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Yfantidou, I, Riskos, K and Tsourvakas, G

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### Article

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# Advertising message strategy analysis for award-winning digital ads.

## Abstract

*In anticipation of increasing interest in digital advertising, the present study examines the message strategy of digital CLIO award winning advertisements over a period of nine years. A sample of 291 digital ads (including TV, film, social media, mobile and Facebook ads) from Clio awards was content analyzed. The results indicate that the ritual view is dominant across all organizational types and product categories regardless of the country of origin. However, the finding support that award winning marketers prefer to either alter consumers' social profile or advertise rational information for their products.*

**Keywords:** Advertising, Clio Awards, International marketing, Message strategy, Digital advertising

## 1. Introduction

Designing creative and successful ads is an impressive and robust tool for organisations to elevate their products or services (Pan *et al.*, 2013). Taking into account the extensive rise of the Internet and Web2.0, marketers create ads not just to advertise goods but also to engage with stakeholders (Tsekouropoulos *et al.*, 2013; Lepkowska-White *et al.*, 2014).

For this paper we conducted a content analysis of Clio award winning digital ads, a well-known award body that honours advertising superiority, innovation and creativity ([www.clioawards.com](http://www.clioawards.com)). Clios equip prize winners with high industry status and business distinction (Tippins and Kunkel, 2006). Interestingly, though, there is limited research on award winning ads (Chen and Taylor, 2012). A study by Tippins and Kunkel (2006) investigated whether there is a relationship between Clios and organizational performance while a study by Chen and Taylor (2012) examined the message strategy on selected award-winning print ads. The latter is the only research paper in our knowledge that examines award-winning ads, but the findings cannot be generalized since it is limited to print Chinese advertisements. This paper aims to update and extend the existing literature on advertising message strategy, since it emphasizes on digital award-winning ads. The contribution of this paper is to identify potential similarities or differences between digital ads message strategy to the strategy that is being used on other types of advertising (print, outdoors, TV, radio ads). Research on digital marketing and advertising is still in its infancy, thus this work is thought-out essential in order to spot trends and adjust digital business models accordingly.

This paper begins by reviewing literature on advertising and digital ads. The concept of Clio awards is explained and Taylor's (1999) six segment message strategy wheel is presented. Then, there is a description of the research methodology and as a final point, the research findings are presented along with proposals for future research and implications.

## 2. Literature Review on Digital Marketing and Advertising

In today's fast paced business environments traditional marketing and advertising channels are not marketers' number one priority anymore. Although word-of-mouth (WOM) is still considered as the most established method of advertising, the emerge of the Internet generated digital marketing, online advertising and e-branding (Golan and Zaidner, 2008). What makes digital marketing so interesting and special is the two way process of communication instead of the traditional one way where organisations only transmit messages to stakeholders. Undoubtedly, we have moved to next generation marketing management due to the public's control over corporate messages through their online presence (Carlson and Lee, 2015). Thus, consumers are now considered as co-marketers.

The expanding popularity of social media embarks marketing professionals to devote more effort and work in communicating with consumers and reaching out a broader audience (Chi, 2011). Osarenkhoe (2006) supports that the majority of organisations is absorbing Information Technology (IT) in marketing in order to attain more customers. Additionally, Taylor (2009) believes that interactive digital advertising is essential if marketers seek to bring to light brand-related messages to approach Internet users. Buzz marketing and viral marketing seem to be the ultimate goal for professionals, so they need to create powerful, innovative and creative ads that viewers will pay attention to (Qiao and Griffin, 2016). Utz (2009) claims that social media is where viral marketing is thriving, while Libai *et al.* (2010) parallels viral marketing with electronic word-of-mouth (e-WOM).

Several scholars have studied advertising techniques with the use of content analysis. This study aims to add upon and broaden previous studies by investigating digital advertisements associated with international awards. In particular, Clio's Gold, Silver and Bronze award winning ads were examined, for the period 2007-2015. Clios are the most prestigious advertising awards around the world and they are viewed as advertising Oscars since they '*grant advertising excellence worldwide*' ([www.clioawards.com](http://www.clioawards.com), 2017). Although Clios take in tens of thousands of submissions every year, only 5% of the entries secure a prize. The Clios were founded in 1959 and they hand over hundreds of awards every year across various categories (i.e. TV, Print, Radio, Digital, Film, Outdoor). This paper is only interested in the digital Clio award winning ads which appeared in 2007. There is no data for internet/online/digital/mobile Clio award ads prior to 2007.

Helgesen (1994) notes that international advertising awards are important to businesses because they are considered a professional assessment that embarks on becoming opinion leaders. Kubler and Proppe (2012) suggest that award-winning ads are described by originality whereas Fera (2014) believes that award winners' aim is to stimulate discussions around their work and increase the 'wow' factor among consumers. There is limited research on award winning ads (Chen and Taylor, 2012) and to our knowledge there is no research combining content analysis with digital award winning ads. For example, a recent study by Qiao and Griffin (2016) examined the experimental technologies that are most often incorporated by award-winning agencies. Their study examined award-winning ads from the Clio Awards, the Addy Awards, the ADC Festival Awards, the D&AD Awards, the London International Awards and the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity Awards (Qiao and Griffin, 2016). Another study by Tippins and Kunkel (2006) examined the correlation between winning a Clio award and corporate financial performance. The scholars investigated

New York Stock Exchange companies that had won a Clio prize and, although the findings were not robust, they found that manufacturers and retailers boosted their profits shortly after their Clio award winning ad was launched.

Advertising message strategy has been examined both from an international and local viewpoint (Tai, 1997; Yin, 1998; Zhou and Belk, 2004; Chen and Taylor, 2012). Although academia supports that marketing and advertising should be localized even for multinational corporations, it is true that due to advertising being a “*cultural product*” it is essential to think about time period, community dynamics and societal transformation when attempting to examine advertising techniques (Pollay, 1986). There is also evidence that country of origin disturbs advertising message uniformity (Tai, 1997). Li *et al.*'s (2009) research on Internet advertising shows that “*ego*” appeals are central for both Eastern and Western multinational companies. This paper is focused on international award-winning ads without taking into account the country of origin, although some of the findings are presented from a localized point of view. After all, digital advertising knows no borders, especially online advertising.

Several studies have tried to evidence whether product category influences information content on advertising (Cheng, 1994; Zhang *et al.*, 2008; Chan and Chan, 2005) but they were unable to demonstrate any strong relationships. For example, Chan and Chan (2005) examined 386 Chinese television ads to find that they have become less informative over the years whereas the levels of information provided was not affected by the duration of the advertisement or the advertised product. On the other hand, Zhang *et al.*'s (2008) findings demonstrate that healthy lifestyle, product effectiveness and family were the dominant values among 141 TV advertisements. Similarly, Golan and Zaidner (2008) analysed 360 viral ads to find that the ritual view (humor and sexuality) is more often picked by advertisers. Another study by Cheng (2015) examines 572 Chinese magazine advertisements and found that modernity, technology and quality were mostly promoted. The findings of the aforesaid studies illustrate a tendency over the last years but they can only be limited to the Chinese society since all three of them examine Chinese commercials. Additionally, research shows that there is a change from information placed advertising to emotion occupying advertising (Chan and Chan, 2005; Paek and Nelson, 2007; Zhang *et al.*, 2008; Chen and Taylor, 2012). As an illustration, Paek and Nelson (2007) found that there is a bent towards standardization of advertising the more we are moving to a globalization era, but there are still some regions highly attached to their traditions (e.g. China). Again, their research findings cannot be generalized since the scholars solely focused on female nudity appearance across several countries.

### **Taylor's Six Segment Strategy Wheel**

In excess of the informational and transformational classification of advertising strategies (Puto and Wells, 1984), Taylor (1999) created the six-segment strategy wheel which is a model of examining advertising messages. Taylor's (1999) wheel has been used as the primary theoretical framework for examining Clio award-winning digital ads. Likewise previous studies, Taylor (1999) went through the ritual view (akin to transformational) and transmission view (akin to informational) but he also created three segments for each aspect. As illustrated in Figure 1, the ritual view consists of ego, social and sensory whereas the transmission view consists of ration, acute need and routine (Taylor, 1999). There is a vertical axis crossing the wheel. At the top of the axis Taylor places items that are of high importance to consumers albeit

at the bottom of the axis there are things of smallest significance. Table 1 provides a better understanding into the six segments.

Over the last two decades several advertising studies have used Taylor’s typology to content analyse the message strategy. Most recently, Park *et al.*, (2016) examined message strategies in USA military recruitment advertising, Kim (2016) researched the content of Korean cosmetic surgery websites, Elliot and White (2016) content analysed how do brochures encourage walking outdoors, and Boudewyns *et al.*, (2016) studied drugs advertising claims.

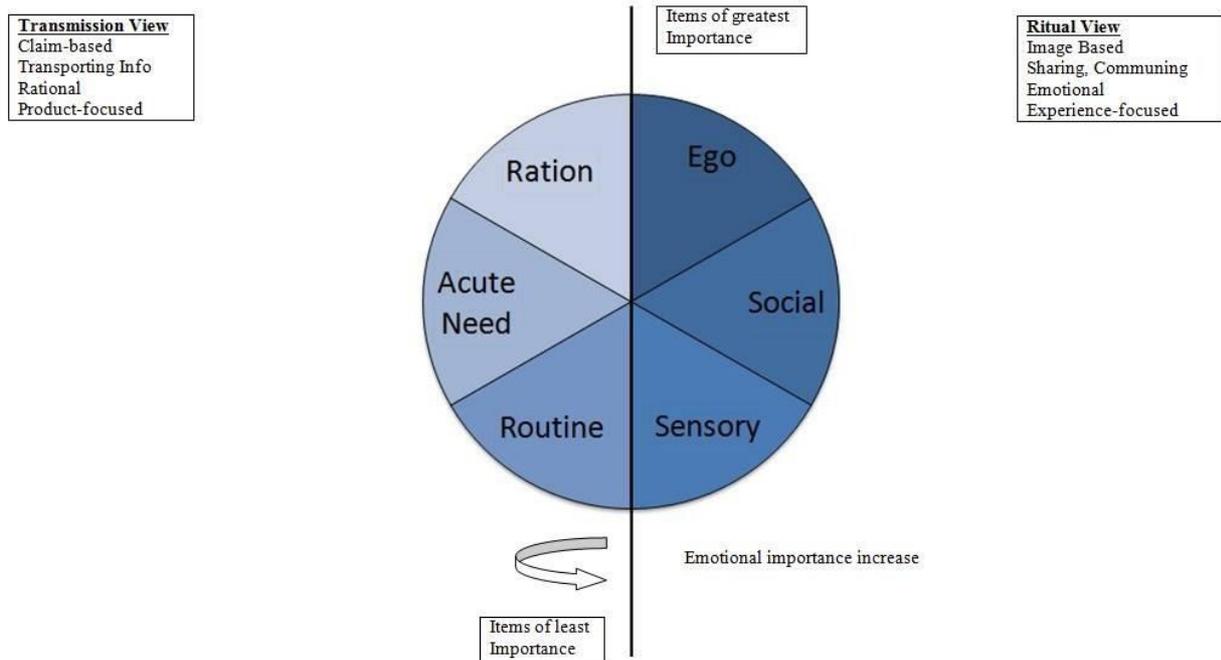


Figure 1: Taylor’s (1999) six segment wheel

Table 1  
Taylor’s six segments

|                   | Segment    | Examples                            | Message strategy        |
|-------------------|------------|-------------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Ritual View       | Ego        | Luxury clothing, cars               | User image              |
|                   | Social     | Flowers, jewelry, perfumes          | Use occasion, resonance |
|                   | Sensory    | Snacks, CDs, books                  | Moment of pleasure      |
| Transmission View | Routine    | Laundry products, personal care     | Hyperbole, pre-emptive  |
|                   | Acute need | Tires, batteries, cleaning supplies | Brand familiarity       |
|                   | Ration     | House, car, college                 | Positioning, generic    |

### 3. Research questions

A study by Chen and Taylor (2012), focused on printed award-winning advertisements, found that from the transmission view cluster, *ration* was more frequently employed and from the ritual view cluster, *sensory* was repeatedly

preferred. Excluding the 'awards' factor, there are more studies that have analysed advertisements' message strategy. For example, Zhang *et al.*'s (2008) findings illustrate that healthy lifestyle (related to Taylor's 'ego'), product effectiveness (relates to Taylor's 'sensory') and family (relates to Taylor's 'social') were the values mostly promoted within their 141 examined ads. To add upon the aforesaid findings this paper intends to investigate what message strategy is used more often in digital award-winning ads.

*RQ1: What message strategy is used more often in digital award-winning ads?*

Products and services are often distinguished when it comes to advertising analysis (Shostack, 1977; Liebermann, 1996). Understandably, there has to be different advertising message strategies between products and services since services are intangible (Shostack, 1977). Unwin (1975) believes that marketers whose task is to advertise a service have a difficult job to do because they must portray the invisible. A study by Cutler and Javalgi (1993) shows that emotional appeals were leading in services advertisements. Moreover, Liebermann (1996) used the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) to examine different message appeals across services and goods. He found that emotional appeals were often used for non-durable products and trusted services; while rational appeals were preferred for durable goods and experience services. With regards to product categorization, the study's sample is divided into products and services since a sub-categorization would be complex for award-winning ads. Given that this research aims to add upon previous studies that have examined product category's affect on the ads' message strategy (Cheng, 1994; Zhang *et al.*, 2008; Chan and Chan, 2005), the aim is to find whether there is any difference with regards to product ads and services ads.

*RQ2: Is there a difference between product and service ads with regards to message strategy?*

Literature supports that advertising messages change historically, especially because of societal transformation and other political, environmental, social incidents (Pollay, 1986). Even though the sample consists of digital ads, it is not limited to Internet ads. Taking into account the rapid societal changes around the world over the last decade it is interesting to examine whether the message strategy changes historically from year to year and if yes, how does it change? For example, Chen and Taylor (2012) investigated the message strategy of advertisements over a period of twenty eight years and they found that there was a change from transmission view to ritual view, with the "ego" structure being most frequently used. Additionally, Chan and Chan (1995) report a tendency for commercials to become less informative historically regardless of the ad duration or media channel. Unfortunately our timeframe is limited to nine years (2007-2015) as there no further available data for Clio digital advertising winners.

*RQ3: Is there consistency in the ads' message strategy through years?*

Moreover, literature supports that message strategy depends on the location country (Abernethy, 1992; Tsao, 1997). Advertising literature used to note that there are differences on message strategy between the West and the East (Pollay, 1984; Cheng, 1994). Academic on culture believe that Eastern cultures are correlated with collectivism and tradition whereas Western cultures honour individualism and

modernity (Cheng and Schweitzer, 1996). Since nearly half of the Clio award-winning digital ads are of USA origin, the plan is to examine whether there is any difference between USA brands and non USA companies when it comes to ad message strategy.

*RQ4: Is there a difference to ads message strategy between USA and non USA countries?*

A study by Leonidou *et al.* (2011) shows that organisational type plays an important role on selecting advertising techniques. Benerjee *et al.* (2003) also used industry type as a moderator to examine differences in green marketing as it provides valuable trends. Likewise, Zhang *et al.* (2010) believe that competition on advertising and marketing is high among industries. Singh *et al.* 2012 believe that global competition and technological advances drive companies to produce more products or innovative services. Regarding charitable events, Amato and Amato (2007) found that companies are so competitive that they urge to meet and exceed other industries' philanthropic stance marketing. In view of the fact that Clios are about competition, it is suggested that industries do compete each other for the various Clio advertising awards among all categories. Thus, it is questioned whether message strategy depends on the organisational type in award winning ads.

*RQ5: Is digital award winning ads' message strategy affected by organisational type?*

#### **4. Methodology**

Similar to other studies (Leonidou *et al.*, 2011) this research is based on quantitative content analysis (Kassarjian, 1977) in order to examine the form and substance of advertising messages (Yang and Jolly, 2008). Two different coding systems were merged and used. Firstly, Leonidou *et al.*'s (2011) coding system was used with regards to the following variables: Company name, location country, organization type and economic activity. The organisation type variable is divided in the following sub-categories: Manufacturer, Supplier, Distributor, Financial Organisation, Governmental Organisation and NGO. Similarly, the economic activity variable is separated in the two sub-categories: Products and Services. In order to evaluate the message strategy that is employed, Taylor's (1999) two variables coding system was used: Ritual view and transmission view (Figure 1). The ritual view variable encloses three sub-categories: ego, social and sensory. Likewise, the transmission view embodies ration, acute need and routine. Additionally, in order to categorize the data three more items were added: advertising means, year and award type (gold, silver or bronze). The final coding instrument is presented on the Appendix Section.

#### **Sample of Study**

Altogether 291 digitally related ads were examined for the period 2007-2015. Unfortunately, there is no data regarding digital ads prior to 2007. Data was derived from Clio's official website ([www.clioawards.com](http://www.clioawards.com)). Table 2 illustrates the data gathered as of advertising means and year of award. Specifically, 166 advertisements belong to the Digital/TV/Cinema category, 45 advertisements are categorized as Digital, 38 ads are classified as Digital Social, 35 fit into to the Digital Mobile

category and the remaining 7 advertisements are classified as Facebook Integrated Media.

Table 2  
Sample of the Study

| Advertising means         | Year | Num. of ads |
|---------------------------|------|-------------|
| Digital                   | 2007 | 13          |
| Digital                   | 2008 | 3           |
| Digital/TV/Cinema         | 2009 | 83          |
| Digital/TV/Cinema         | 2010 | 83          |
| Facebook Integrated Media | 2011 | 3           |
| Facebook Integrated Media | 2012 | 4           |
| Digital Mobile            | 2013 | 35          |
| Digital Social            | 2014 | 38          |
| Digital                   | 2015 | 29          |

### Coding Process

Two specially trained researchers individually examined the 291 digital Clio award-winning ads. Although both researchers were familiar with advertising techniques and marketing with postgraduate educational level, they were still trained in the specific coding and protocol. Each advertisement was reviewed by each reviewer three times. Regarding the coding process, organizational type variable was given a value from 1 to 6 given the aforementioned organizational type sub-category (Appendix 1). Consequently, each sub-category variable was coded as 1 when a company belongs to the present enterprise type and as 0 when not. Likewise the economic activity variable was coded as 1 for products and 2 for services. The two sub-categories were coded as 1 when product type was present and as 0 when not. Finally, transmission view and ritual view variables were valued from 1 to 3 depending on the sub-category type of each advertisement. In particular, transmission view was coded as 1 for advertisements where ‘ego’ message strategy was employed, as 2 for ‘social’ content and as 3 for ‘sensory’. Similarly ritual view variable was coded as 1 for ‘ration’ advertisements, as 2 for advertisements characterized by ‘acute need’ content and as 3 for advertisements that applied ‘routine’ message strategy. Cohen's Alpha Intercoder Reliability was 0.92 for the transmission view message strategy and 0.89 for the ritual view message strategy. Inconsistencies between the two coders were resolved by a third judge. Statistical analysis was performed in IBM SPSS software.

### 5. Research findings

Examining the message strategy that is used more often in award winning ads (RQ1), the results in Table 3 indicate that ritual view is applied in 67.4% of the sample, while transmission view receives 32.6% ( $\chi^2=35.06$ ,  $p<.001$ ). In specific, it was found that “*Social*” is the sub-category that is most frequently used (27.8%) followed by “*Sensory*” (21.8%), “*Ration*” (20.3%), “*Ego*” (18.2%), “*Acute Need*” (6.2%) and “*Routine*” (6.2%) ( $\chi^2=66.59$ ,  $p<.001$ ).

Table 3  
Frequencies for Message Strategies

| Message Strategy      | Frequencies | Percentage | Sig.                   |
|-----------------------|-------------|------------|------------------------|
| Ritual View           | 196         | 67.4%      | $\chi^2=35.06, p<.001$ |
| Transmission View     | 95          | 32.6%      |                        |
| <b>Sub-Categories</b> |             |            |                        |
| <i>Ego</i>            | 53          | 18.2%      | $\chi^2=66.59, p<.001$ |
| <i>Social</i>         | 81          | 27.8%      |                        |
| <i>Sensory</i>        | 62          | 21.3%      |                        |
| <i>Ration</i>         | 59          | 20.3%      |                        |
| <i>Acute need</i>     | 18          | 6.2%       |                        |
| <i>Routine</i>        | 18          | 6.2%       |                        |

Furthermore, considering whether there is any difference between products and services ads (RQ2), both categories use ritual view on a greater extent rather than transmission view (Table 4). In particular, ritual view is used at 63.6% of product ads compared to 36.4% of transmission view ads. Similarly, services award winning ads chose ritual view on 86 ads (72.9%) compared to 32 ads (27.1%) that employed the transmission view. However, results indicate a marginally significant difference ( $\chi^2=2.758, p<.097$ ) regarding the message strategy that is applied between product ads and services ads (Table 4).

Table 4  
Message Strategy per Product Category

| Message Strategy  | Products               | Services   |
|-------------------|------------------------|------------|
| Ritual View       | 110 (63.6%)            | 86 (72.9%) |
| Transmission View | 63 (36.4%)             | 32 (27.1%) |
| Sig.              | $\chi^2=2.758, p<.097$ |            |

Interpreting the results about the use of message strategy sub-categories, it is noted a significant difference on “*social*” sub category ( $\chi^2=14.218, p<.001$ ) between products (42%) and services (58%) related ads (Table 5). On the other hand, “*ration*” is the sub-category message strategy that deploys a significant difference ( $\chi^2=4.228, p<.040$ ) since it is regularly applied on product ads (71.2%) compared to service ads (28.8%).

Table 5  
Message Strategy per Product Category (Sub-categories)

| Message Strategy | Products   | Services   | Sig.                    |
|------------------|------------|------------|-------------------------|
| Ego              | 37 (69.8%) | 16 (30.2%) | $\chi^2=2.886, p<.089$  |
| Social           | 34 (42%)   | 47 (58%)   | $\chi^2=14.218, p<.001$ |
| Sensory          | 39 (62.9%) | 23 (37.1%) | $\chi^2=.390, p<.532$   |
| Ration           | 42 (71.2%) | 17 (28.8%) | $\chi^2=4.228, p<.040$  |
| Acute Need       | 7 (38.9%)  | 11 (61.1%) | $\chi^2=3.365, p<.067$  |
| Routine          | 14 (77.8%) | 4 (22.2%)  | $\chi^2=2.673, p<.102$  |

In addition, taking into consideration the selection of Clio winning ads from 2007 to 2015 (RQ3), it is obvious that ritual view outmatches the transmission message strategy in every year (Table 6). Hence, there is consistency over the years, with ritual view being the dominant message strategy.

Table 6  
Message Strategies in Years

| Year  | Ritual View | Transmission View | Total |
|-------|-------------|-------------------|-------|
| 2007  | 10          | 3                 | 13    |
| 2008  | 3           | 0                 | 3     |
| 2009  | 56          | 27                | 83    |
| 2010  | 49          | 34                | 83    |
| 2011  | 2           | 1                 | 3     |
| 2012  | 4           | 0                 | 4     |
| 2013  | 28          | 7                 | 35    |
| 2014  | 27          | 12                | 39    |
| 2015  | 17          | 11                | 28    |
| Total | 196         | 95                | 291   |

Our next research finding investigates whether there is a difference between USA and non-USA brands that have won a Clio award (RQ4), with regards to the message strategy being used. In this study USA based companies deployed ritual view strategy on 90 ads, compared to 33 firms that favoured transmission view strategy (Table 7). Likewise, for non-USA brands, 106 ads applied the ritual view strategy while transmission view was limited to 62 ads (Table 7). Additionally, it is observed a marginally significant difference ( $\chi^2=3.278$ ,  $p<.07$ ) regarding the transmission view strategy that is deployed by non-USA brands (36.9%) compared to those of USA origin (26.8%) (Table 7).

Table 7  
Message Strategy per Location

| Message Strategy  | USA                      | Non-USA     |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------------|
| Ritual View       | 90 (73.2%)               | 106 (63.1%) |
| Transmission View | 33 (26.8%)               | 62 (36.9%)  |
| Sig.              | $\chi^2=3.278$ , $p<.07$ |             |

Finally, as to whether organisational type affects message strategy (RQ5), the results demonstrate that ritual view is prevailing across all organisational types (Table 8). Categorically, the ritual view is applied by manufacturers on a significantly greater extent ( $\chi^2=4.367$ ,  $p<.037$ ) (62.9%) compared to the transmission view strategy (37.4%). Similarly, there is a significant difference ( $\chi^2=4.350$ ,  $p<.037$ ) on ads that are designed on behalf of governmental organisations. Clearly, 92.3% of governmental organisations' ads draw on the ritual view while almost 7.1% applied the transmission view strategy (Table 8). Interestingly, regarding financial organisations, four out of seven ads favoured the ritual view and the remaining three preferred the transmission

view in their message; which is a small difference given the sample size. Table 9 summarizes the research questions and results.

Table 8  
Message Strategy per Organisational Type

| Organisational Type | Ritual View | Transmission View | Sig.                   |
|---------------------|-------------|-------------------|------------------------|
| Manufacturer        | 109 (62.6%) | 65 (37.4%)        | $\chi^2=4.367, p<.037$ |
| Supplier            | 5 (83.3%)   | 1 (16.7%)         | $\chi^2=.711, p<.399$  |
| Distributor         | 51 (75%)    | 17 (25%)          | $\chi^2=2.359, p<.125$ |
| Financial Org.      | 4 (57.1%)   | 3 (42.9%)         | $\chi^2=.340, p<.560$  |
| Governmental Org.   | 13 (92.9%)  | 1 (7.1%)          | $\chi^2=4.350, p<.037$ |
| N.G.O               | 16 (66.7%)  | 8 (33.3%)         | $\chi^2=.006, p<.940$  |

Table 9  
Summary of Research Questions Testing and Results

|     | Research Questions  | Results     |
|-----|---|-------------|
| RQ1 | What message strategy is used more often in digital award-winning ads?                  | Ritual View |
| RQ2 | Is there a difference between product and service ads with regards to message strategy? | No          |
| RQ3 | Is there consistency in the ads' message strategy through years                         | Yes         |
| RQ4 | Is there a difference to ads message strategy between USA and non USA countries?        | No          |
| RQ5 | Is digital award winning ads' message strategy affected by organisational type?         | No          |

## 6. Conclusions and discussion

The current study aims to conduct content analysis on award winning digital advertisements. Although the research was focused on the message strategy appeals, valuable insights was also gained regarding data regarding the location country and organizational type of digital award winning commercials.

There is limited research on award winning ads analysis. Given that Clios are the most prestigious advertising awards around the world, the paper focused on them and fixated exclusively on digital ads (including TV, online, Facebook and film). Specifically, only radio, printed and outdoor ads were excluded from this study. Similar to past findings, the results illustrate that ritual view strategy is widely preferred by advertisers across all organizational types and across all countries although for product category the results are quite varied.

Regarding *RQ1*, since advertising reflects society needs it is interesting to apprehend that most advertisers picked the “*social*” structure (27.8%) instead of the ritual view and the “*ration*” segment (20.3%) rather than the transmission view, which is in

contradiction with Golan and Zaidner's (2008) findings. Golan and Zaidner (2008) used Taylor's six segment wheel to examine the message strategy that is most regularly used for viral Internet ads and they found that the "ego" and the "rational" appeal were more often employed. Hence, it is obvious that marketers choose to either alter consumers' social profile or position products in a way that rational information is easily available to consumers. Findings are in agreement with previous research; Zhang *et al.* (2008) found that family was mostly promoted in TV commercials. Family can be associated with the Taylor's 'social' view. Moreover, Chen and Taylor (2012) examined award winning print ads and they also found that 'rational' view was the most popular among the examined commercials.

Findings are relatively mixed about message strategy per product category (RQ2). More distinctively, although the ritual view is the more popular one in both product and services ads, it is also evidenced that the 'accute need' segment of the transmission view was employed mostly by service related ads (61.1%) juxtaposed products (38.9%). Similarly, the 'social' segment from the ritual view was mostly used by services (58%). Findings seem to illustrate what Urwin (1975) said over forty years ago that marketers who deal with services promotion have a tricky mission since they are asked to describe the intangible. An explanation is that since services are quite obscure, it is possible that digital advertisers prefer to either associate the service with an accute need to enhance brand familiarity or with social standards to promote resonance (Taylor, 1999).

In relation to the third research question regarding a change in message strategy through years, unfortunately data only indicate a period of nine years which is a relatively small timeframe. Even so, there are no variations with ritual view being dominant across all years. Only in 2011 where the sample consists of only three Facebook commercials, it was found that two of the three ads favoured the ritual view and the remaining one preferred the transmission view. Yet, a sample of three advertisements is not strong enough.

Even though literature supports that variations among Eastern and Western countries become noticeable in advertising (Pollay, 1984), the study's findings indicate that the ritual view message strategy was dominant both for USA brands and non-USA based companies (RQ4). A possible explanation for this can be the fact that some western countries are included in the non-USA category (i.e. United Kingdom, France, and Germany). This adds upon recent literature which supports that businesses are shifting onto a globalization of marketing and advertising, moving away from standardization (Chang, 1995). Interestingly, out of 291 award-winning ads examined there was none from a Chinese company.

Finally, regarding organizational type (RQ5), the findings illustrate a preference towards the ritual view from all six organizational types. Though, for the financial organisation type, four out of seven advertisements applied the ritual view and three used the transmission view. Given the small number of the ads, the preference of ritual over transmission is not significant. With the term financial organisation, banks, financial institutions, insurance companies and building societies are portrayed. Hence, it makes sense to use the transmission view almost equally as product characteristics need to be addressed during the commercial.

Concluding, the results of this study provide valuable findings for practitioners as it is noticeable that creative ads are the ones that respond to rational and social standards. From a professional's point of view, the findings provide a guiding approach for international advertising that promotes creativity and intelligence. Social and rational appeals appear to be dominant, yet there are variations among product categories that

should be taken into account by marketers. Lastly, from a theoretical point of view, this study contributes to the existing advertising literature by pointing out message strategy similarities and differences between digital and traditional types of advertising (print, outdoors etc.). Hence, academics can shape a holistic outlook of the message strategy appeals across all types of advertising among different cultures.

## **7. Limitations and further research**

The main caveat for this research is that it strives to examine a fairly uninvestigated area of scholarship. Additionally, the sample size of 291 is fair enough but the findings might differ if more data is added. There is limited research on advertising awards and since advertising prizes grant excellence and creativity, more research on advertising or marketing awards is needed. Another limitation is the descriptive character of this study. Thus, if more data can be collected from other advertising award bodies (i.e. ADC European awards), a higher level analysis and a multivariate development are possible. A combination of advertising awards analysis, either international or national, would be also very interesting.

The digitally oriented Clio award-winning ads included TV and cinema in just two years (2009 and 2010) of the study's timeframe. A separation to solely online or Internet ads was rejected because the sample size would be significantly smaller. It will be stirring for the future to examine exclusively online or Internet award winning ads (targeting Google Adwords and social media ads).

Moreover, academics are encouraged to conduct qualitative research on selected Clio internet ads in order to gain a deeper understanding on what message appeals are appreciated by viewers and which appeals viewers consider irritating. Thirdly, given a bigger sample size, a separation between western and eastern countries' awards would also be of interest as it would reveal trends and cultural differences.

Lastly, although Internet advertising is still in its infancy, future researchers should be able to collect more data over a longer period of time in order to examine whether there are historical changes on message strategy.

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## Appendix 1

### Coding Instrument

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|                               |
|-------------------------------|
| <b>Advertising means</b>      |
| <b>Year</b>                   |
| <b>Award</b>                  |
| <b>Company name</b>           |
| <b>Location country</b>       |
| <b>1. Organisation type</b>   |
| 1.1 Manufacturer              |
| 1.2 Supplier                  |
| 1.3 Distributor               |
| 1.4 Financial Organisation    |
| 1.5 Governmental Organisation |
| 1.6 NGO                       |
| <b>2. Economic activity</b>   |
| 2.1 Products                  |
| 2.2 Services                  |
| <b>3. Ritual View</b>         |
| 3.1 Ego                       |
| 3.2 Social                    |
| 3.3 Sensory                   |
| <b>4. Transmission View</b>   |
| 4.1 Ration                    |
| 4.2 Acute need                |
| 4.3 Routine                   |

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