

# LAYING THE FOUNDATION FOR AN ECOSYSTEM OF CREATIVITY MARKETING

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## ABSTRACT

Although marketing scholars have recognized the role of creativity in marketing, we argue that it has been underestimated, particularly in light of the new marketing paradigm (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) in which the focus is on the co-creation of value between firms and their stakeholders, including customers. We heed the call of organizational creativity scholars (e.g., Hennessey and Amabile, 2010) by proposing a systemic approach to creativity in marketing which recognizes the interdependence between the individual and organizational processes of creativity as well as the strategic role of creativity-enhancing systems and processes in producing creative outcomes and, as a result, value for the firm and its stakeholders. This paper aims to contribute to the issue at hand by (a) offering a review of the construct across a range of disciplines and levels, and (b) developing a Creativity Marketing Ecosystem model which lays the foundation for future research on the multi-faceted and crucial role of creativity in marketing.

## INTRODUCTION

Creativity, defined as “the production of novel and useful ideas in any domain” (Amabile et al., 1996), has long been researched by scholars from various disciplines seeking to understand the creative performance of individuals, organizations and societies. That creativity plays an important role in management is hardly debated, but establishing the extent of this role and how it is linked to the individual dimensions of creativity remains an open issue. In the field of marketing, in particular, although scholars have recognized the role of creativity, we argue that it has been underestimated, particularly in light of the new marketing paradigm (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) in which the focus is on the co-creation of value between firms and their stakeholders, including customers. We heed the call of organizational creativity scholars (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010) by proposing a systemic approach to creativity in marketing which recognizes the interdependence between the individual and organizational processes of creativity as well as the strategic role of creativity-enhancing systems and processes in producing creative outcomes and, as a result, value for the firm and its stakeholders. This paper aims to contribute to the issue at hand by (a) offering a review of the construct across a range of disciplines and levels, and (b) developing a Creativity Marketing Ecosystem model which lays the foundation for future research on the multi-faceted and crucial role of creativity in marketing.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The marketing literature, following the general creativity literature in other domains, lacks a solid view of creativity and its potential offer in the domain. Textbooks, for instance, offer piecemeal and fragmented views of creativity in marketing ranging from its role in advertising to product development, planning, sales and strategy. The problem is not unique to marketing, after decades of investigation in fields as diverse as psychology, anthropology, sociology, economics, social psychology and even biology and neuroscience, creativity research is proliferating while at the same time it has become increasingly fragmented and difficult to follow. Guilford (1950) suggests that the subject is one in which psychologists “whether they be angels or not, have feared to tread.” If they are to understand and harness this capacity to generate new ideas, new approaches, and new solutions, researchers need to master the basics and take a more integrative approach to the subject. Recent calls for a broad and comprehensive approach (e.g., Mumford, 2001) are summarized by Hennessey and Amabile (2010), who suggest a “systems approach” involving cross disciplinary efforts – from the innermost neurological level to the outermost cultural level – in order to unlock creativity’s secrets and make use of it. We begin with a review of the rich, but puzzling psychological literature on individual creativity before exploring the organizational literature and its applications to strategy and marketing.

### The individual level creativity literature

*Affect.* The relationship between affect and creativity appears somewhat complex. While many experimental studies have shown that positive affect leads to higher levels of creativity (e.g., George and Zhou, 2007), other studies are less supportive (Vosburg, 1998) or refute (Kaufman, 2003) this relationship. Similarly, while negative affect has, generally, a negative influence on creativity (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010), under certain conditions, it seems to actually lead to higher creativity than positive affect (George and Zhou, 2002). George and Zhou (2007) argue that employees can become more creative by

experiencing both positive and negative moods over time in a supportive context. The importance of the role played by a supportive context is important in the social or organizational context: positive mood leads to expansive, playful, divergent thinking and the generation of new creative ideas while negative mood may signal problems and push individuals to actively search for creative solutions through systematic information processing and creative ideas (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010).

**Cognition.** Diversity of views also reigns in this area. Kaufman and Baer (2002) show that the cognitive mechanisms underlying creative performance are domain specific. In the same field but with a different focus, Groborz and Necka (2003) argue for the importance of “cognitive control” in the attention process. Others (Ward, 2001) focus on the importance of conceptual combination in creative thought. Scott et al. (2005) investigate conceptual combinations – such as alternative knowledge structures, and heuristics – and their effect on creativity. Mumford (2001) in his review of Guilford's (1950) reports on “late cycle” capacities which enable individuals to evaluate and implement novel ideas, including “conceptual foresight,” which enables a holistic perspective on the outcome and “downstream consequences” of the implementation of a novel idea; and “redefinition,” which entails shifting the function of objects as demanded by the problem at hand.

**Personality.** This is the original field of empirical research on creativity. A crucial question here is what differentiates creative persons from the rest (Hennessey & Amabile, 2010) and whether such individuals are born with a creative charisma or can be trained. In the psychometric approach, creativity is perceived as a measurable mental trait (like intelligence). Creative abilities (e.g., Guilford, 1950), personal traits and thinking modes and processes (e.g., Barron, 1969; Torrance, 1962), creative potential (e.g., Getzels & Jackson, 1962), and environments that foster creativity (e.g., Amabile, 1983) are all tested. Research on individual differences has recognized some common traits among creative individuals, for instance Sternberg and Lubart's (1992) five traits, tolerance of ambiguity, willingness to overcome obstacles, willingness to grow, willingness to take sensible risks and belief in oneself. Kashdan and Fincham (2002) argue for the central importance of a sense of curiosity and self-confidence as traits that correlate highly with creativity. Feist (1999) shows that curiosity, high levels of personal energy, attraction to complexity and novelty, tolerance for ambiguity, open-mindedness, and persistence in the face of adversity are positive traits of creativity. Csikszentmihalyi (1999) argues rather than specific traits, it is their ability to function across a spectrum of traits (extroverted/introverted, gregarious/reclusive, sensitive/alooof) as conditions require that differentiates creative individuals -- adaptability to the environment and circumstances being the overarching trait.

### **The organizational creativity literature**

The organizational behavior literature offers some promising insights into the role of creativity within organizations. While some see creativity as an outcome (Andrews and Smith, 1996), others such as Woodman and colleagues (1993) argue that creativity is a process whose inputs are creative individuals, groups or organizations whose behaviors in creative situations consist in organizational creativity. This influential model is based on the interactions between individuals, social and social and contextual influences and echoes the three shaping forces of creativity introduced by Csikszentmihalyi (1999): field, domain and individual. Much of Amabile's (summarized in Hennessey and Amabile, 2010) very rich work on organizational creativity focuses on similar contextual, cultural and individual factors. Perry-Smith (2006) uses social network analysis to show the complex effects of strong or weak social ties and centrality.

Unsworth (2001) sees creativity and a problem-solving process and identifies four types of processes along the two dimensions of “problem type” (problem explicitness), and “driver for engagement” (required or volunteered task). Ford's (1996) work contrasts individual creative versus habitual action – individuals make choices between these two alternatives against the context in which they are operating. Drazin et al. (1999) focus on creativity as an iterative process which they too see as a deliberate choice to “produce novel ideas.” Throughout this literature, organizational creativity is seen as resulting from individual creativity, but also emanating from group dynamics (e.g., negotiation, competition) as individuals or groups with different frames of reference seek to find appropriate solutions over time.

Recent work on knowledge and creativity (e.g., Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011) adds interesting dimensions to our understanding of creativity. According to Taylor and Greve (2006) creativity is strongly linked to knowledge combination, either within diverse teams or as a result of individuals' experience across diverse domains. Knowledge from a range of domains is combined to create new ideas and solutions, but also helps screen out previously flawed or irrelevant solutions, resulting in better performance. While teams with diverse experience produce at a higher creative level, the knowledge diversity effect is even greater among individual creators, a result of their ability to integrate diverse knowledge more readily than team members. In-depth experience and commitment to diverse domains and a team's experience working together are

also important positive factors of knowledge combination and creativity (Gupta et al., 2007; Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011).

### **The literature on organizational creativity as a firm resource**

Much of the work on creativity per se in the organization seems focused on product development, a rather obvious outcome of creativity. We argue that this focus underestimates the power of creativity as an organizational resource. There is clear evidence that organizations that deliberately seek to develop organizational creativity and employ it strategically stand to reap the benefits beyond product development. We agree with Ford (1996) that creativity applies to the broader “development and utilization of novel solutions in organizational and market settings.”

Strategy scholars have advocated creative approaches to strategy-making, but seldom identify creativity explicitly. Mintzberg (1987) uses his famous image of the potter sitting at her wheel to introduce the notion of strategy crafting. It is the intimate knowledge of what has worked and not worked in the past coupled (a benefit of experience as discussed by Taylor and Greve, 2006) with a perspective on the future that make the potter’s craft, and should guide the strategist, advocates Mintzberg. Eisenhardt (1997) borrows from the world of jazz to recommend improvisation as a strategy-building model bringing together “adaptive innovation” and “efficient execution.” The importance of a creative process in strategy underlies many strategic frameworks, several of which we will now discuss.

March (1991) contrasts the exploitation of existing knowledge with the exploration of new ideas which involves “search, variation, risk-taking, experimentation, play, flexibility, discovery and innovation” (p. 71). Much of the focus of the work on exploration/exploitation is on selecting the appropriate mix or balance of the two approaches according to a firm’s appetite for risk and innovative outcomes with potential high returns (and losses) (Taylor and Greve, 2006).

Teece and colleagues (1997) introduce the notion of dynamic capabilities within the broad resource-based view, a perspective on value creation based first and foremost on “exploiting existing firm-specific assets” within a changing environment. Dynamic capabilities allow firms to renew these assets by “adapting, integrating and reconfiguring internal and external organizational skills, resources, and functional competences,” implicitly calling for creativity.

A highly related stream of research is that on innovation, a term which we and many authors typically associate more readily with product development, but which is also used at times in a broader strategic sense (Gupta et al., 2007). Blue Ocean strategies (Kim and Mauborgne, 2004), for instance, advocate breaking away from industry boundaries by exploring beyond a market’s assumed natural boundaries. The field would greatly benefit from greater consistency in the terminology. Our point here is not to relabel existing work simply for the sake of consistency, but to advocate that work on creativity, innovation and other related fields tap into the rich multi-level literature on creativity and contribute to the integrative systems approach called for by Hennessey and Amabile (2010). Given that creative skills and processes are at the center of all these processes, this would certainly expose overlooked regularities, trends and opportunities and allow these different streams to benefit from and contribute to the ongoing research on individual, social and organizational creativity.

Relatively new interesting streams of research on creativity in strategy also emanate from the design industry. Design thinking captures and formalizes the creativity processes used in the design industry and has been applied to product innovation and to strategy design (Brown, 2008). Strategic management has also been analyzed as a design process akin to those of “creative disciplines” using Michel Foucault’s discourse framework (Hatchuel et al., 2010).

### **Organizational creativity in the marketing literature**

Creativity is more explicitly apparent in the marketing literature than in the broader strategy literature we have just reviewed. In the marketing context, creativity is discussed both at the strategic level and at the more operational level of marketing programs, as well as in the product development context. Drawing from the exploitation/exploration literature (March, 1991), Menon et al. (1999) show that creative strategic outcomes result from marketing strategy-making associated with an innovative culture. Recognizing the role of creativity in creating points of differentiation for mature products, Andrews and Smith (1996) introduce the notion of marketing program creativity (“marketing practices”), an outcome of individual creativity (product manager background, experience and motivation), and situational factors (plan formalization, time pressure and interaction with others).

Im and Workman (2004) see creativity as an antecedent of innovation, as strongly linked to product differentiation, and as a source of competitive advantage. In testing the relationship between creativity and performance, they define creativity along

two dimensions, novelty and meaningfulness (appropriateness and usefulness to target customers), and pertaining to two types of outputs, new products and marketing programs (roughly, the marketing mix). They find that meaningfulness of products and programs has a stronger effect on performance than does novelty. In both of the latter articles, creativity is seen as an important contributing factor to marketing performance, but falls short of playing the strategy crafting role envisaged by Mintzberg (1987) or Eisenhardt (1997).

Verhoef and Leeflang (2009) question the impact of creativity which they see as a marketing department capability, on the department's influence within the firm. They contrast creativity (program-related) with innovativeness (in product development). Results indicate a much stronger correlation between innovativeness and influence than between creativity and influence. The authors cite the lack of tangible evidence of creativity as a likely factor in this disparity. Slater and colleagues (2009) focus on the relative impact on performance of marketing strategy creativity (marketing mix and practices) and implementation effectiveness. Their premise is that cultural tensions and resource scarcity may require a choice between whichever one of these two levers has greater impact on performance.

The work reviewed here suggests a restricted perspective on marketing strategy, centered on products and the marketing mix, a view which we find underplays the impact of creativity in marketing, as discussed below. We attribute these shortcomings to the lack of integration of creativity research in the marketing literature, and the resulting difficulty to identify and measure creative processes and outcomes.

### **Creativity Marketing: Extending creativity to a new marketing paradigm**

More recently, the service dominant paradigm has developed the argument that the resources from which the firm creates value extend beyond the traditionally understood range of internal resources, to integrate the resources brought to bear by customers, suppliers and other stakeholders (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The paradigm suggests a broader dimension of organizational creativity as the firm and its stakeholders all bring their creative resources to the value creation process.

This perspective goes far beyond research on how market orientation and customer knowledge (Joshi and Sharma, 2004) enhance the firm's ability to create value (Vorhies et al., 2011). In the service dominant framework, customers along with other stakeholders assume an equal role to the firm's in the "value constellation" (Normann and Ramirez, 1993), reflecting greater consumer control over the firm-consumer relationship. This perspective follows the early work by Normann and Ramirez (1993) for whom value propositions are made available by the firm as rallying opportunities for customers (and other stakeholders) to contribute their own resources to create value for themselves through their consumption experience. The firm and its marketers creatively craft these opportunities by bringing together stakeholders with relevant resources and needs and who stand to gain from their contributions.

In the service dominant logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004), activities that harness and apply resources from diverse stakeholders to create value are at the heart of a firm's ability to build sustainable competitive advantage and therefore constitute real opportunities for the firm and a critical creative challenge. Creativity is the name of the game here as new strategic models must be imagined to bring stakeholders together in a value creation endeavor.

From the early days of resource-based value to the development of the concepts of core and dynamic competences to the more recent focus on operant resources, the scope and role of the resources that are shown to drive competitive advantage have shifted from internal and static to shared and dynamic. This shift in the academic literature reflects an evolution in the discipline of strategy, but more importantly a changing environment in which dynamic pressures emanate not simply from the competition but also from the firm's own stakeholders, namely its customers and partners. A firm can no longer think of its competitors as being other firms offering similar or substitute products or services, but as also including other stakeholders with access to some of the resources necessary to compete and who are able to appropriate the firm's value proposition in order to obtain all or some of the same benefits. In other words, firms must compete on their creative ability to rally diverse resources from diverse players with a broad range of needs and desires and with diverse and appealing solutions at their disposal. In this context, success depends on building creative platforms or frameworks which inspire internal and contributors to invest their own resources and competences in an effort to reap benefits ranging from economic to emotional, social to individual.

Read and colleagues (2009) show how experienced marketers apply effectuation processes or "non-predictive logic" to their marketing decisions under uncertainty and in so doing, develop collaborative constellation-like marketing models. While these processes are not explicitly identified as creative, they do strongly suggest creative processing as they rest on an assumption of managers creating (and co-creating) the environment in which they seek to operate rather than "predicting" it.

This perspective strongly echoes Guilford's (1950) and subsequently Mumford's (2001) conceptual foresight. This work is also closely linked to the resource-based view according to which value-creation solutions originate from a review of available resources and competences and accommodate constraints along the way through an iterative rather than a predictive process according to which business opportunities are derived from market and contextual analyses. The effectuation perspective also supports the notion that expert domain knowledge is conducive to creativity as it allows greater self-confidence and the ability to think beyond immediate constraints. Finally this finding also supports the proposition by Taylor and Greve (2006) that experts search familiar domains to determine what rules to break while novices conform to familiar knowledge, yielding less creative outcomes.

In the view we are proposing, the marketer's role involves (a) gaining an intimate understanding of the value and benefit drivers for all potential stakeholders, as well as a broader understanding of the marketplace, (b) imagining the framework or platform that will be most effective at rallying resources from different players assuming the roles that best suit the benefits they seek, (c) creating the compelling story and modalities that will draw these potential contributors' attention and motivation to engage (Lusch and Webster, 2011), and (d) designing the economic models that optimize, distribute and measure the value created through these platforms for all involved. These broad strategic objectives are fulfilled via the execution of tactical programs and actions that also fall under marketers' responsibilities. Lusch and Webster (2011) characterize the role of marketing in the organization by proposing that "the key concepts in the value co-creation concept of strategy and organization are core competencies and dynamic capabilities used to cocreate value and the relationships with all stakeholders that help to accomplish this." (p. 132). We further propose that creativity must be an important element of these core competencies and dynamic capabilities. To this effect, creative skills must be distributed throughout the marketing organization and the institution must be committed to fostering and developing these skills. Creativity is a necessary competency to enable the development of the four broad objectives listed above and the development of the derived tactical programs and actions that will fulfill these objectives.

## TOWARDS A CREATIVITY MARKETING ECOSYSTEM – DISCUSSION AND CASE STUDY

The broader dimension of organizational creativity we have begun to present brings together external and internal players, individuals and groups, whose contribution to value creation is motivated and facilitated by complex social, organizational and contextual systems which call for conceptual formalization. To offer a first step towards such a systemic approach and capture the multi-level aspects of organizational creativity, we conceptualize an initial "Creativity Marketing Ecosystem" built on Bronfenbrenner's (1989) Ecological Systems Theory. While this is still a work-in-progress, we make a contribution to the literature on creativity by offering an alternative to existing (Amabile, 1988, 1996; Woodman et al. 1993; Drizin et al., 1999; Ford, 1996; Mumford, 2000; Unsworth, 2001) multilevel but non-systemic (Hennessey and Amabile, 2010) theories of creativity. We also contribute to the marketing literature on creativity by offering the first model that encompasses individual, team and strategic dimensions to creativity. Finally, we offer some additional suggestions for future research that should benefit the literature across the various domains, although our focus remains in marketing. Our model (Fig. 1) of the "Creativity Marketing Ecosystem" reflects a basic idea: creativity in a marketing organization reflects the existence of several strongly interdependent environmental systems.

(Figure 1 approximately here)

We now provide a discussion of the model together with an illustration of its applicability to a specific case study, the web platform, *epicurious.com* owned by Condé Nast Publications. The Ecosystem model allows us to analyze the different systems within the *epicurious.com* model and show their interdependence. *Epicurious* was launched in 1995 as a digital companion to *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* magazines, an early innovative example of conceptual foresight by its strategy teams (Mumford, 2001), and has developed into a very active platform bringing together amateur cooks and professional chefs, sharing recipes and other culinary knowledge and experience, and selling culinary products and utensils. The website has won prestigious awards and attracts advertisers with a range of text, banners and rich media options. The platform supplanted one of its original parents: *Gourmet* was shut down in 2009, but remains a source of content through its archives. *Epicurious* is an integrated platform with highly interdependent components: consumers come to contribute and to seek the expertise of its contributors, the functionalities and the overall community experience. Professional chefs offer recipes for exposure (brand-building) and product development (recipe ideas and feedback). Advertisers come to it for its highly targeted audiences. Condé Nast sponsors the site for its advertising revenue. All together, these different stakeholders form a value constellation of interdependent elements. The nature of the value created on *epicurious* ranges from monetary for Condé Nast, the advertisers and the professional contributors to knowledge-related and affective for consumers.

**Micro-systems:** Included in the micro-systems are the individuals whose creativity fuels the system-wide creative engine. Creativity is first and foremost an individual process. The individuals who constitute these micro-systems are the employees that design and facilitate the creative process, but also the individual consumers and other stakeholders who contribute to this process.

At *epicurious.com*, individual creative stakeholders include staff members from Condé Nast Publications who conceived of the site to integrate *Gourmet* and *Bon Appétit* content and as a profitable advertising platform, designers who optimize the platform for usability, consumers, professional chefs and advertisers. The individual creativity of each of these players, derived from their domain knowledge (culinary expertise), positive affect (personal satisfaction), personality (openness to new experiences) and motivation (extrinsic and intrinsic), and expressed in the content of their contributions (strategy, recipes, expertise, cooking passion) and in their form (pictures, entertaining reviews, creative columns, new forums) constitutes the contributed and aggregated resources which are transformed into economic value through advertising sales. The creative processes are driven by intrinsic motivation such as the satisfaction derived from sharing a recipe to extrinsic motivation such as the employees' compensation. An understanding of these motivations or the cognitions behind the creative processes is relevant to the executives who oversee the platform in their ability to conceptualize a site with optimal efficiency at creating value for all stakeholders in the ecosystem.

**Macro-systems:** The macro-systems are the teams and larger organizational and extra-organizational units that function creatively. These can be marketing and product teams, but also groups of customers or other stakeholders, and of course the value constellations which they form. The structures of these teams, the ties between the different stakeholders, the centrality of certain players (Perry-Smith, 2006) and the ways in which they function creatively affect the overall group's creativity (Drazin et al., 1999). What constitutes a creative group or simply a collection of creative individuals is an important issue which depends both on the group's perception of their belongingness to the group, and on the social and cultural features and processes that bring members together.

In the *epicurious.com* example, macro-systems are the Condé Nast teams responsible for the platform (editorial, technical and ad sales), the consumer communities (small and large, topic or function-focused), all advertisers, all content providers (professional and amateurs), all readers, all recipe users, and of course the full constellation of all stakeholders. The huge knowledge diversity of contributors clearly fosters great creativity (Taylor and Greve, 2006). Similarly, the ad hoc casual relationships between most contributors can also be a facilitator of creativity (Perry-Smith, 2006).

**Meso-systems:** The meso-systems are both spontaneous and managed structures, and processes that promote individual and organizational creativity such as discussed above (e.g., Woodman et al. 1993). Amabile and colleagues (1996) discuss three elements that promote organizational creativity, organizational motivation to innovate, resources and management practices. Organizational knowledge and learning are important here as in-depth knowledge of diverse domains and their practices has been linked to greater creativity (Taylor and Greve, 2006; Gupta et al., 2007; Argote and Miron-Spektor, 2011).

Organizational culture is another important meso-system element. For instance, adhocracy (Deshpande et al., 1993) is a high performance cultural style which combines organic processes associated with flexibility and adaptability with an external focus on exploring new markets and opportunities for growth rather than internal maintenance or exploitation. In the broader service dominant perspective, meso-systems also include the structures and processes that harness stakeholder creativity, including both physical structures such as interactive exchange platforms and other physical and virtual touchpoints as well as economic compensation models and non-monetary reward systems based on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations.

*Epicurious.com* was launched as an innovative example of organizational creativity, motivation to innovate and creative resource and management practices (Amabile et al. 1996). It remains creative, as evidenced by the awards it receives year upon year, and functions as a meso-system in its role as an important multi-way spontaneous knowledge exchange venue for all stakeholders. Creative exchanges are facilitated and enhanced not only by the platform's prominence and usability, but also by its transparency, credibility, trustworthiness and expertise, as well as systems such as shared customer profiles and history, moderated forums and other creatively crafted solutions to foster full engagement from all stakeholders. This creative crafting echoes Lusch and Webster's (2011) point that "all enterprises should strive to be an effective and efficient service support system for helping all stakeholders, beginning with the customer, become effective and efficient in value co-creation." (p. 129).

**Outcomes:** The creative outcomes of these systems can best be characterized as innovative value creation models (Normann and Ramirez, 1993; Vargo and Lusch, 2004) operationalized through creative marketing strategies, marketing programs

(Andrews and Smith, 1996) and activities as well as their executions. Lusch and Webster (2011) argue that marketing has evolved to unify stakeholders and facilitate co-creation. They point to sensing, resourcing, responding and learning as key management processes in fulfilling the continuously changing needs of customers. Similarly, Arnould (2008) calls for a new “organizational ecology” to meet the challenges of the new era of marketing. Value propositions are important outcomes of these systems and the associated creative strategies; they are the rallying point for stakeholders to contribute their own resources and can help align the value creation process among stakeholders (Frow and Payne, 2011).

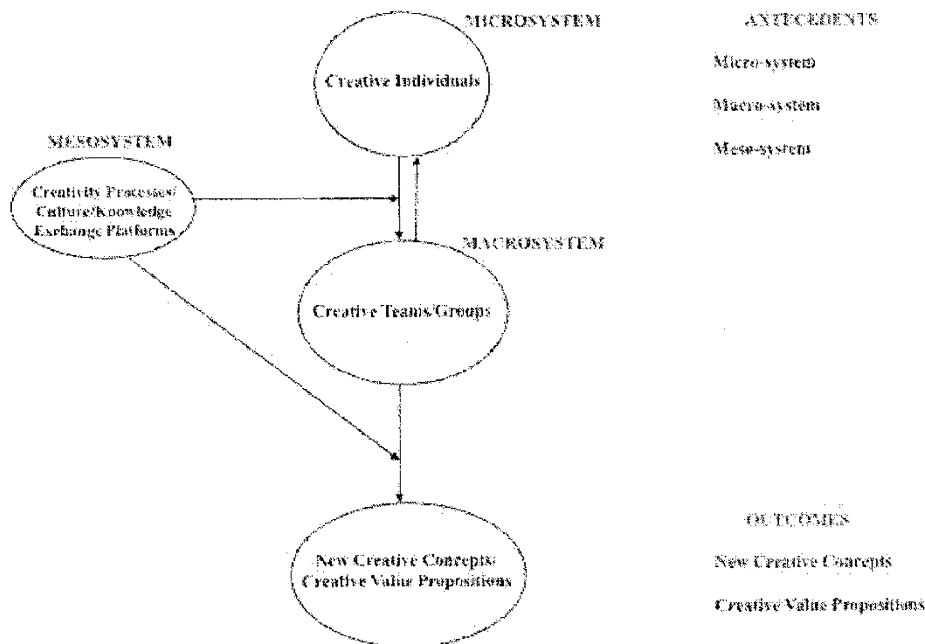
### CONCLUSION AND DIRECTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This paper lays the groundwork for future research on the different dimensions of creativity in marketing and the levels of creative resources that contribute to it. A review of the extant literature on creativity in marketing exposes a significant gap, a failure to exploit or contribute to the rich, albeit fragmented, research on creativity both at the individual and organizational levels, and to consider creativity as a significant source of value and competitive advantage. Our Creativity Marketing Ecosystem proposes a perspective that can account for creative efforts by the different individual stakeholders in a value constellation, the contextual and structural elements that can harness these efforts, and the aggregate level of creativity within an organization’s value creation processes. It can serve as a powerful tool to analyze opportunities for value creation through creativity and to highlight the interdependence of these opportunities across an organization.

The framework opens the way to future research to explore both specific levels and cross-level perspectives. For instance, while extant research has focused on individual consumer creativity (e.g., Burroughs et al., 2008), there is need for more work at the meso-level, including the relevant environments to harness creativity and encourage a creative consumer culture. Research at the macro-level both amongst customers and more broadly across stakeholder categories is also required, focusing for instance on the nature of collective creativity processes. From a managerial perspective, there is work to be done to better evaluate creativity in the competences and outcomes associated with each of the four aspects of the marketer’s role defined above. For instance, what is a creative approach to understanding consumers and how does it add value? This question is particularly relevant in light of the increasing availability of very rich consumer data, both on and off-line. What are creative ways to engage customers across a range of new distribution touchpoints? How does creativity enable more relevant storytelling for different types of customers? What creative opportunities can we develop to facilitate value creation and capture across stakeholder categories?

Creativity plays a crucial role as marketers seek to increase their influence within the firm and to create value alongside more empowered consumers and other stakeholders. Marketing scholars must recognize the full extent of this role at the strategic and operational levels, and develop theory in this domain in order to further encourage its adoption in practice.

**FIGURE 1 – THE CREATIVITY MARKETING ECOSYSTEM**





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