomes emerge from identifiable cognitive work rather than pure inspiration. Guilford's concept of divergent thinking — the capacity to generate multiple alternative solutions to open-ended problems — remains foundational for understanding ideation in advertising agencies, where the ability to produce many candidate concepts under brief constraints is a daily professional requirement.

Contemporary paradigms have displaced the locus of creativity from the isolated individual towards systems and cultures. Csikszentmihalyi (1996, 23) argues that creativity "does not happen inside people's heads, but in the interaction between a person's thoughts and a sociocultural context": an idea becomes creative only when validated by the relevant field. Vygotsky's (1978) socio-cultural perspective similarly grounds creative production in shared symbols and social interaction, while Amabile (1996) demonstrates that intrinsic motivation and organizational environment condition creative performance — findings directly applicable to agency teams. With digital technologies, creativity has become increasingly distributed: Jenkins's (2006) concept of participatory culture describes the erosion of the boundary between producers and consumers, visible in advertising through user-generated content, co-creation, and campaigns designed to be completed by their audiences.

For advertising specifically, the literature converges on three evaluative dimensions: originality, relevance, and effectiveness. Originality is a necessary but insufficient condition of creativity (Runco and Jaeger 2012); Smith and Yang (2004) theorize advertising creativity as the combination of divergence and relevance, arguing that divergence without relevance produces surprise but not engagement. Effectiveness closes the triad: Till and Baack (2005) show that creative advertisements are significantly better recalled than conventional ones, while warning against "vampire creativity," in which executional novelty absorbs attention at the expense of the brand. A recent meta-analysis covering 878 effect sizes confirms robust positive effects of advertising creativity on consumer responses, while underscoring that both originality and appropriateness must be present for those effects to materialize (Rosengren et al. 2020).

This triadic understanding was already implicit in the philosophies of the profession's classic practitioners, formed during the golden age of television advertising in the 1950s–1970s. Ogilvy (1985) subordinated creativity to commercial results and consumer respect — a good advertisement sells — insisting on research-based communication and warning that underestimating the audience amounts to insulting it. Bernbach, by contrast, elevated emotional resonance and artistic execution as persuasive forces, treating advertising as an art of persuasion in which how something is said matters as much as what is said (Levenson 1987). Burnett (1961) sought "inherent drama" in the product itself, expressed through warm, culturally resonant storytelling and archetypal characters. Their divergent philosophies mark out the same space the present study operationalizes: the tension and complementarity between originality, relevance to an audience, and measurable effect. Notably, all three logics remain legible in contemporary digital practice — data-driven personalization extends Ogilvy's research imperative, shareable emotional content extends Bernbach's resonance, and platform mascots and character worlds extend Burnett's archetypes — which is precisely why a comparative analysis of TV and digital creativity cannot be framed as a confrontation between an obsolete and a current model.

2. From the Television Model to the Digital Ecosystem

The televised advertising model that dominated marketing communication until the late 2000s was built on unidirectional communication towards large, relatively homogeneous audiences (Belch and Belch 2018, 20–23). Creativity was oriented towards capturing attention within a fixed 30- or 60-second interval and building brand image through elaborate production, storytelling, and visual aesthetics, with effectiveness measured indirectly through estimated audience and reach (Kotler and Keller 2016, 580–582). The format imposed a rigorous creative logic: complete narratives with setup, conflict, and resolution, early brand anchoring, and universal transferability across channels.

The digital ecosystem introduced a structurally different regime characterized by interactivity, personalization, and audience fragmentation. Users ceased to be passive receivers and became active participants who react, comment, share, and produce brand-related content of their own (Jenkins 2006, 2–4). Personalization, enabled by large-scale data collection and algorithmic distribution, allows messages to be adapted to individual behavior and preferences (Chaffey and Ellis-Chadwick 2019, 112–115), while performance becomes measurable in real time through engagement metrics, enabling continuous optimization (Ryan 2017, 45–48). Authenticity emerged as a central value, partly in reaction to the polish of professional production (Holt 2002), and the creative unit shifted from the finished spot to the modular concept, declinable across platforms and formats.

The transition also transformed the creative artefact itself. Where the television commercial was a finished product of fixed duration and form, digital creative concepts are modular and adaptive: a single idea is declined into multiple coherent versions optimized for different platforms, devices, and consumption contexts, including sound-off viewing and non-linear engagement. Storytelling persists but adapts to fragmented attention, and the competition for that attention pushes creative strategies towards relevance, concision, and the capacity to generate immediate interaction. Data, algorithms, and increasingly artificial intelligence add a further layer, turning advertising from an intuitive craft into a continuously optimized process — with attendant risks of content uniformization and constrained creative freedom (Malthouse et al. 2013). The rapid adoption of generative AI tools has intensified this dynamic, reopening the question of what counts as creative work and how creative labour and human judgement will be reorganized in advertising practice (Huh, Nelson, and Russell 2023). Research on brand communication in social media likewise emphasizes that platform characteristics themselves — affordances, cultures, and usage contexts — increasingly condition creative effectiveness (Voorveld 2019), a premise the present study operationalizes directly through the platform native-fit variable.

In Romania, this transition was accelerated by the 2008–2009 economic crisis, which forced a rapid reconfiguration of media budgets and communication strategies, and subsequently by the

growth of social platforms in a market that reached digital maturity later than Western European ones. Romanian campaigns of the past decade have nonetheless demonstrated that local advertising can be simultaneously culturally specific and internationally competitive, as attested by their recognition at effectiveness competitions. The transition did not eliminate traditional forms: television and digital advertising coexist, and the central question is no longer which medium prevails but how creative logics differ and interpenetrate across them. That question motivates the empirical study reported below.

3. Methodology

3.1. Research questions

The study investigates how advertising creativity has transformed with the migration of content from television to the online environment, with emphasis on viral advertising. It is exploratory in character, mapping an evolving phenomenon rather than testing predetermined hypotheses — a choice justified by the recency of these transformations in the Romanian industry and the absence of systematic local studies. Four research questions were formulated:

RQ1: What types of narrative structures predominate in awarded Romanian commercials, and do they differ between the TV and digital formats?

RQ2: How do the emotional tonality and persuasive register of TV commercials differ from those of digital ones?

RQ3: To what extent do the analyzed commercials exploit the specificity of their distribution platform, and what role does conceptual originality play in message construction?

RQ4: What is the degree of Romanian cultural anchoring of the analyzed commercials, and how is it reflected in narrative and visual choices?

3.2. Design and corpus

The research adopts a mixed qualitative–quantitative design based on systematic content analysis, a method suited to the objective, systematic, and quantitative description of manifest communication content (Berelson 1952) while also allowing interpretation of its latent dimensions. The unit of analysis is the individual commercial, treated as a multimodal text integrating narrative, visual, sonic, and strategic elements and analyzed in its entirety.

The corpus comprises 40 Romanian commercials selected from the portfolios of agencies recognized at the Effie Romania and Internetics competitions. Unlike festivals that reward creativity alone, these competitions reward the effectiveness of campaigns — the real impact of creativity on consumer behavior — yielding a sample validated both creatively and strategically. Selection criteria were: Romanian provenance (created by agencies active on the Romanian market, addressing Romanian consumers); dual representation of media (18 TV commercials and 22 digital ones, classified by creative logic rather than broadcast channel alone); diversity of product categories (retail, banking, CSR/NGO, food and beverage, telecom, streaming, tourism); public accessibility of the material; and recency of the campaigns. The corpus includes brands such as BCR, ING, Carrefour, Kaufland, KFC, McDonald's, eMAG, Samsung Romania, Netflix Romania, Dăruiește Viață, and Salvați Copiii România, created by agencies including Jam Session Agency, Leo Burnett, McCann Romania, DDB Romania, Publicis Romania, and Saatchi & Saatchi + The Geeks.

3.3. Coding instrument

The instrument was a coding grid of 17 variables grouped into four dimensions, constructed based on the advertising analysis, applied narratology, and visual communication literatures and adapted to the Romanian market. The narrative dimension covers the type of narrative structure (mascot/platform character, brand manifesto, extended visual metaphor, problem–solution, complete-arc mini-story, testimonial, slice-of-life, product demonstration, no narrative structure, cultural hijack/parody); narrative arc strength (ordinal 1–5); moment of brand identification (immediate 0–3 s, early 4–10 s, middle, late, final reveal); and dominant emotional tonality (nine categories, from empathy/compassion to nostalgia). The strategic dimension covers the persuasive register (ordinal 1–5, from purely rational to purely emotional appeal); Romanian cultural anchoring (ordinal 1–5, from generic/international to inseparably Romanian content); conceptual originality

(ordinal 1–5); and call-to-action type (transactional, informational, social engagement, creative/UGC participation, cause/civic action). The visual dimension covers dominant frame type, dominant color palette, lighting and visual aesthetic, and voice–image ratio. The distribution dimension covers platform native fit (ordinal 1–5, from repurposed TV content to platform-first content) and influencer/creator presence.

3.4. Procedure

Each commercial was coded through a standardized three-stage procedure: an initial first viewing without coding; a second viewing with deliberate stops for coding each variable; and a final verification viewing to ensure internal consistency across the corpus. Coding was performed by a single analyst, which precludes inter-rater reliability computation but ensures homogeneity of interpretive perspective; this limitation is discussed in the concluding section. Data were centralized in a structured spreadsheet and processed through absolute and relative frequencies for nominal variables and means and distributions for scalar variables, disaggregated by cluster (TV/digital). Statistical processing was carried out in GNU PSPP 1.4, the free and open-source statistical analysis program developed by the Free Software Foundation as a libre alternative to proprietary packages — a choice consistent with the goals of transparent, replicable, and freely reproducible research. Between-cluster differences on the five scalar variables were tested with Mann–Whitney U tests (two-sided, $\alpha = .05$), appropriate for ordinal measures and unequal group sizes, and associations between scalar variables were examined through rank correlations.

4. Results: Comparative Analysis of TV and Digital Advertising Creativity

4.1. Creative patterns in TV advertising

The TV cluster ($n = 18$) exhibits a clear and consistent set of patterns reflecting the conventions of classic television advertising. Narratively, the dominant structures are the mascot/platform character and problem–solution, each present in 4 commercials. The mascot structure appears in campaigns for ING, Storia.ro, McDonald's, Kaufland — brands that have invested in recurring characters or narrative worlds recognizable over the long term — while problem–solution characterizes Vola, OLX, eMAG, and iCredit, all functional categories in which demonstrating a concrete benefit remains central. Slice-of-life (Carrefour, Agricola International) and the complete-arc mini-story (Fixodent, Bitdefender) complete the picture, the latter two obtaining the maximum narrative arc score of 5 (Figure 1).

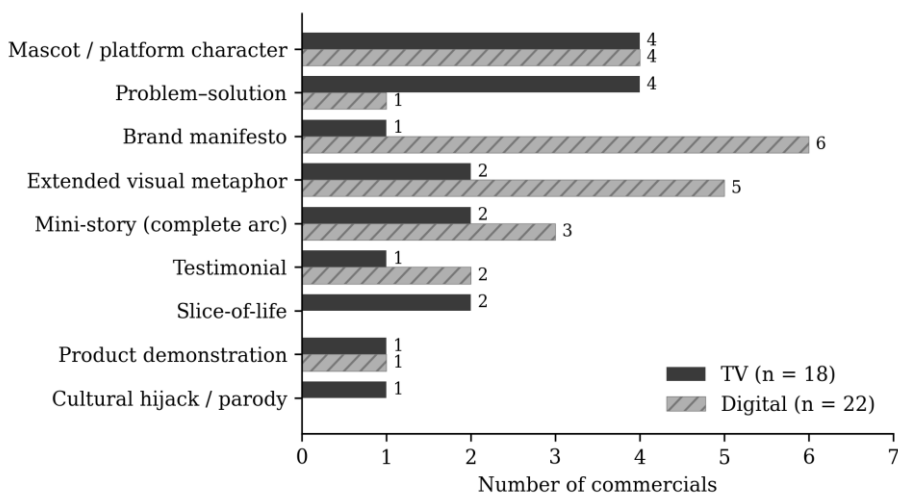


Figure 1. Narrative structures by cluster (absolute frequencies)

Narrative arc strength averages 3.67 in the TV cluster, the highest in the corpus, with maximum scores for OLX, Fixodent, eMAG, and Bitdefender. The value reflects television's tendency to build complete stories — setup, conflict, resolution — within the constraint of a 30- or 60-second spot. The moment of brand identification is among the most format-revealing indicators: 8 of 18 spots present the brand immediately (0–3 s) and another 8 early (4–10 s), so that 89% of TV spots anchor the brand in the first third of the commercial. The only exceptions are ING and Bitdefender, which employ a final reveal — a riskier narrative choice trading early anchoring for suspense.

The dominant emotional tonality in TV is inspiration/aspiration (5 spots: Stora.ro, Vola, McDonald's, Fixodent, Kaufland), followed by humor (3), and fear/concern, family warmth, dynamism, and empathy (2 each) (Figure 2). The persuasive register averages 2.67, indicating a balanced or slightly rational orientation: 8 spots score 2, 5 score 3, only 4 reach 4, and no TV spot received the maximum emotional score of 5.

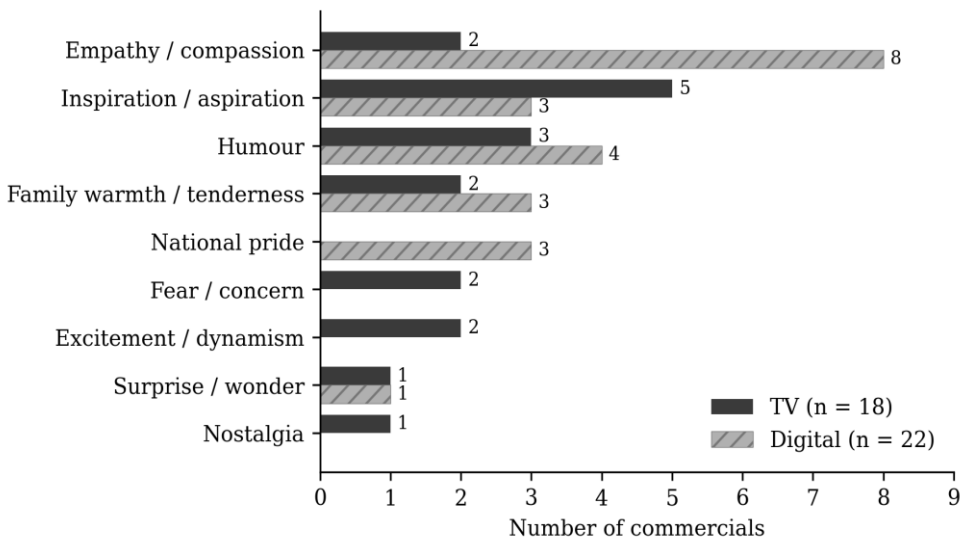


Figure 2. Dominant emotional tonality by cluster (absolute frequencies)] Visually, the dominant aesthetic is classic professional studio (6 spots), followed by natural/documentary (5) and stylized cinematic (4). The colour palette is predominantly warm — yellow, orange, red — in 9 of 18 spots, an aesthetic orientation towards visual comfort and proximity. Voiceover dominates the voice–image ratio in 10 of 18 spots, reflecting the TV convention of accompanying image with explanatory verbal narration, and the balanced mixed frame dominates in 11 spots, indicating deliberate alternation of shot types to create narrative rhythm.

Calls to action in TV are predominantly informational and transactional (8 spots each), confirming the orientation of televised advertising towards concrete, measurable consumer actions. Conceptual originality averages 3.83, with maximum scores for ING, Vola, VEKA Romania, AQUA Carpatica Kids, and Bitdefender. Romanian cultural anchoring, by contrast, remains low: a mean of 2.44, with 11 of 18 spots at score 2 — superficial localization present only at the level of language. The single TV spot with elevated cultural anchoring is VEKA Romania (score 4), built on a cultural hijack with specifically Romanian references. Influencer or creator presence is marginal: 14 of 18 TV spots feature no external creator or celebrity.

4.2. Creative patterns in digital advertising

The digital cluster (n = 22) presents a more diverse, flexible creative landscape, adapted to the specific platforms on which content lives. The dominant narrative structure is the brand manifesto, present in 6 of 22 spots (AQUA Carpatica Flavours, Kaufland, Samsung Romania, Accept, Olympia, Pampers). Unlike the linear narratives typical of TV, the manifesto communicates through declarations of values and position-taking, relying on the emotional resonance of a clear, direct message. The extended visual metaphor follows with 5 spots (SAMEDAY, Netflix Romania, ANAIS Association, Electric Castle, Dăruiește Viață), exploiting the digital medium's capacity to build powerful symbolic images in a short time, while the mascot/platform character appears in 4 digital spots (Salvați Copiii România, Head&Shoulders, Old Spice, Elfi), all deploying characters adapted to the tone and mechanics of digital platforms.

Narrative arc strength averages 3.36 in digital, slightly below TV; maximum scores go to BCR, Orkla Foods Romania – Tomi, and Elfi, spots which invest in narrative construction despite being conceived for the online environment. The moment of brand identification is markedly more flexible than in TV: only 6 spots present the brand immediately and 6 early, while 4 use a final reveal (Accept, Salvați Copiii România, Netflix Romania, ANAIS Association), 3 introduce the brand mid-content, and 2 late. This flexibility reflects the narrative freedom of the digital environment, where a user who has chosen to watch can be led through an experience before the brand is revealed (Figure 3).

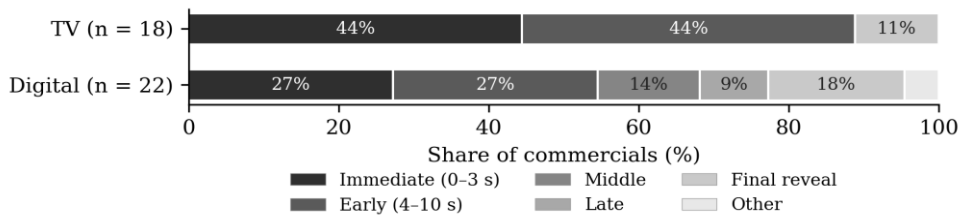


Figure 3. Moment of brand identification: share of commercials within each cluster

The dominant emotional tonality in digital is empathy/compassion, present in 8 of 22 spots (Durex, Kaufland, Samsung Romania, Salvați Copiii România, Teach for Romania, ANAIS Association, Dăruiește Viață, Pampers) — a distribution reflecting both the prevalence of CSR campaigns online and a more general tendency towards deep emotional connection. Humour follows (4 spots), then national pride, inspiration, and family warmth (3 each). The persuasive register averages 3.68, markedly higher than in TV: 5 spots received the maximum score of 5 (purely emotional register) and 7 scored 4, while only 2 scored 2.

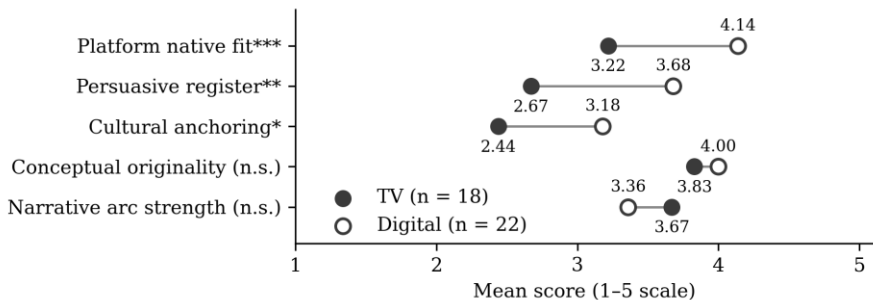
The visual aesthetic is more polarized than in TV: classic professional studio and hyper-stylized/CGI account for 7 spots each, while the amateur/UGC-feel aesthetic appears exclusively in digital (BCR, BCR Pensii) as a deliberate choice mimicking the authenticity of user-generated content. The color palette is more varied — brand-coded and warm (6 each), cold (5), contrastive (3), and desaturated/monochromatic in Accept and ANAIS Association, both campaigns with grave subject matter. The voice-image ratio likewise diversifies: voiceover remains most frequent (9 spots), but mixed alternation (4) and mute visual with image and text (4: SAMEDAY, Samsung Romania, Orkla Foods – Tomi, Electric Castle) reflect platform conditions in which content is often consumed without sound.

Calls to action are dominated by social engagement — like, share, comment — in 8 spots, followed by transactional (5) and cause/civic action (4), reflecting the interactive nature of digital

platforms, where audience involvement is an objective as important as sales. Conceptual originality averages 4.00, with maximum scores for Samsung Romania, Salvați Copiii România, Orkla Foods – Tomi, Netflix Romania, Elfi, Olympia, and Teach for Romania. Platform native fit is the most distinctive digital indicator: a mean of 4.14, with 9 spots at the maximum score of 5 and 7 more at 4. Romanian cultural anchoring is higher than in TV (mean 3.18), with 4 spots at the maximum score: Orkla Foods – Tomi, Netflix Romania, Elfi, and Teach for Romania. Influencer and creator presence is substantially greater than in TV: 13 of 22 digital spots feature some external creator presence, including 6 macro-influencers and 4 mainstream celebrities.

4.3. Comparative analysis: divergences and convergences

Table 1 and Figure 4 summarize the scalar comparisons. Three of the five scalar variables differ significantly between clusters. The largest difference concerns platform native fit (TV M = 3.22, digital M = 4.14; $U = 80.0$, $p < .001$): no TV spot received the maximum native-fit score, whereas 41% of digital spots were conceived exclusively for a specific platform. This is arguably the fundamental divide between the two creative logics — TV produces content with universal vocation, transferable to any channel, while successful digital advertising is designed from inception for the context in which it lives. The second significant difference concerns the persuasive register (2.67 vs. 3.68; $U = 92.0$, $p = .003$): TV balances rational argument with emotional elements, while digital relies predominantly on high emotional impact, a pattern consistent with platform economies that reward immediate reactions and sharing. Third, Romanian cultural anchoring is significantly higher in digital (2.44 vs. 3.18; $U = 126.0$, $p = .035$) — a counterintuitive result discussed below.



Mann-Whitney U: *** $p < .001$, ** $p < .01$, * $p < .05$, n.s. non-significant (GNU PSPP 1.4)

Figure 4. Mean scores of the five scalar variables by cluster, with Mann–Whitney significance levels (GNU PSPP 1.4)

Table 1. Scalar variables by cluster: means, Mann–Whitney U, standardized Z, two-sided p (GNU PSPP 1.4)

Variable	TV (n = 18)	Digital (n = 22)	U	Z	p
Narrative arc strength	3.67	3.36	164.0	−0.97	.334
Persuasive register (1 = rational, 5 = emotional)	2.67	3.68	92.0	−2.99	.003
Romanian cultural anchoring	2.44	3.18	126.0	−2.11	.035
Conceptual originality	3.83	4.00	182.5	−0.45	.653
Platform native fit	3.22	4.14	80.0	−3.49	<.001

The nominal variables follow the same divergent logic. Emotional tonality splits cleanly: TV builds aspiration and desire (inspiration as dominant tone), while digital relies on empathy and compassion. Narrative structures diverge correspondingly: TV prefers formats that build memorable characters and demonstrate concrete benefits (mascot, problem–solution); digital prefers formats that communicate through values and symbols (manifesto, visual metaphor) — a difference reflecting distinct modes of media consumption, with TV demanding complete stories and digital demanding messages that resonate quickly and circulate easily. Brand identification timing follows suit: TV anchors the brand within the first ten seconds; digital permits suspense and delayed or final reveals.

The distribution-related variables complete the divergent picture. Calls to action reverse their hierarchy across formats: informational and transactional CTAs dominate TV (8 each of 18), while social engagement dominates digital (8 of 22), followed by transactional (5) and civic action (4). Audience involvement becomes an explicit campaign objective online. Influencer and creator presence nearly triples in digital (13 of 22 spots versus 4 of 18 in TV), and the typology diversifies beyond mainstream celebrities to macro-influencers, niche creators, and platform-specific figures, reflecting the creator economy's integration into awarded advertising — a pattern consistent with recent evidence that creator-led, platform-specific content, particularly humorous content on short-video platforms, drives effectiveness through followers' hedonic experience (Barta et al. 2023). Product-category composition also differs in one telling respect: CSR/NGO campaigns cluster almost entirely in digital (6 of 22, against none in TV), which partly explains — but does not exhaust — the digital cluster's empathic tonality and emotional register, since the register difference persists among commercial brands as well.

Against these divergences, several elements remain constant across formats. Dominant voiceover is the most frequent voice–image configuration in both clusters (10 of 18 in TV, 9 of 22 in digital), indicating that verbal narration retains a central role in awarded Romanian advertising regardless of platform. Conceptual originality is high in both clusters and does not differ significantly ($p = .653$), with maximum scores distributed across both formats — creativity is not the property of a single medium. Narrative arc strength likewise does not differ significantly ($p = .334$): although the digital cluster contains formats with minimal narration, such as photo-based campaigns, its strongest spots invest in narrative construction as consistently as television does. The balanced mixed frame dominates both clusters (11 of 18 and 10 of 22), and transactional calls to action appear consistently in both, confirming that awarded Romanian advertising pursues concrete commercial objectives alongside creative impact.

One claim suggested by case-level inspection deserves a statistical caveat. Several digital spots do score maximally on both native fit and originality (e.g., Orkla Foods – Tomi, Olympia, Salvați Copiii România), which invites the reading that platform adaptation stimulates originality. However, the rank correlation between native fit and conceptual originality within the digital cluster is weak, negative, and non-significant ($p = -.23$, $p = .31$): in this corpus, high originality occurs at all levels of platform adaptation. The co-occurrence of platform mastery and originality in the corpus's most celebrated cases is therefore better described as a feature of a subset of exemplary campaigns than as a general association. Similarly, cultural

anchoring correlates only weakly and non-significantly with originality across the corpus ($\rho = .20$, $p = .21$).

5. Discussion and Conclusions

Returning to the research questions: awarded Romanian TV advertising is dominated by mascot/platform-character and problem–solution structures, digital advertising by brand manifestos and extended visual metaphors, with narrative arc strength comparable across formats (RQ1). Digital commercials operate in a significantly more emotionally persuasive register, replacing TV's aspirational tonality with empathy and compassion (RQ2). Platform native fit is the sharpest discriminator between the two logics, while conceptual originality is uniformly high and format-independent; the data do not support a general positive association between platform adaptation and originality (RQ3). Finally, cultural anchoring is modest in TV — largely limited to language — but significantly stronger in digital, where several campaigns are inseparable from their Romanian cultural context (RQ4).

The higher cultural anchoring of digital advertising is perhaps the study's most notable finding, running counter to the intuition that globalized platforms dilute local identity. Campaigns such as Orkla Foods – Tomy, Netflix Romania, Elfi, and Teach for Romania suggest instead that the digital environment can amplify cultural specificity, enabling precise communication with well-defined audience segments — consistent with the platform logic in which culturally resonant content is rewarded with organic circulation, and with the socio-cultural understanding of creativity as constructed from shared symbols (Vygotsky 1978). Television's economics, by contrast, push towards broad, culturally neutral messages legible to a mass audience, which the corpus reflects in its predominance of superficial, language-level localization.

The findings also speak to the theoretical triad of originality, relevance, and effectiveness. That originality is uniformly high while register, tonality, and platform fit diverge suggests that in awarded advertising, the differentiating creative work happens on the relevance dimension — adapting to the audience's platform, emotional expectations, and cultural repertoire — rather than on sheer divergence (Smith and Yang 2004). At the same time, the absence of a positive correlation between native fit and originality qualifies the popular claim that platform constraints themselves stimulate creativity: in this corpus, platform mastery and conceptual originality are independent accomplishments that the very best campaigns happen to combine. More broadly, the results do not support a narrative of substitution in which digital has rendered televisual advertising obsolete. They describe complementarity: TV remains a powerful format for structured narratives, memorable characters, and long-term brand identity; digital offers experimental freedom, deep platform adaptation, stronger cultural anchoring, and a more intense emotional register. Awarded Romanian advertising currently operates in a hybrid model in which classical communication principles — Ogilvy's consumer knowledge, Bernbach's emotional resonance, Burnett's cultural warmth — coexist with platform-first innovation.

The study has several limitations. The corpus of 40 spots, though diversified, reflects exclusively campaigns awarded at Effie and Internetics; the results cannot be generalised to Romanian advertising production at large. Coding was performed by a single analyst, precluding inter-rater reliability assessment and introducing a degree of subjectivity, particularly for the scalar variables of originality and cultural anchoring. The classification of

spots into TV and digital clusters by creative style rather than broadcast channel, while justified by the corpus, involves interpretive judgement. Finally, the sample size limits the power of the statistical comparisons reported.

These limitations map onto directions for future research: extending the corpus to non-awarded campaigns to test whether the identified patterns characterise successful advertising specifically or Romanian advertising generally; introducing the receiver's perspective through audience studies of how consumers perceive and respond to the two creative logics; longitudinal analysis tracking the evolution of Romanian advertising creativity over time; and, given the growing role of artificial intelligence in creative production, dedicated research on how AI reshapes creativity in the Romanian advertising industry, a direction the international literature has only begun to chart (Huh, Nelson, and Russell 2023).

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- Note: The full list of analysed campaigns and their public sources (Effie Romania, Internetics, YouTube, TikTok, Instagram) is available from the authors upon request.*
- The PSPP database and syntax will be made available on a Figshare repository after the article passes the peer-review.*

BIONOTES:

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