

ANALYSIS OF FACTORS INFLUENCING SUCCESS IN COLLEGE-LEVEL ADVERTISING DESIGN COMPETITIONS: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY OF COLLEGE AWARDS

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Abstract: This study examines patterns in award-winning graphic advertising designs to identify factors that increase students' chances of success in university competitions. The research specifically analyzes creative advertising approaches, visual representations, and submission strategies of gold-winning entries in the AD CAMPUS competition (2019–2023). Findings show that using metaphors, flat illustrations, and submitting three pieces as a cohesive series are the most effective strategies for winning. This study provides valuable insights for instructors guiding students in creative advertising competitions, offering a foundation for future design instruction and competition strategies.

Keywords: Advertising Creativity; Creative Approaches; Empirical Research; Quantity of Works; Visual Representation of Design

1. INTRODUCTION

There is a growing need for advertising education as a result of the advertising industry's recent rapid growth. For students pursuing careers in field of advertising, exceptional creative thinking, creativity and practical skills are necessary, in addition to a solid theoretical foundation; design theories and development are an essential component of this advertising education. Against this backdrop, a number of advertising design contests have steadily grown in importance as training grounds for students' all-around skills. Students can display their creativity on a stage and get a chance to match their products with real market needs by participating in these competitions.

The study examines the gold-winning graphic advertising design works from the previous five years (2019-2023) in the context of the China College Students Advertising Art Festival Academy Awards. Through a quantitative analysis of three main factors such as: a) creativity methods; b) visual presentation forms; and c) quantity of submissions per group. The aim of this study is to identify the innovative themes in these exceptional pieces and to offer insightful advice to upcoming students taking part in advertising contests. The study's conclusions should assist future students grasp the essential components of effective creative advertising, improving their chances of entering and succeeding in competitions and developing both their practical and creative skills.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

From a technological perspective, our everyday lives and education have been significantly impacted by the widespread advancement of mobile internet technology. Concurrently, there has been a radical shift in the advertising sector. Advertising education, being a highly practical discipline, needs to adapt its methods and content in order to develop flexible talent that will meet the changing needs of the advertising industry and keep up with industry advancements. A number of national policy documents have been formulated in recent years with the goal of evolving the advancement of higher education. The dynamic modification of teaching content and curriculum based on industry development needs was stressed in the "13th Five-Year National Strategic Emerging Industries Development Plan" released in 2016. At present, according to the requirements of national policies, many advertising design competitions have built a practical teaching reform platform of promoting training, learning and teaching through competition, so as to cultivate students' innovative consciousness and problem-solving ability, hoping to achieve the consistency of course content and market demand. The Ministry of Education's 2019

"Implementation Opinions on Double First-Class Undergraduate Courses" strongly supporting the deep integration of contemporary information technology (IT) with the teaching instruction or methodology. It optimises and restructures curriculum systems and instructional materials in accordance with the demands of talent development, and economic, and social development, guiding students towards inquiry-based and personalised learning. In order to promote the growth of applied undergraduate and industry-specific colleges, the State Council's 2017 "Opinions on Deepening the Integration of Production and Education" highlight the concepts of school-enterprise collaboration and cooperative education. It places a strong emphasis on strengthening practical instruction, adjusting to industry demands, and enhancing the training system, with a primary focus on applied talents.

Taken a closer look at these educational (teaching) policies reveals that they prioritise the development of applied skills, the incorporation of "Internet + education" into instructional strategies, and curriculum that is specially customised to meet the needs of each student. These significant national policies emphasise how crucial it is to align teaching strategies with the practical needs of emerging industries. This Focus on applied talent development, bolstered by modern Information Technology (IT), emphasises the importance of industry relevance and real-world knowledge in post-secondary education. The synergy between policy directives and technological advancement underscores a strategic commitment to preparing students for a dynamically changing professional landscape, ensuring their readiness to make meaningful contributions to the advertising industry and beyond.

Despite the increasing relevance of advertising design competitions in education, little research has been done on identifying specific patterns in award-winning works that can guide students in future competitions. The Times Young Creative Awards, the National Advertising Art Design Competition for College Students (also known as "SUN-ADA"), and the China College Students Advertising Art Festival Academy Award (also known as "AD CAMPUS") are just a few of the well-known competitions in China, that provide students with a useful platform. With 32 editions under its belt since its launch in 1992, the Times Young Creative Awards seeks to foster young people's creativity and develop the next generation of creative elites. It is recognised as the pinnacle of young creative achievement because of its strict professionalism and elevated creative standards; it is also frequently compared to the "Oscars" of the Chinese creative award industry. Now in its 15th edition, "SUN-ADA" was founded in 2005 with the goals of advancing educational reform, fostering moral character development, strengthening abilities, inspiring wisdom, and improving quality. The China College Students Advertising Art Festival Academy Award, or "AD CAMPUS" for short, has been given out nationwide for exceptional accomplishments in

advertising among college students. It has been held since 1999 and has been organised in 21 editions. It invites students from different universities to participate in propositional creativity for well-known national and international businesses, making a substantial contribution to industries like marketing, advertising, communication, art, design, new media, and animation.

It is clear from the examination of these exceptional platforms for typical competitions that design discipline competitions are an effective means of developing students' creative and practical skills while they are in school. These kinds of contests can be easily incorporated into classroom instruction, along with the use of efficient online learning tools. These contests are an important part of the practical teaching methodology in Chinese higher education, because of their widespread impact, which is highlighted by their prominence in the professional development of students across the design discipline. The thoughtful incorporation of design competitions into the academic program is in line with the all-embracing objectives of Internet-plus education, providing students with a special opportunity to develop their creative thinking and practical skills. It does, however, serve as evidence of how flexible and positive educational approaches can be to meet the needs of the modern world, encouraging students to have a proactive attitude towards the learning process and creating a supportive environment.

A review of the literature at this time indicates that the majority of universities offering programs in advertising design view advertising design competitions as an essential component of hands-on learning. Students believe that entering advertising design competitions improves their creative abilities, critical thinking, and practical skills, which will help them greatly in their future careers (Liu and Qiu, 2019). Students can improve their problem-solving and practical skills by applying their theoretical knowledge and visual skills to real-world design challenges through the integration of advertising design competitions into their daily coursework and assessment methods (Xiao, 2016). Students create advertising works based on real-world scenarios; by entering national advertising competitions like the Times Young Creative Awards, Golden Calf Awards, and College Awards. These competitions require students to apply their creative advertising skills. This competitive learning environment encourages students to actively participate in the development of their practical and creative thinking abilities, which eventually raises their level of professional proficiency (Pang, 2017). According to Liu (2019), advertising design competitions give students a stimulating intellectual environment, acting as a singular forum and supporting thought-provoking analysis that goes beyond the confines of textbooks. These contests, which are based on business ideas, give students a glimpse into what employers need, which aids in their decision-making about how to further their

education and improves their employability. Through the seamless integration of theoretical and practical activities, case studies on advertising design competition and experiential marketing are combined to create a collaborative learning outcome (Parker, 2000). Numerous academics' research findings highlight the beneficial and positive effects of advertising competitions on students' professional creativity and practical skills. Nevertheless, there hasn't been much focus on explaining how to write exceptional competition entries.

This study analyses the number of entries that received the grading recognition award from 2015 to 2018, with a focus on the "SUN-ADA" and "AD CAMPUS" events, in an effort to understand this gap. Finding patterns in the winning entries' conceptual content and expressive forms is the aim. Using quantitative statistical analysis, Zhang (2020) tackles this from the perspective of storytelling marketing theory, examining the patterns in the conceptual content and expressive forms of the winning pieces. The study uses meticulous case descriptions, but it only analyses a representative sample of cases as opposed to offering comprehensive final information. It is acknowledged that more research is necessary in this field even though this research offers and conveys a useful perspective. Student creativity, practical skills, inventiveness, and market readiness are all greatly enhanced by participation in advertising design competitions. The incorporation of these competitions into academic curricula is consistent with the overarching objectives of contemporary education, which prioritise the practical application of theoretical knowledge. Students can learn the nuances of creating effective competition submissions by using the analysis of award-winning entries as a guide. Academic institutions can adequately prepare students for the competitive and dynamic advertising industry through such initiatives.

The research perspective for this study is based on the "ROI" advertising creative theory put forth by American copywriter and creative director William Bernbach (1911–1982). ROI, an acronym for "Relevance Originality Impact," is a useful manual for creative advertising. Bernbach understood and held the view that for advertising to be effective, it needed to establish an emotional connection with the public; therefore, the presentation of the advertisement is even more important than the content. He asserts that if an advertisement isn't unique, doesn't relate to the product, or doesn't have a big enough impact on the viewer, it loses its meaning.

Previous research on creativity in advertising design competitions has highlighted the importance of innovative thinking and the use of visual elements in design. For instance, studies by Wang (2020) and Xu (2024) emphasize the role of Creative and visual in engaging audiences. However, few studies have specifically examined how

these factors correlate with success in graphic advertising competitions. This study fills that gap by quantitatively analyzing the use of creative approaches, visual representations, and submission strategies in award-winning designs.

This study emphasise how vital and critical it is to present and carry out advertising ideas. The study focusses on the "AD CAMPUS's" gold-winning graphic advertising design from the previous five years (2019–2023). It uses three primary variables as analytical indicators: a) the number of submissions for each group; b) the creative advertising techniques; and c) the visual representation of design. The study attempts to provide a systematic explanation of the innovative patterns of exceptional design advertisements through quantitative analysis. The research acts also as a useful manual for students competing, because it offers an impartial and exhaustive understanding of the creative trends. The ultimate goal is to improve students' analytical and creative thinking, practical and hand-on skills, which is in line with the main goals of the teaching and learning through the participation in design competition.

The study aims to improve students' practical skills within the context of the classroom and their ability to think creatively and analytically. The study contributes to our understanding of effective creative direction by identifying the underlying patterns of successful design (print) advertisements through a quantitative analysis. At the same time, this allows students who are submitting work for competitions to get more precise, clear, and targeted instruction. The primary objective aligns with the concepts of competition-driven learning and teaching by focusing on raising students' practical skill levels and stimulating their creative thinking.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Data Collection

At present, the advertising design courses taught in the class mainly focus on the design of print advertisements. In order to understand the design patterns of previous winning entries in the process of competition, design patterns are provided for the creation of advertising design entries. Increase the likelihood of winning. Over the course of the previous five years (2019–2023), data for this study was gathered from the AD CAMPUS's official website. The graphic advertising design category's gold-winning entries were the main focus. For examination, 208 entries in total were gathered; Utilising the College Award as the primary data source guarantees the accuracy and dependability of the data, considering its standing as a distinguished nationwide contest. Specifically identifying and extracting data related to 2-

dimensional (print) advertising design gold-winning entries, the researcher used the website's features as filters.

3.2 Research Methods

With Microsoft Excel serving as the main instrument for data analysis, the study used a quantitative research design. For a thorough statistical examination, three primary variables were selected: a) the creative advertising approaches; b) the visual representation of design; and c) the number of submissions for each group.

The Creative Advertising Approaches: The researcher classified the creative methods used in the gold-winning entries by drawing on well-known theories such as James (2021) believed that creativity is old elements in new combinations; The book of Ding (2021), *72 Creative Changes— 72 Strategies to Turn Advertising Rookie into Creative Masters*, and Ding (2024) summarized 27 Creative Methods in Eight Aspects. Firstly, the researcher downloaded (2019-2023) gold awards graphic advertising entries from the AD CAMPUS website. Then placed them in a folder on the computer, and analyzed each entry. After that the entries were divided into thirteen categories, and the corresponding table was made in Microsoft Excel (See Table 1). Patterns in the application of creative techniques were found by analysing the amounts and percentages of each method.

The Visual Representation of Design: By checking gold awards graphic advertising entries on the AD CAMPUS website (2019-2023), the researchers were able to find out the visual representation method adopted by the creator's interpretation of the works. the results were collected in Microsoft Excel (See Table 2). There were 12 categories of visual representation Design forms utilised in the gold-winning entries, acknowledging the importance of visual representation in advertising, particularly from the viewpoints of industry, academia, and advertising companies. The researcher looked at the distribution and prevalence of these visual representation of design forms to find patterns and preferences among judges.

The Number of Submissions for Each Group: Researcher examined the number of submissions for each group about the gold awards graphic advertising entries in the AD CAMPUS website (2019-2023). And the specific number of results conducted statistics in the Microsoft Excel (See Table 3). The study looked into how the quantity of entries submitted affected the chances of winning. The number of entries submitted per series—which could be positioning as first, second and third, was used as a method to group the entries. The goal of the analysis was to see if there was any relationship between the likelihood of winning and the quantity of entries received.

The research sought also to provide an in-depth and impartial understanding of the factors influencing success in 2-dimensional advertising design competitions by using descriptive analysis techniques and Excel for statistical computations. The utilisation of a quantitative approach facilitated a more profound examination of patterns and trends within the dataset, thereby augmenting the dependability and relevance of the research outcomes.

4. ANALYSIS

4.1 The Creative Advertising Approaches

James Webb Young, since its book publication in 1965, "A Technique for Producing Ideas;" Young's proposed the concept of creativity as "new combinations of old elements." He summarized that ideas follow a five-step process of: 1) gathering or collecting raw material for the mind; 2) digesting and assimilating the raw materials in the mind; 3) stepping away from the problem; 4) allowing the ideas to come back or emerge naturally; and 5) testing the ideas in the real world and adjusting it base on feedback.

One of the most challenging steps in the creative process is generating new ideas. Ding (2021), in his book 72 Creativity Changes, addresses this challenge by identifying three core stages in the creative process, offering 72 strategies to stimulate the emergence of innovative ideas. Ding (2024), a famous Chinese brand, advertising and marketing expert, in his book "Advertising Planning and Creativity," summarized 27 creative methods with eight aspects, illustrating how advertising creativity can be effectively expressed through a case study.

As a result, educational institutions stress how important creative advertising is to propel student understanding of their own creative process. The -Table 1- below was created by the researcher; by tallying the number of works-entries, their proportions, and the use of creative methods for each winning group. The researchers also concentrated their effort on the gold-winning entries in the College Awards graphic advertising category over the previous five years (2019–2023).

Table 1: The Creative Approaches in Graphic Advertising

The Creative Advertising Approaches	Quantity of Works-Gold winning	Percentage (%)
Metaphor	39	18.8%
Substitution	26	12.5%
Exaggeration	24	11.5%
Contrast	22	10.6%
Halo Effect	22	10.6%
Personification	18	8.7%
Positive Induction	18	8.7%
Emotion	15	7.2%
Homology	10	4.8%
Negative Induction	5	2.4%
Symbolism	5	2.4%
Peculiarity	2	1.0%
Humour	2	1.0%
Total of Categories: 13	Total of entries: 208	Total: 100%

This -Table 1- above, also summarizes 13 categories of creative methods employed in the gold-winning graphic advertising design entries of the college award, providing insights into the distribution and prevalence of various creative approaches taken by the participants.

The total number of creative method works were 208 entries. Firstly, as the -Table 1- above show the metaphorical creative method was the most frequently used, securing 39 gold awards, which represent the 18.8% of the total entries; Secondly, four creative methods such as: Substitution, Exaggeration, and Halo Effect, were relatively more prevalent, with 26, 24, and 22 entries respectively, which represent 45.2%, almost half of all others creative methods together; Thirdly, follow by a set of four creative methods, such as Personification, Positive Induction, Emotion, and Homology, were used moderately, with 18, 18, 15, and 10 entries respectively, which represent 29.4% of the total entries award. Finally, the remaining four creative methods such as: Negative Induction, Symbolism, Peculiarity and Humour, were less frequently used, with 14 works combined together, which represent only 6.8% of the total entries. Through this data analysis, the following conclusion can be drawn:

The high prevalence of metaphor suggests that this creative method resonates more with competition judges, possibly due to its ability to convey interesting ideas graphically and truthfully. Therefore, teachers can focus on the creative method of metaphor when guiding students to participate in the competition, which consequently increased the student's chances to win more awards.

4.2 The Visual Representation of Design in Graphic Advertising

Three distinct groups from various backgrounds frequently judge student entries for the competition College Awards: representatives and expert from the industry, experts from the academia, and brand ambassadors. Brands frequently highlight an artwork's maturity and even its potential for direct commercial application. As a result, the works' visual representation of design bear special significance. Presently, one of the most frequent problems that students face during instruction is having the ability to come up with original ideas for competitions or special ideas that meet up industry standards and expectations, most of the time students finds difficult to communicate their ideas visually. Beside selecting the best visual presentation for competitions can also be difficult for some students.

Given these obstacles, studying exceptional, award-winning works is the most direct and efficient way to foster creative development in the student mind. This study introduced a statistical analysis based on another factor of advertising creativity in order to obtain a more accurate understanding of the visual representation of design that judges particularly appreciate in graphic advertising.

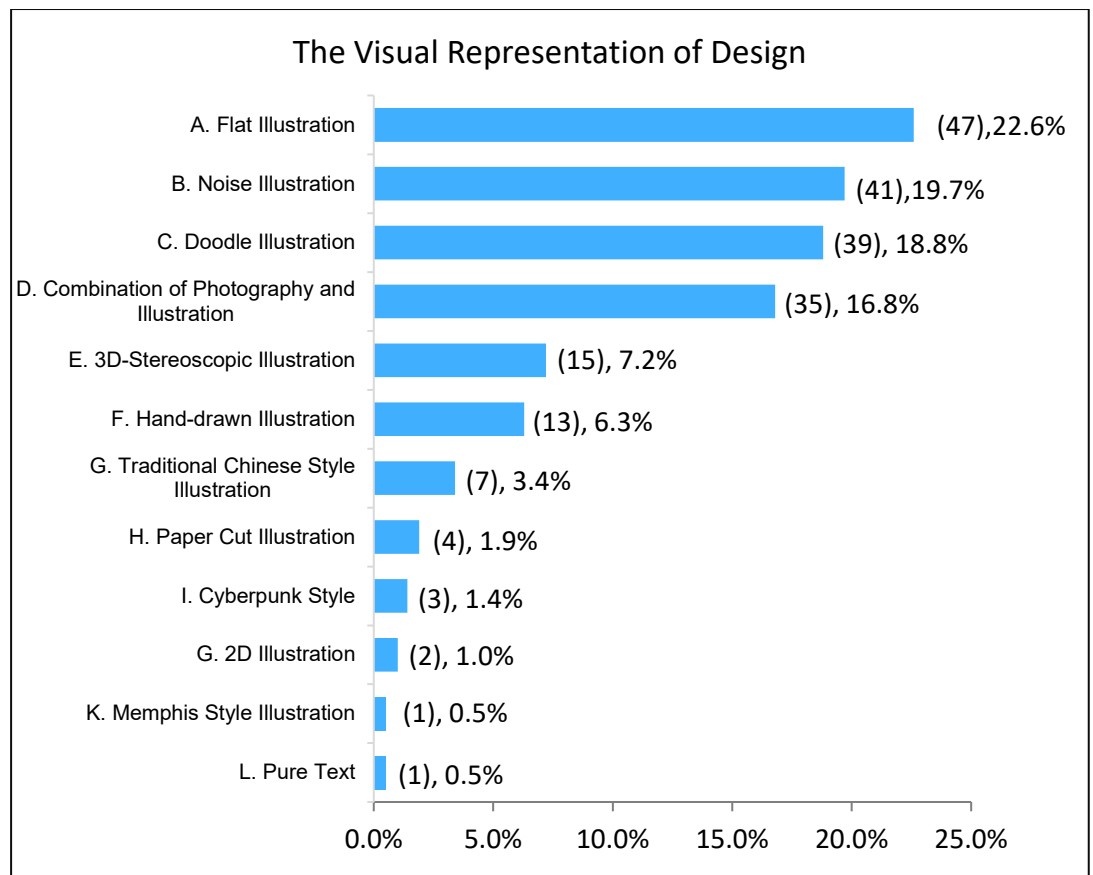


Figure 1: The Visual Representation of Design in Graphic Advertising

This - Figure 1- above also summarizes 12 categories of visual representation of design employed in the gold-winning graphic advertising design entries of the college award, providing insights into the distribution and prevalence of the various visual approaches taken by the participants.

The total number of visual representation of design in graphic advertising design were 208 entries. It shows evidence from the gold-winning entries in the College Awards category, that over the past five years students have preferred 12 different visual presentation forms. Firstly, the most frequently employed visual presentation forms was the -flat illustration- with 47 works, which represent 22.6% of the total of entries. Secondly, three relatively prevalent visual presentation forms such as: Noise Illustration, Doodle Illustration, and the Combination of Photography and Illustration, were used moderately, which represent the 19.7%, 18.8% and the 16.8% of the total respectively. Thirdly, follow by a set of two visual presentation forms, such as 3D-Stereoscopic Illustration, and Hand-drawn Illustration, with 15 & 13 entries, which represent the 7.2 % and the 6.3% respectively. Lastly the least frequently employed visual presentation forms, comprises the last six categories, such as Traditional Chinese Style, Illustration, Paper Cut Illustration, Cyberpunk Style, 2D Illustration,

Memphis Style Illustration, and Pure Text; which collectively represent 8.7%. form this data analysis, the following conclusion can be drawn: The high prevalence of flat illustration suggests that this visual representation method resonates more with competition judges, possibly due to its ability to convey complex ideas succinctly and visually. It is evident that guiding students through this process in term of visual representation of design in graphic advertising design competition; it is necessary to prioritize the used of graphic visual forms which may show higher winning possibilities and is more likely to garner recognition from judges, which consequently increased the student chances to win more awards.

4.3 The Number of Submissions for Each Group in Graphic Advertising

The study gathered information from the 208 groups that won gold in graphic advertising over the previous five years at the College Awards in order to further corroborate this finding In this study, the number of submissions per group influences the likelihood of the winning. Award-winning entries from national competitions like "Times Young Creative Awards"- "SUN-ADA" and "AD CAMPUS" were examined. It was revealed that the group that received the most awards was the one that submitted three pieces in a series.

Table 2: The Number of Submissions for Each Group in Graphic Advertising Design

The Number of Submissions for Each Group	Quantity of Works-Gold winning	Percentage (%)
3	166	79.8%
2	31	14.9%
1	8	3.8%
24	2	1.0%
6	1	0.5%
Total of Categories: 5	Total: 208	Total: 100%

This -Table 2- above also summarizes 5 categories of submission per group in graphic advertising design entries of the college award; providing into the distribution and prevalence of the various results taken by the participant. The 5 categories were submitted in series or groups of three (triple), two (double) and one (single) entry; beside the series of 24 works and another of 6 works, which represent a total of 208 entries.

The total number of the quantity of submission per group in graphic advertising design were 208 entries. It shows that among the gold-winning entries in the College Award category, that over the past five years students have -presenting- three pieces in sequence, which is the most popular approach, with 166 submissions, which represent 79.8% of the total. However, under the category of 24 works combined with other 6 works group, it shows that very few were submitted. Under the submission of two (2) per group, it shows 31 works which represent the 14.9% of the total. This data indicates that the more submission per group may not always represent a higher chance of winning any competition. Perhaps, the best course of action is to submit small number of works (two works or three works together as one entry) combined into a series of submission, using this planning may increase the student advantage to gold-winning the competition; under the College Award, rules and regulations is stated that up to maximum of three entries (three works, three design, three visuals) together may be submitted per group. It is also advisable to submit two works as per one entry.

Consequently, given that it accounts for a sizeable percentage of the data (79.8%), it appears that submitting three works in succession is the most popular and effective approach. When entering competitions for graphic advertising design, submitting three pieces as a cohesive series increases the likelihood of winning awards. It is advised that when producing work for advertising competitions, submissions should follow the insights that have been analysed and outlined. This will increase the likelihood of winning prizes.

As a result of a thorough examination of the College Awards' gold-winning pieces, the research has revealed some intriguing trends taken by the participants. When it comes to creative methods for advertising, 'metaphor' is the most often utilised, making up 18.8% at (Table 1). 'Substitution, exaggeration, contrast, and halo effect' are also used fairly frequently, totalling over 45% at (Table 1). The most common type of visual presentation form, accounting for 22.6% of the works, is the 'flat illustration' at (Figure 1). There has also been extensive use of 'Noise Illustration', combined with 'Doodle Illustration,' as well as 'Combination of Photography and Illustration' altogether (Figure 1). Furthermore, we noted that the vast majority of submissions which represent 79.8% have three pieces per group (Table 2), whereas submissions representing 1.0% and 0.5% of 24 and 6 pieces per group are rather uncommon (Table2).

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The study's goal was to identify patterns within three influencing factors, analysing the 2-Dimensional advertising design entries that have won gold awards, in order to increase the likelihood of winning university student advertising design competitions. The findings from this study suggest that certain creative approaches, such as the use of metaphor, flat illustrations, and submitting three works per group, significantly increase the chances of winning in graphic advertising competitions. This outcome is consistent with industry trends favoring clear, visually engaging designs that convey complex ideas succinctly. The prevalence of metaphors in winning designs aligns with James (2021) proposed concept of creativity as "new combinations of old elements," which resonates with both academic theories and practical industry applications. Furthermore, flat illustrations have become increasingly popular due to their ability to simplify complex messages while maintaining aesthetic appeal, as observed in contemporary advertising campaigns (Ni, 2016).

University students who take part in advertising design competitions can effectively direct their creative process and effort by understanding the design patterns of previous winning entries. This pattern enhances our understanding of how university students can produce more competitive entries, thereby boosting their confidence in the process; as a result, these new learning patterns (this visual design solutions) can be used as a guide for future university design competitions. This study relies on the quantitative methods to produce reliable and accurate results, applying statistical analysis to the small number of practical teaching classes, the results of the data presented has convey substantial and positive information. Lastly, increasing the confidence and excitement of university students and faculty members to participate in design competitions and to share knowledge about the patterns involved in producing outstanding award entries among the students. It also helps with practical instruction by giving the teacher a different way to succeed.

However, the study also has limitations. The sample size of 208 entries, all from a single competition (AD CAMPUS), may not fully represent the broader landscape of global advertising competitions. Future research should expand the scope to include other prestigious contests, such as the "Times Young Creative Awards" or "SUN-ADA," to determine whether these patterns hold across different contexts. Additionally, the role of judges' personal preferences, industry standards, and the impact of emerging technologies such as AI in the creative process should be considered in further studies.

As the advertising industry continues to evolve, understanding the creative strategies that resonate with judges and consumers alike can help shape future advertising campaigns. Moreover, teaching students how to apply these strategies effectively can better prepare them for the competitive nature of the industry.

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