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Abstract

Creativity in Marketing - a lost cause or new possibilities?

Creativity literature has mainly focused on the individual and ignored the effect on organisations to a large extent. Interest in creativity research in the marketing and management field has been growing, especially in the last few years which reflects the fact that creativity is written about continuously in the press and is seen as a necessity to build competitive advantage especially in times of economic downturn.

Many studies are either conceptual or have been carried out in lab settings. Few studies were carried out in organisations using employees or took account of the impact of the organizational context on creative acts (Ford 1995).

This paper briefly reviews the influential theoretical frameworks which have influenced research in the field of organisational creativity and outlines some of the unanswered questions in terms of construct development, levels of analysis and model development.

To date only a handful of empirical studies on creativity in the marketing literature have been reported. These are appraised and serve as possibilities for future research directions.

Keywords

Organisational creativity, marketing creativity, marketing strategy

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Introduction

The importance of creativity has been well documented over the years from the scientific arena (Datta, 1963), the artistic situation (Simonton, 1975), to the 20th century where research has emphasised the importance of creativity for the long-term survival of organizations (e.g., Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Scott & Bruce, 1994). More recently, the reasons for promoting creativity are economic. Clearly in times of economic downturn creativity rises to the fore. It helps businesses to become more competitive or indeed maintain their competitiveness through innovation in new products and services (Jeffcut and Pratt 2002, Florida 2002, De Fillippi et al 2007). The technological developments of the 21st century are transforming global economies and the need for flexible people in business. Creativity is necessary to create sustainable value for organisations and their stakeholders in the rapidly and dynamically changing environment (George 2007). IBM's recent study, *Capitalising on Complexity* (2010), found that CEO's value creativity highly. "Today's CEO's know that creativity is an essential asset and that it must permeate the enterprise" (IBM 2010 p32). Market leadership is dependent on creativity for product innovation, and superior marketing strategies. For example, Whirlpool invested \$45 million to embed creativity into their business culture and felt the benefit over 5 years from introduction of the new innovation process (Barrett et al, 2012).

Having established the importance of creativity for organisations, the following sections review the development of creativity research, outline the influential frameworks and suggest unanswered questions remaining. This is followed by an appraisal of empirical studies from the marketing literature, which serve as possibilities for future research directions.

The roots of creativity research

The literature on creativity covers many contexts since Guilford highlighted the need for creativity research in 1950s. Since then, the literature has spanned cognitive creativity (Mednick 1962), sociological accounts (Stein 1967), interactionist accounts (Woodman et al 1993), social and psychological accounts (Amabile 1983, 1996), research into creativity in organizations (e.g., Oldham & Cummings, 1996; Scott & Bruce, 1994). It has also spanned disciplines - creativity in marketing education (e.g. McCorkle et al 2007, McIntyre et al 2003, Titus 2000) and creativity within marketing and entrepreneurship (e.g. Fillis 2002, Fillis and Rentschler 2010). Indeed the wide ranging approaches indicates that the literature on creativity is not integrated (Styhre and Sundgren 2005) and whilst rich in approach creates issues in terms of development. Ford and Gioia (1995) suggested that the traditional roots of research on creativity "have focused overwhelmingly on the individual as the main, and often the only, contributor to creativity" (p.xxi) a factor which has not helped the development of the construct and has been to the detriment of the organisational context and practitioners (Csikszentmihalyi and Sawyer 1995).

Definition of Creativity

Within the literature there are various definitions of creativity each of them subtly different. However, it is generally accepted that the creation of ideas is novel and useful (e.g. Amabile 1988, 1996; Ford 1995, Mayer 1999, Oldham and Cummings 1996; Scott and Bruce 1994). The definition can be applied to a number of perspectives - creative solutions to business problems and strategies, creativity in HR practices, creativity in NPD and of course marketing.

What is evident is that in many research studies creativity has been defined as an outcome (e.g. Amabile 1996, Ford 1996, Oldham and Cummings 1996) i.e. the dependent variable

(George 2007). Based on Anderson et al's (2004) study, George (2007) suggests that there may be a case for research which sees creativity as the independent variable. Certainly, in the marketing studies investigated later e.g. Im and Workman's study (2004) creativity is a mediator between Market orientation (MO) and new product success.

In the literature there is evidence that the concepts of creativity and innovation overlap. A number of researchers have sought to differentiate them e.g. Amabile (1988), who sees creativity as the precursor to innovation, Woodman et al (1993) see creativity as a subset of innovation. Some researchers, (e.g. Williams and Yang 1999, Sethi et al 2001) use the terms creativity and innovation synonymously which does not add to its credence and understanding. One useful suggestion regarding their difference is that creativity is the generation of ideas for new ways of doing things whereas innovation is the implementation of the ideas (West 1999).

What is unhelpful is the use of the terms creativity and innovativeness interchangeably which has not helped the development of the construct. Additionally, creativity has been viewed as a unified construct which was challenged initially by (Unsworth 2001) and more recently has gained support from Sullivan and Ford (2010). Interestingly, in the marketing studies of Im and Workman (2004, 2008, 2013) the creativity construct has been investigated on both novel and useful dimensions.

Influencing Frameworks

In the field of organisational creativity, there are three influential approaches– the componential model (Amabile 1988, 1997), the interactionist model (Woodman et al 1993) and the systems approach Csikszentmihalyi (1998).

Amabile (1983), proposed a sociological model of creativity that stressed the effects of domain- related skills, creative relevant skills (more recently changed to creative relevant processes (Zhou and Shalley 2003) and task motivation and has developed her work in an organisational context. Later work looked at factors that foster or impede creativity in organisations which has received considerable research (e.g. Woodman et al 1993 and Oldham and Cummings 1996, Amabile 1998).

The interactionist approach advocated by Woodman et al (1993) proposed one of the first multi level models linking individual, group and organisational level variables to creative outcomes within an environmental context (Drazin et al 1999, Styhre and Sundgren 2005). The conceptual model combines creative processes, creative product, creative person and creative situation that influence or inhibit creativity.

The systems approach advocated by Csikszentmihalyi (1998) describes three interrelated systems domain, field and individual which includes individual social and cultural factors that influence creative processes and help achieve a creative outcome. The argument here is that creativity should be defined as a socially constructed label used to describe actions in specific contexts (Ford and Gioia 2000). This theoretical framework has gained acceptance in understanding organisational creativity (Styhre and Sundgren 2005).

The models outlined above offer insights into the managerial aspects of organisational creativity and serve as a good theoretical platform for further research into organisational creativity. However, some of the work is based on conceptual papers (e.g. Woodman et al 1993) and there remain many debates about the definition of the construct (e.g. Sullivan and Ford 2010, Unsworth 2001), the measurement of creativity (e.g. George 2007, Sullivan and Ford 2010), and levels of analysis (e.g. Taggar 2002). A short synthesis is outlined below.

Creativity in Organisations

Creativity research began with its focus on the individual where it was deemed that a creative person had certain personality traits, and moved its focus to the individual in context, looking at the environment and its influences on creativity and finally into an organisational context (Williams and Yang 1999). Since Guildford's seminal paper in the 1950s much of the creativity research has focused on the individual and ignored the effect on organisations and as a result the research failed to develop a clear understanding that is actionable by industry practitioners because researchers have had too narrow a focus (Ford 1995). In the management literature, organisational creativity research has predominantly investigated employee creativity at the individual level and more recently at the team level in organisations. A large body of work has investigated personal and contextual factors (e.g. Amabile et al 1996, Oldham and Cummings 1996, Shalley, Zhou and Oldham 2004) which are viewed as either antecedents or inhibitors of creativity. There are numerous reviews on organisational creativity which look at contextual factors, which may be further divided into job characteristics, team factors and organisational factors depending on ones perspective. For example, Choi et al (2009) delineate contextual factors into organisational and social. Again, this does not help our understanding or advancement of the area. To date relatively little has been written about creativity and firm performance in the marketing literature.

The link between Marketing and Creativity in Organisations – a brief review

Creativity is inherent in marketing in terms of idea generation for New Product Development (NPD), advertising and promotion, product positioning and branding. New products are indeed necessary for organisations but the earnings from existing products must not be forgotten (Andrews and Smith 1996). In order to maintain profits from well established products they need to have meaningful differentiation from the competition (e.g. Levitt 1980), which is why, over time, the use of creative marketing tactics to adapt the product, packaging, promotion and positioning to achieve this aim are clearly evident (Andrews and Smith 1996). Despite this obvious objective, there are many examples where a lack of creativity and imagination has rendered products to become mere commodities via the use of price promotions. Research studies have highlighted that the primary reason for NP failure is a lack of innovativeness (Sethi et al 2001). However, hope is not lost! There are some excellent examples from recent years where creative marketing initiatives have been very successful for the enhancement of product performance. e.g. Apple's iphone, ipad, iTunes. What is evident is that idea creation resulting in products and product differentiation are critical determinants of firm performance (Andrews and Smith 1996, Song and Parry 1997) and that creativity which produces meaningful differentiation for customers becomes a competitive advantage (Andrews and Smith 1996, Sethi et al 2001, Song and Parry 1997).

Within the management and marketing literature there are a limited, but growing number of empirical studies exploring creativity. Firstly, studies which have investigated creativity as the degree of novelty and the relationship with organisational learning (Moorman 1995, Moorman and Miner 1997). Secondly, the study of individual, group and organisational characteristics that influence creativity for New Products (e.g. Andrews and Smith 1996 and Sethi, et al 2001 – both US studies).

Thirdly, creativity linked to marketing strategy and teams in relation to NPD (e.g. Im and Workman 2004, Im et al 2008, Im et al 2103) and organisational performance (e.g. Barrett et al 2005, 2012).

Table 1 Creativity linked to performance - Key studies in marketing (see appendix).

Table 1 illustrates six influential studies. Firstly, studies which looked at the individual, group and organisational characteristics that influence creativity for New Products (NP) (e.g. Andrews and Smith 1996 and Sethi, et al 2001 – both US studies). The former study looked at factors which foster or hinder marketing programme (MP) creativity (individual problem solving inputs, situational factors and motivational factors of product managers), and found that it is positively related to macro environmental knowledge. Diversity of experience does not affect MP creativity but diversity of education had a negative impact i.e. creativity is enhanced by business education more than diverse education - surprisingly. Intrinsic motivation and willingness to take risks have a positive impact on MP creativity. Working with others and a moderately formal planning process are conducive to creativity. The perception of time pressure had a negative effect. However, the relationships were moderated by both motivational and situational factors.

The latter study, in contrast, looked at cross functional team factors (social cohesion, functional diversity and superordinate identity) and contextual influences (project monitoring, customer influence and risk taking), influencing new product (NP) innovation at the project level. Their results found that creativity (innovativeness) is positively related to the level of super ordinate identify in the team, encouragement to take risks, customer influence and monitoring of the project by senior management. Social cohesion negatively affects NP innovativeness whereas functional diversity does not affect NP innovativeness.

Building on these studies is the work of Im and Workman (2004) who proposed that the generation and marketing of creative ideas in terms of new products and marketing programmes is a key factor in a firm's success. Initially, creativity as a mediator between MO and NP success was investigated. The findings indicated that MO is not a panacea for enhancing creativity as there were trade offs between novelty and meaningfulness in creativity. As such, NP success tends to be driven by meaningfulness rather than by novelty. A customer orientation can be detrimental to generation of novel perspectives for NP and creativity of NP is more likely to influence NP success than creativity of MP.

A later study by Im et al (2008) investigated how the behavioural dimensions of (MO) as defined by Narver and Slater (1990) interact with each other to influence MP creativity. They found that a competitor oriented company tended to generate meaningful differentiation and novel positioning of their marketing programmes. Interestingly in both of these studies creativity was separated into two dimensions meaningful and novel and not viewed as a unitary construct – something which Unsworth (2001) and more recently Sullivan and Ford (2010) have argued will help the development of creativity research in organisations.

More recently, there have been studies which investigate creative climate and performance by Barrett et al (2005, 2012) who found that there was interaction between managerial activities e.g. Market orientation (MKTOR), Learning Orientation (LNOR), Entrepreneurial Orientation (ENT), Organisational flexibility (ORGF) and Creative Climate (CRC) in relation to organisational performance and decision making. Their initial exploratory study found that all the managerial activities i.e. independent variables were all highly correlated to performance (the dependent variable). In their later study the results were validated with a larger sample and interestingly there appeared to be a moderating effect of CRC with LRN.

What is evident from the studies above is that creativity is defined in a similar way, the studies are all carried out in the US and creativity is seen as the dependent variable in most cases – the exceptions being Im and Workman (2004) and Barrettt (2005, 2012).

The possibilities for future research in marketing

The brief review above demonstrates that there are still many unanswered questions relating to creativity in organisations. Generally, it is agreed that there are elements which still require further investigation e.g. additional contextual factors, the fact that field research only investigates contextual factors at one level and perhaps multiple levels of analysis are required (Drazin et al 1999) measurement issues e.g. self reporting of creativity and who decides on creativity (George 2007) and finally, the fact that creativity has been seen as a unitary construct (Sullivan and Ford 2010, Unsworth 2001.)

What is unhelpful in the above marketing studies and in the literature on creativity in general is the interchangeability of the terms creativity and innovativeness (e.g. Sethi et al 2001). This has not helped the conceptualisation of the construct and may have led to authors publishing outside the marketing literature.

What has developed in the few studies reported in marketing is the separation of the dimensions of novelty and meaningfulness rather than a combined creativity construct (Im and Workman 2004, Im et al 2008, Im et al 2103). This approach is reinforced by Sullivan and Ford (2010) who argue that because creativity is a multi dimensional construct it should be treated as such in terms of definition, measurement and model development.

The research reviewed in this paper serves as a foundation for future research directions. If, as (Gilson 2008) suggests it is assumed that creativity enhances competitiveness or firm performance why are we not seeing more empirical studies in the marketing arena? Is it because creativity research in an organisational context has migrated into other literatures or because it is assumed that no empirical evidence is required (Zhou & Shalley 2008)?

So is creativity in the marketing literature a lost cause or an area for new possibilities? Certainly, there is plenty of room for scope. The importance of creativity for organisations is well documented, but despite this, there have been few studies linking creativity to firm performance (Gong et al 2013). The link between strategic resources and dynamic capabilities in marketing and creativity represents a new research stream which could be researched to see the affect on firm performance, particularly in the UK. It would also be interesting to examine the effects of MO, organisational culture and climate on the development of creative capability and the resulting performance. Finally the current research needs to reflect the complexity of modern organisations and by addressing some of the issues mentioned above and investigating issues of creativity through paradoxes or contradictions (George 2007) all of which could be interesting areas of research for marketers.

Table 1

Author	Definition of creativity	Primary focus	Sample data	Variables
Andrews J and Smith D C (1996)	based on Amabile (1983) MP creativity "the extent to which the actions taken to market a product (e.g. Package changes) represent a meaningful difference from marketing practices in the product category" p175	Determinants of Marketing Programme creativity for established products	US study. 193 Product mgrs from Consumer goods companies. Product managers individuals	Dependent variable - Creativity of the marketing program. Moderating variables - Motivational factors and situational factors
Barrett H Balloum J L and Weinstein A (2005), International Journal of Non profit Voluntary Sector marketing Vol. 10, pp. 213-223		Exploratory study - examines managerial activities e.g. MKTOR, LNOR, ENT, ORGF, CRC in relation to organisational performance.	snowball sampling, non probability sample of 267 responses, US study 5 Southeastern states. Non profit companies	ENT, CRC, LRN, ORG, MKT are the Independent variables PERF is the Dependent variable
Barrett H Balloum J L and Weinstein A (2012), International Journal of Business Innovation and Research Vol. 6, No. 2, pp. 202-220		Identification of managerial controllable factors that maximise performance, whether CRC relates to the other variables	60 organisations - 37 business, 23 Non profit, banking, healthcare, manufacturing, real estate, retail, education, other services a range of sizes snowball sampling, non probability sampling US 5 Southeastern states	ENT, CRC, LRN, ORG, MKT are the Independent variables PERF is the Dependent variable CRC is moderating variable

Im S and Workman J P 2004, Journal of Marketing, Vol. 68, pp114-132	NP and MP creativity as "the degree to which NP and their associated MP are perceived as representing unique differences from competitors products and programmes in ways that are meaningful to target customers " p115	Creativity is a mediator between MO and NP success	312 project managers, at the NPD team level US high technology manufacturing firms	Creativity is a mediator between MO and NP success
Im S, Hussain M, Sengupta S (2008), Journal of Business Research, 61 p859-867	MP creativity "as the degree to which MP associated with NPD are perceived to be different from competitors programmes as well as more meaningful to customers p860	Proposed model suggests 3 dimension of MO positively interact to enhance the generation of creative ideas and incentives for MP	222 product innovation project leaders US high technology manufacturing firms	MP creativity is dependent variable - novelty and meaningfulness
Sethi R, Smith D C and Park C W (2001)	"product benefits that are unique to a given product and are perceived as useful by customers " p73 "NP innovativeness refers to the extent to which the product differs from competing alternatives in a way that is meaningful to customers"p74	Determinants of NP creativity in NP team context	141 Project managers US study appliances, lawn care equipment, office supplies, toys, processed foods, health & beauty aids and household products	Innovativeness is dependent variable

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