



Exploring Global Advertising Creativity Trends Through Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix Winners

Salas Supalakwatchana and Xin Fan

Abstract

This study examines the evolving landscape of global advertising creativity through an analysis of the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix winners. As the advertising industry navigates technological innovations and shifting societal values, understanding contemporary creative excellence becomes essential for both scholars and industry practitioners. The research employed a content analysis method to examine 28 Grand Prix-winning campaigns across 36 categories, identifying emerging creative trends and their strategic implications. The analysis revealed 13 notable advertising creative trends, with Social Responsibility & Brand Activism emerging as the most prominent pattern, appearing in nine campaigns that address critical issues, including domestic violence, healthcare equity, and beauty standards. Technological Innovation ranked second with eight campaigns utilizing AI, data science, and immersive digital tools to enhance storytelling and accessibility. Purpose-Driven Marketing & Inclusivity and Human-Centered Storytelling each appeared in seven winning campaigns, emphasizing authentic emotional connections and systemic social change. The findings demonstrate a fundamental transformation in advertising excellence, characterized by the strategic integration of genuine social purpose, advanced technology, and authentic human narratives. This convergence reflects the industry's evolution beyond traditional commercial objectives toward meaningful societal contribution, establishing new benchmarks for creative leadership in contemporary global advertising practice.

Keywords: Advertising, Creativity, Cannes Lions, Trend, Creative Industries, SDG 17: Partnership for the Goals

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Introduction

Strong advertising is built on a strong creative idea in combination with powerful execution, and a strong creative idea is a framework for increasingly integrated advertising (Stotesbury, 2005). In recent years, the advertising industry has experienced significant transformations, driven by technological innovations, shifting consumer behaviors, and evolving societal values (Kumar, & Reinartz, 2016). Advertising creativity, the degree to which an advertisement is novel, divergent, or unexpected (Rosengren et al., 2020), is widely acknowledged as a pivotal determinant of success in contemporary marketing, influencing consumer responses and ultimately driving brand performance (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013; Sasser, & Koslow, 2008). Currently, the media landscape has become so complex that brands need to understand the global advertising creative trends to develop effective communication strategies and advertising campaigns that work across different markets in different cultural contexts (De Mooji, 2019). Advertising agencies often rely on distinctive creativity to maintain competitiveness in the industry (Tur-Viñes et al., 2024). The Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity, which was launched in 1954, has become the main international benchmark of advertising excellence (Hackley & Hackley, 2015). Grand Prix honors are the highlights of not only the success rate of innovation but also the creative achievement in the advertising industry. Creativity is an important foundation in brand-differentiating, consumer engagement, and long-term achievement in advertising. Hence, Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity serves as the central tool for selecting and appreciating the most creative achievements in the advertising industry (Tur-Viñes et al., 2024). This paper aims to explore the prevailing trends in advertising creativity by analyzing the Grand Prix-winning campaigns from the Cannes Lions 2025 festival, offering insights into the current state and future direction of creative excellence.

Literature Review

Advertising Creativity

Advertising creativity is not conceptualized as being an aesthetic attribute but rather as a multi-dimensional strategically driven attribute. A landmark meta-analysis by Rosengren and colleagues (2020) explains that although originality is vital, what makes a campaign effective is fundamentally moderated by its appropriateness or strategic relevance

to the brand. Their findings point to the fact that the actual worth of creativity does not simply attract attention for a short period of time, but is robust and is capable of such favorable brand attitudes, as well as strengthening the structures of long-term memory. This view is further corroborated by Shen and colleagues (2021) who, building on experimental research, show that creative executions observe a significant improvement in the recognition accuracy as well as in the purchase intention by overcoming the cognitive interference in cluttered media environments. From a management perspective, West and colleagues (2019) highlight how the future of the field needs more integrated understanding of the creative development process within agencies in order to ensure that divergent thinking actually translates into measurable market outcomes. Collectively, these studies suggest that creative effectiveness is maximized when high levels of execution-related divergence are balanced with clear alignment with brand strategy.

The analysis of advertising dynamics is impossible to do without creativity since the communications industry is active and innovative; it continuously invents new types of communication that create social clamor and ethical questions. As a result, academics and marketing managers will be obliged to admire these changes in order to predict forthcoming transformations, categorize innovations as either new industries or fleeting fads, and face ethical tensions and other disturbances, including the loss of jobs caused by this transformation. Eventually, this would allow professionals to thrive in the environment of creative destruction (Zinkhan & Watson, 1996). Recent studies highlight the importance of establishing the means through which global advertising campaigns can balance universal and local cultures (Fastoso & Whitelock, 2010). In this light, the concept of glocalization has become eminent—in marketing, brand means ensuring that the brand message remains uniform, but regional tastes and differences in culture are addressed (Robertson, 2012).

Advertising Award Ceremony

The advertising award ceremony business has experienced continuous growth over the years. These award ceremonies value and highlight advertising campaigns and communication pieces, as well as pointing out the creative trends in the practices of the advertising industry (Tur-Viñes et al., 2024). The academic discourse on advertising creativity and its evaluation in award settings reveals several key

dimensions. Historically, agencies have been selected based on various metrics, including awards won (Tur-Viñes et al., 2024). While some research suggests that winning prestigious awards like the Clio might correlate with increased profitability for creators, accurately quantifying this benefit remains challenging (Tippins & Kunkel, 2006). A notable observation is that most advertising award ceremonies tend to be non-specialized and general in scope, often lacking transparency in jury selection and the specific criteria used for evaluating submissions (Tur-Viñes et al., 2024). This highlights a broader need for greater methodological clarity in assessing advertising excellence.

However, Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca (2023) conclude that, unlike winning a Cannes Lion, victory is based on a painful creative process. For many participants, long-term adverse health and professional integrity effects of the award are outweighed by its signaling benefits. West and colleagues (2013) note that winners are preferred to be chosen through an elite and heuristic-driven judging mechanism that favors originality, strategic alignment, and technical execution; such mechanism often uses 10-point scales to quantify the inherently subjective nature of creativity. Ultimately, although award ceremonies are important institutional processes for signaling talent and creative excellence, they are also part of an organizational culture that can put the trophy before the professional well-being and ethical integrity of the creators themselves.

Focusing specifically on creative trends, a previous study by Um (2019) analyzes the 2019 Cannes Lions winners to identify key shifts in global advertising creativity. The results revealed that campaigns increasingly emphasize creative trends as follows: (1) multi-sensory experiences, (2) the integration of data and creativity, (3) authentic humanism, (4) brand activism, and (5) inclusivity for marginalized groups. These trends reflect broader shifts in consumer expectations and the growing importance of social responsibility and technological innovation in advertising.

A comprehensive analysis of the Cannes Lions festival's evolution illustrates how it came from a modest film advertising event in 1954 to an all-round global festival surrounding diverse creative disciplines, highlighting the festival's dual role as a celebration of creativity and a commercial marketplace. Today, Cannes Lions continues to shape industry standards and creative practices, but its future relevance depends on balancing tradition with innovation (Charyton, 2017). As

the advertising landscape becomes increasingly fragmented across digital platforms and traditional media, analyzing award-winning creative campaigns will offer valuable insights into the strategies and approaches that capture both industry recognition and consumer attention (Ashley & Tuten, 2015).

However, a longstanding debate in the advertising literature concerns whether award-winning creativity necessarily translates into market effectiveness (Baack et al., 2016; Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2007). While industry competitions like the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity highlight creative excellence (Kübler & Proppe, 2012), some reports indicate a growing skepticism among marketers regarding advertising creativity's direct value and a corresponding decrease in investment (Parsons, 2019; Premutico, 2019; Rosengren et al., 2020). Studies have suggested that award-winning advertisements are not always effective in driving sales, citing examples such as Nissan's "Mr. K" campaign, which garnered creative accolades but failed to boost sales (Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2007). This perspective often highlights that the primary audience for creative awards is frequently other advertising professionals, leading to creative award shows being held in higher esteem by creatives than by researchers focused on demonstrable effectiveness (Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2007). Advertising managers, from this viewpoint, sometimes contend that award-winning creative advertising may have little correlation with actual sales or brand outcomes (Goldenberg & Mazursky, 2007). Kilgour, Sasser, and Koslow (2013) reveal a massive disjunction between academic understandings of creativity and the criteria used by award-bodies in industry. While scholars conceptualize creativity as a composite construct with both originality and strategic appropriateness, the predictive power of creativity awards is mostly based only on originality, with the strategic fit often neglected. This "originality bias" means that such awards are good at seeing new work but do not see the strategic depth that is required to produce elevated consumer responses, for example in terms of improved brand attitude or purchase intention. Accordingly, the authors believe that creativity awards should be interpreted as measures of artistic innovation and not as all-encompassing measures of campaign effectiveness and thus urge scholars and practitioners not to treat them as definitive proxies for effective communication. Yet, Cannes Lions winners, especially Grand Prix winners, still represent

the pinnacle of advertising creativity, setting creative trends for future directions in advertising creativity (Rosengren et al., 2020).

Creative Effectiveness

The principal barriers to the vitality of established brands include consumer ennui and predictability that dominate conventional advertising and marketing campaigns; thus, creativity becomes a good measure in fighting disengagement and maintaining the allure of the brand without the need to introduce completely new messaging (Dahlén et al., 2008). Contemporary scholarship on advertising creativity asks questions about the ambivalence between experiential and affective encounters and codified organizational structures. Andrew McStay (2013) is an advocate for an affective turn, imagining advertising as an event of sensory intensity and not merely a static text, and uses phenomenological thoughts to identify creativity as the raising of the mundane to conspicuously distinctive forms. This theoretical stance provides a kind of triangulation that strengthens creative assertions with new lenses through unexpected academic disciplines, thereby foregrounding embodied experiences and affective perception. By contrast, Stuhlfaut (2011) scrutinizes the operational aspect of the governance of creativity through a “Creative Code” made up of both formal and informal conventions that relate to philosophy, process, performance and pragmatics; these codes form indispensable mechanisms for social regulation and coherence of brands, and they effectively translate from abstract creative concepts into coherent strategic marketing communication within the agency milieu. The study of the 2025 winners of the grand prize of the annual Cosmopolitan awards—the Cannes Lions—is essential for witnessing the manifestation of high-grade creativity and the affective turn in professional practice. Moreover, the festival serves as a benchmark for the deployment of “creative codes” by contemporary agencies, where philosophical considerations are balanced against performance criteria, thus producing unique, award-winning concepts that manage the need for a “human touch” against the requirements of automation and the creator economy.

A previous study conducted by Stipp (2018) shows that the context in which an advertisement is placed—in other words, the particular media environment in which an advertisement is placed—is a key moderator of creative effectiveness. Rather than processing advertisements on an individual basis, consumers process them using two main psychological

mechanisms. The first is attention transfer, meaning that increased engagement with content will lead to greater ad recall. The second is priming and halo effects, wherein the emotional or cognitive tone of the surrounding content leaks into the perceptions of the brand. Although the creative quality of an advertisement is still a predominant determinant, effectiveness is significantly enhanced if a multidimensional alignment can be achieved between advertisement and contextual milieu, aligning energy levels, affective states, and thematic content. However, this is an inherently complex strategy; monochromatic “one-size-fits-all” rules are not sustainable, and bad alignment can create brand distraction or ad avoidance, especially in digital cluttered environments or sensitive news situations. Ultimately, the author argues that marketers today should move past basic demographic targeting and embrace emotional targeting to make sure that creative execution is deeply relevant to the consumer’s current psychological state on the particular platform.

Furthermore, the relationship between the agency and the client also has a significant impact on creative effectiveness, as shown when Bilby, Koslow, and Sasser (2023) examined the psychological barriers within the client-agency relationship that stifle advertising excellence. By analyzing 258 campaigns, the authors identified two main drivers of mediocrity: client-risk aversion, in which advertisers prefer safe but ineffective work in order to avoid uncertainty, and agency clientelism, a form of self-censorship whereby agencies fulfil what they perceive to be the preferences of their clients to safeguard their accounts. This double moral hazard creates a climate of fear that shuts down both the originality and the strategic depth of campaigns. The study concludes that although highly knowledgeable clients may sometimes stymie creativity by intervening too much, the use of formal copy-testing may have the paradoxical advantage of providing the empirical reassurance that risk-averse clients need to allow more adventurous and effective creative work to be approved. Research on agency-client relationships has suggested a dual-process dynamic in which high-quality relationships can undermine, as well as enhance, advertising creativity. On one hand, good relationships may engender “dark-side” problems such as agency opportunism in which agencies become risk-averse or ignore client briefs because they feel so secure in their position, leading to lower levels of campaign originality compared to a low-quality relationship in which the pressure to perform often results in higher levels of professional standards and greater levels of originality. On the

other hand, high-quality relationships can serve as a “bright side” by making a significant difference in the level of intrinsic motivation and passion of the agency staff, centering on a critical mediator that can counteract the negative effects and ultimately lead to an increase in the overall level of creativity. Thus, while positive relationships are great, their success in driving excellence is based on their capacity to spark professional passion rather than merely offer a comfortable working environment (Koslow et al., 2022). Therefore, advertising campaigns submitted to the Cannes Lions festival could have been influenced by the agency-client relationship in terms of the trends that occurred in Grand Prix winners.

AI-Driven Creativity

The recent development of artificial intelligence (AI) has shown capabilities in producing creative works such as digital artworks, stories, and music (Brown et al., 2020; Dong et al., 2018; Tan et al., 2017), allowing human creators to directly participate in the creative process by text-to-image systems (Rombach et al., 2022). Zhou and Lee (2024) believe that in an upcoming world where AI is mainstream, the core competencies that will make the difference between success and failure as a creative will be towards ideation competency and a refined artistic lens instead of mere mechanical execution. Although there is the potential for a self-reinforcing cycle of generic content, those who can explore creative new ideas using AI are likely to continue pushing the creative frontier. The intersection between Generative AI and human creativity in advertising is defined by a paradigm shift where AI helps improve creative efficiency by automating routine tasks while humans remain indispensable in ensuring the brand strategy and the emotional resonance. Findings show that while AI powered by generative machines is great for convergent thinking, which involves finding one best solution using analyzed data, human creators will remain key for divergent thinking, which involves originality, empathy, and cultural nuances. A major challenge identified is the risk of creative homogenization, whereby public AI platforms that draw on similar historical data sources can result in a standardization of creative outputs that undermines the uniqueness of brands. To maintain uniqueness, agencies are taking on human-driven, Gen AI-informed approaches to major campaigns and looking for proprietary AI models that are trained using bespoke data. Ultimately, the industry grapples with important ethical and regulatory challenges related to copyright, data privacy, and transparency, making

it clear that the burden of ethical use of these tools lies entirely with human practitioners (Demsar et al., 2025). At the last time, at the 2024 version of the Cannes Lions, the event was mostly focused on artificial intelligence; many of the campaign submissions have leveraged artificial intelligence techniques. In contrast, the focus of Cannes Lions 2025 was on human-centered stories over the simple application of AI, according to Mahbub (2025). As a result, a review of Grand Prix winners at the Cannes Lions 2025 could see that there is great utilization of AI within campaigns, but then there is an important question of whether such utilization is prioritizing human-centric storytelling.

Diverse Perspectives in Advertising Creativity

In China, message and creativity are the most significant correlates of advertising success, followed by media selection, product uniqueness, and market research. Interestingly, while high market share positively influences campaign outcomes, the level of competition and the quality of agency-client relationships did not show a statistically significant relationship with brand success. Practically, this implies that marketers must move beyond a “one-size-fits-all” approach and instead prioritize regionalized strategies that match creative execution to the distinct cultural histories and media habits of different Chinese cities. Furthermore, it was suggested that advertising agencies should invest more heavily in pre-launch market research to overcome current industry tendencies toward speed over insight, ensuring that creative efforts are backed by a deep understanding of the sophisticated Chinese consumer (Tai, 2007). However, no matter how much consumer insights are understood or how the beliefs have shifted, advertising campaigns in China cannot be so supportive of LGBTQ. A previous study investigated how Chinese consumers respond to gay-themed advertising, revealing that implicit imagery (e.g., matching men’s outfits) generally elicits more favorable ad attitudes and higher purchase intentions than explicit imagery (e.g., men holding hands). Drawing on congruency theory, the researchers found that while consumers generally prefer gay-themed ads from globally positioned brands (GCCP), the advantage of implicit imagery is specifically salient for locally positioned brands (LCCP). For local brands, explicit gay imagery often creates a mismatch with traditional cultural values, leading to lower perceived brand-message fit and negative ethical judgments that diminish ad effectiveness. Conversely, for global brands, the imagery’s explicitness has little impact because the gay theme is already perceived as congruent with

global consumer culture. Ultimately, perceived fit and ethical judgment act as serial mediators that explain why local brands face greater risks when using explicit gay-themed appeals in a conservative market such as China (Zhang et al., 2026). This is confirmed in the number of entries in the Cannes Lions 2025 SDG category, which demonstrated that advertising campaigns from China are not submitted in SDG 5, Gender Equality, at all (Punnahitanond et al., 2025).

In Colombia, Roca and colleagues (2017) discovered that the Colombian national context influences the professional identity and practices of advertising creatives. Drawing on interviews with 24 top creative directors, the study found that while a unified Colombian creative identity is still emerging, it is currently defined by resourcefulness in the face of economic hardship and a strong orientation toward pro-social, award-winning work. However, a significant “chasm” exists between these innovative festival-targeted projects and conservative day-to-day practices, which are often constrained by risk-averse clients, media monopolies, and a reliance on traditional, attribute-based messaging. Ultimately, the study extends existing communication frameworks by demonstrating that macro-level social hardships and industry structures are fundamental in shaping both the collective self-perception and the creative output of a nation’s advertising field.

Worldwide, Punnahitanond and colleagues (2025) discovered that Hofstede’s cultural dimensions are significantly correlated with the categories of advertising campaigns submitted to Cannes Lions 2025 in the SDG category. High power distance countries, such as China, emphasized Good Health and Well-being more than low power distance countries, such as the United States. Individualistic nations such as Finland more often presented Good Health and Well-being, Climate Action, and Life Below Water, compared to India, one of the collectivist countries.

Diversity, Equality, and Inclusion in Advertising

Roth-Cohen and Gvili (2026) find that the motivations of advertising professionals to create diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) campaigns are not motivated by commercial pressures but by personal attitudes. A practitioner’s broadly favorable view of DEI in society predicts a more specific positive attitude toward the implementation of these principles in advertising, which is the direct psychological precursor to their professional intention to create inclusive content. As cultural agents, these professionals assume that they can change social reality and

consolidate the national fabric by representing marginalized groups, especially related to gender and sexual orientation, through emotional portrayals of authenticity. Notably, this motivation has an altruistic element, as practitioners show a greater propensity to act when they believe that there are significant benefits coming to society rather than their own brands or profit margins. Although supportive of the cause, they remain critical of creative execution, regularly rejecting campaigns they view as inauthentic, exploitative, or hypocritical. Ultimately, their commitment to social change leads them to navigate the risks of facing a public backlash or accusations of “diversity washing” in order to create a more inclusive media landscape.

Fusea and Grad (2025) emphasize the increasing importance of inclusive advertising, such as LGBTQ+ representation in contemporary advertising, driven by new generations’ demands for inclusivity. Such representation helps normalize LGBTQ+ identities and serves as a form of activism, fostering brand loyalty. However, their analysis of Cannes Lions winners reveals that while present, LGBTQ+ inclusion is not yet fully integrated, with brands often balancing inclusive portrayals against explicit advocacy to avoid alienating broader audiences.

Significance of Study

By filling an essential literature gap related to contemporary, content-focused analyses of award-winning advertising, this study provides a systematic analysis of the 2025 winners of the most prestigious advertisement award, the Cannes Lions Grand Prix, in a bid to understand how rapid technological and societal changes have fostered new creative paradigms. The research offers a dual contribution to practitioners and academia:

- Firstly, to practitioners, the knowledge about which pinnacle strategies and narrative forms currently trigger worldwide consumer engagement and serve as benchmarks for industry best practice.
- Secondly, for academics and educators, an extension of the sociology of cultural production and the creative economy, in the sense of providing evidence of how excellence is established in a technologically mediated setting, thereby providing a theoretical foundation for future advertising strategies and talent development.

Objective

This study aims to provide a comprehensive analysis of the creative trends embodied in the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix winners, examining the trends that emerged in 2025 winning campaigns through systematic analysis of award-winning work across various categories. This research seeks to identify patterns in creative strategy, execution, and messaging that characterize contemporary advertising excellence. The findings will contribute to the academic understanding of global advertising trends while providing practical insights for industry professionals seeking to develop innovative and effective creative campaigns.

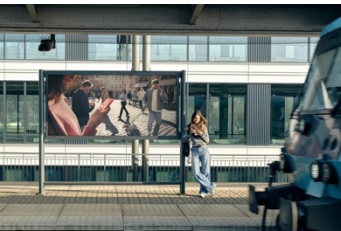
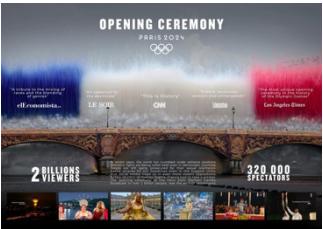
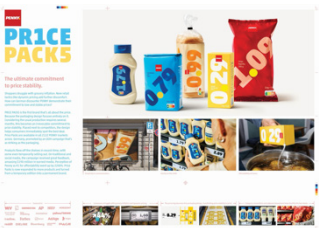
Methodology

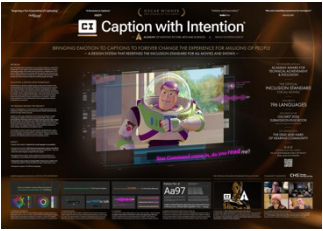
This study employs a qualitative content analysis method to examine the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix-winning campaigns. Data were collected from official Cannes Lions sources and industry reports listing the Grand Prix winners in all categories. The analysis focused on identifying the emerging advertising creative trends, recurrent patterns, and innovative elements that characterize the current global advertising landscape. The trends were defined based on emerging trends in Cannes Lions from a previous study by Um (2019) and the key themes of the Cannes Lions 2025 festival (Mahbub, 2025). Based on this, each coder analyzed all Grand Prix winners from every award category (shown in Table 1), and the results were compared to examine the similarity and agreement of the creative trends that emerged in Cannes Lions 2025 winners. To ensure reliability, a communication scholar acted as a second coder for the analysis, where the Cohen's Kappa statistic is employed (shown in Table 2).

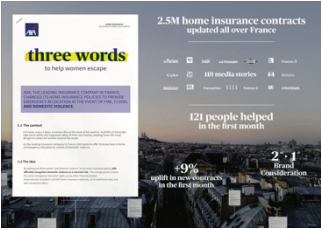
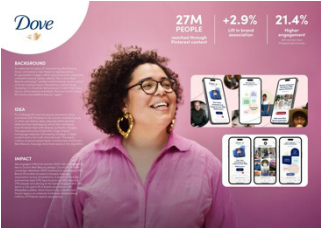
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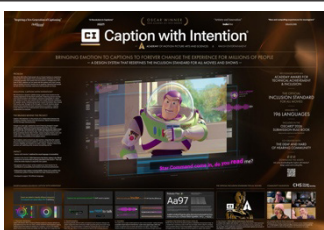
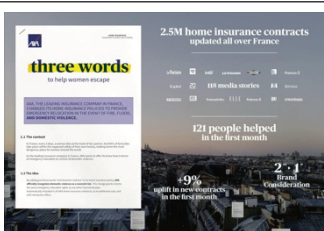
Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix Winners

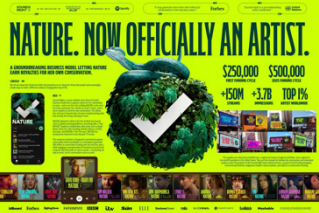
Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Classic		
Audio & Radio Lions (Use of Music)	Budweiser "One Second Ads"	
Film Lions (Media/ Entertainment)	Channel 4 "Paris Paralympics 2024: Considering What?"	
Film Lions (Corporate Purpose & Social Responsibility)	L'Oréal "The Final Copy of Ilon Speech"	
Outdoor Lions (Consumer Goods)	Kitkat "Phone Break: Crowd"	

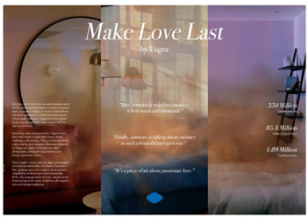
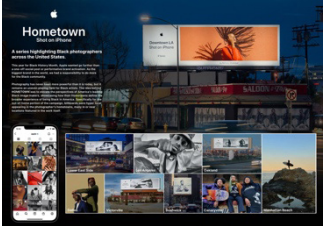
Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Outdoor Lions (Consumer Goods)	Kitkat "Phone Break: Public Transport"	
Outdoor Lions (Consumer Goods)	Kitkat "Phone Break: Street"	
Outdoor Lions (Live Advertising and Events)	Paris 2024 "Olympic Games Opening Ceremony Paris 2024"	
Print & Publishing Lions (Market Disruption)	Penny "Price Packs"	
Craft		
Design Lions (Inclusive Design)	Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences – Rakish – Chicago Hearing Society "Caption with Intention"	

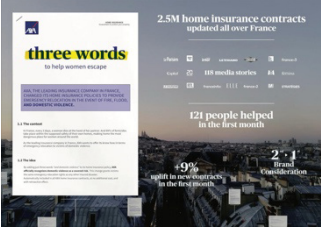
Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Digital Craft Lions (UX & Journey Design)	Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences – Rakish – Chicago Hearing Society “Caption with Intention”	
Film Craft Lions	Telstra “Telstra – Better on a Better Network”	
Industry Craft Lions (Art Direction: Print & Publishing)	Idomed “Nigrum Corpus”	
Engagement		
Creative B2B Lions (Integrated Campaigns)	GoDaddy “B2B: Act Like You Know”	
Creative Data Lions	No Grand Prix Awarded	-

Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Direct Lions (Market Disruption)	AXA "AXA - Three Words"	 A graphic for AXA's 'Three Words' campaign. It features a dark background with a cityscape at night. Text includes: 'three words to help women escape', '2.5M home insurance contracts updated all over France', '121 people helped in the first month', and '+9% right in new territories in the first month'. There are also icons for various services like '3000', '100 media stories', and '2.1 brand consideration'.
Media Lions (Media Insights & Strategy)	Dove "Dove Real Beauty Redefined for the AI Era"	 A graphic for Dove's 'Real Beauty Redefined for the AI Era' campaign. It features a woman with curly hair and glasses smiling. Text includes: '27M PEOPLE', '+2.9% lift in brand awareness', and '21.4% higher engagement'. There are also icons for 'AI', 'Data', and 'Impact'.
PR Lions (Travel, Leisure, Retail, Restaurants & Fast-Food Chains)	Indian Railways "Lucky Yatra"	 A graphic for Indian Railways' 'Lucky Yatra' campaign. It features a train and a person holding a ticket. Text includes: 'LUCKY YATRA', 'Turning every train ticket into a lottery ticket', and 'Winning a luxurious vacation, you're made a potential member of our exclusive club'. There are also icons for 'Travel', 'Leisure', and 'Retail'.
Social & Creator Lions (Community Building)	Unilever "Vaseline Verified"	 A graphic for Unilever's 'Vaseline Verified' campaign. It features a group of people and a large checkmark. Text includes: 'INGENIOUS', 'Verified', 'The Vaseline Verified trick is a must-have', and '7.1 Million 63.3M views'. There are also icons for 'Verified', 'Challenge', and 'The Vaseline Verified'.
Entertainment		
Entertainment Lions (Fiction Film: 5-30 Minutes)	Hyundai "Night Fishing"	 A graphic for Hyundai's 'Night Fishing' campaign. It features a car and a fishing scene. Text includes: 'NIGHT FISHING', 'THE WORLD'S FIRST FILM SHOT BY A CAR', and '200% 100% 98% 767%'. There are also icons for 'Hyundai', 'Night Fishing', and 'The World's First Film Shot by a Car'.

Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Entertainment Lions for Gaming (Use of Gaming/ Streaming Platforms)	Mercado Livre "Call of Discounts"	 The image shows a promotional graphic for the 'Call of Discounts' campaign by Mercado Livre. It features a large, stylized title 'CALL OF DISCOUNTS' at the top. Below the title, there's a central image of a person sitting in a chair, surrounded by various discount icons and text. The bottom section displays several statistics: '100+ DISCOUNTS', '100+ COUPONS', '100+ SALES', and '100+ MOST WATCHED LIVE'. The overall design is vibrant and uses a mix of colors to attract attention.
Entertainment Lions for Music (Cultural Engagement)	Rimas Music "Tracking Bad Bunny"	 The image shows a promotional graphic for the 'Tracking Bad Bunny' campaign by Rimas Music. It features a large, stylized title 'TRaCKiNG BAD BUNNY' at the top. Below the title, there's a central image of a person sitting in a chair, surrounded by various social media and fan engagement icons. The bottom section displays several statistics: '100+ FANS', '100+ GLOBAL ALBUMS', '100+ MOST PRE-SAVED', and '100+ MOST WATCHED LIVE'. The overall design is vibrant and uses a mix of colors to attract attention.
Entertainment Lions for Sport (Partnerships with Sports Talent)	Clash of Clans "Haaland Payback Time"	 The image shows a promotional graphic for the 'Haaland Payback Time' campaign for Clash of Clans. It features a large, stylized title 'PAYBACK TIME' at the top. Below the title, there's a central image of a person sitting in a chair, surrounded by various gaming and sports icons. The bottom section displays several statistics: '100+ FANS', '100+ GLOBAL ALBUMS', '100+ MOST PRE-SAVED', and '100+ MOST WATCHED LIVE'. The overall design is vibrant and uses a mix of colors to attract attention.
Experience		
Brand Experience & Activation Lions (Media/ Entertainment)	Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences – Rakish – Chicago Hearing Society "Caption with Intention"	 The image shows a promotional graphic for the 'Caption with Intention' campaign by the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences. It features a large, stylized title 'Caption with Intention' at the top. Below the title, there's a central image of a person sitting in a chair, surrounded by various social media and fan engagement icons. The bottom section displays several statistics: '100+ FANS', '100+ GLOBAL ALBUMS', '100+ MOST PRE-SAVED', and '100+ MOST WATCHED LIVE'. The overall design is vibrant and uses a mix of colors to attract attention.
Creative Business Transformation Lions (Transformative Strategy)	AXA "AXA - Three Words"	 The image shows a promotional graphic for the 'AXA - Three Words' campaign. It features a large, stylized title 'three words' at the top. Below the title, there's a central image of a person sitting in a chair, surrounded by various social media and fan engagement icons. The bottom section displays several statistics: '100+ FANS', '100+ GLOBAL ALBUMS', '100+ MOST PRE-SAVED', and '100+ MOST WATCHED LIVE'. The overall design is vibrant and uses a mix of colors to attract attention.

Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Creative Commerce Lions (Brand Strategy)	Ziploc "Preserved Promos"	
Innovation Lions (Entertainment Innovation)	Museum for The United Nations "Sound Right"	
Luxury Lions (Partnership/ Collaborations)	LVMH "The Partnership that Changed Everything"	
Good		
Glass: The Lion for Change (Long-Term Brand Platform)	Dove "Real Beauty: How a Soap Brand Created a Global Self-Esteem Movement"	
Grand Prix for Good	New Zealand Herpes Foundation "The Best Place in The World to Have Herpes"	

Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Sustainable Development Goals Lions (Life on Land)	Natura "The Amazon Greenventory"	
Health		
Health & Wellness Lions (OTC Applications – Social & Creator)	Unilever "Vaseline Verified"	
Lions Health Grand Prix for Good	New Zealand Herpes Foundation "The Best Place in The World to Have Herpes"	
Pharma Lions (Unbranded Product or Service Promotion – Film Craft: Cinematography)	Viatrix "Make Love Last - Bedroom"	
Strategy		
Creative Effectiveness Lions (Long-Term Brand Platform)	Apple "Shot on iPhone"	

Award Category	Entry Name	Case Study
Creative Strategy Lions (Long-Term Brand Platform)	Dove "Real Beauty: How a Soap Brand Created a Global Self-Esteem Movement"	 20 years of Real Beauty From a soap bar to a global self-esteem platform NOTED AS MOST VALUABLE BRAND \$7.5bn 95.4m 37%
Titanium		
Titanium Lions	AXA "AXA - Three Words"	 three words 2.5M home insurance contracts updated all over France 121 people helped in the first month +9% split in new contracts in the first month 2-1 Trend Consideration

Note: Cannes Lions 2025 (2025, June); Cannes Lions, Dubai Lynx, Eurobest and Spikes Asia Winners & Shortlists | the Work, (n.d)

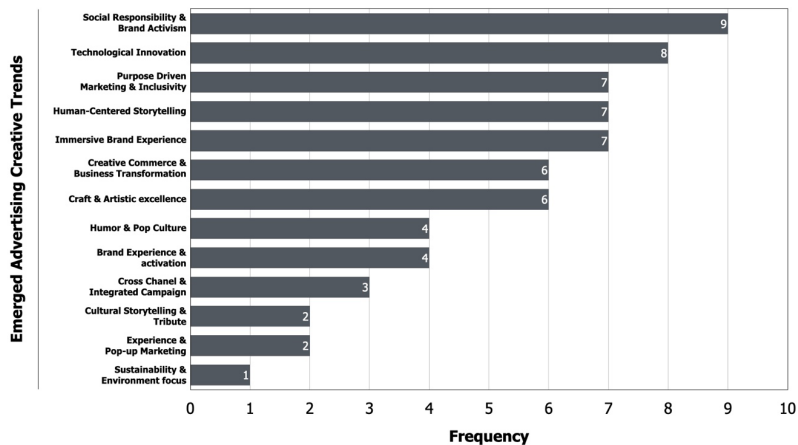
Research Results

28 Grand Prix winners across 36 categories of Cannes Lions 2025 were analyzed. Some of the campaigns have won more than one Grand Prix award in different award categories. The content analysis of the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix winners reveals a multifaceted landscape of global advertising creativity characterized by several dominant trends. The analysis discovered 13 emerging advertising creative trends that occurred in 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix-winners across 36 categories (as shown in Figure 1 and Table 2).

The analysis of the Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix winners revealed a dynamic landscape of creative advertising trends that collectively illustrate the evolving priorities and innovation directions within the global advertising industry. Across all Grand Prix-winning campaigns and categories, 13 trends emerged, reflecting both the creative ambitions and social responsibilities embraced by leading agencies and brands.

Figure 1

Frequency of Emerged Advertising Creative Trends of Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix Winners



Social Responsibility & Brand Activism

The most outstanding trend was Social Responsibility & Brand Activism, which was featured in nine Grand Prix campaigns. This tendency highlights the increased industry focus on the use of creativity to solve the most important societal problems, including domestic violence, disability representation, healthcare equity, and beauty standards. Among the most prominent ones, there is AXA’s “AXA Three Words”, which encompassed the inclusion of domestic violence support in home insurance policies; Dove’s “Real Beauty”, which reshaped the understanding of beauty as inclusive and promoting self-esteem; Channel 4’s “Paris Paralympics 2024: Considering What?” show the presence of people with disability, which taught how technology could support the accessibility of the deaf; and the “Nigrum Corpus” of Idomed, which brought attention to racism in healthcare. Support for social issues like environmental conservation, beauty standards and health destigmatization was also demonstrated in other winning Grand Prix campaigns.

Technological Innovation

The technological innovation trend emerged in eight Grand Prix-awarded campaigns, which incorporate the use of artificial intelligence,

Table 2

Emergent Advertising Creative Trends of Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix Winners & Cohen's Kappa

No.	Advertising Creative Trend	Description	Freq.	Po	Pe	Cohen's Kappa	Strength
1	Social Responsibility & Brand Activism	Advertising campaign that addresses societal issues, promoting inclusivity, or driving positive social change.	9	1	0.625	1	Perfect
2	Technological Innovation	Advertising campaign that uses emerging technologies, data, or digital platforms to enhance storytelling or engagement.	8	1	0.654	1	Perfect
3	Purpose Driven Marketing & Inclusivity	Advertising campaign with a purpose to make social impact.	7	1	0.684	1	Perfect
4	Human-Centered Storytelling	Advertising campaign that uses authentic, emotional narratives focusing on real people, lived experiences, and cultural identity.	7	0.972	0.686	0.912	Almost Perfect
6	Immersive Brand Experience	Advertising campaign that uses interactive, sensory-rich, or experiential campaigns engaging audiences beyond traditional media.	7	1	0.684	1	Perfect
5	Creative Commerce & Business Transformation	Advertising campaign that reinvented business or commerce models through creative strategies.	6	1	0.722	1	Perfect

No.	Advertising Creative Trend	Description	Freq.	Po	Pe	Cohen's Kappa	Strength
8	Craft & Artistic excellence	Advertising campaign with exceptional use of design, and artistic craftsmanship to elevate creative impact.	6	0.972	0.778	0.875	Almost Perfect
7	Humor & Pop Culture	Advertising campaign that uses humor, celebrity, or pop culture to engage and entertain the audience.	4	1	0.796	1	Perfect
9	Brand Experience & Activation	Advertising campaign that creates meaningful experiences that emotionally connect with the audience.	4	1	0.796	1	Perfect
10	Cross Channel & Integrated Campaign	Advertising campaign that uses multi-platform storytelling ensuring cohesive brand messaging across channels.	3	0.972	0.865	0.794	Substantial
11	Cultural Storytelling & Tribute	Advertising campaign that celebrates history, cultural heritage, or social narrative.	2	1	0.892	1	Perfect
12	Experience & Pop-up Marketing	Advertising campaign that uses physical activations or pop-up events that tangibly engage with audience.	2	1	0.892	1	Perfect
13	Sustainability & Environment focus	Advertising campaign promoting eco-friendly behaviors, sustainability, or upcycling.	1	1	0.945	1	Perfect

animation, and immersive digital tools to improve storytelling and engagement. As an example, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences in its “Caption with Intention” applied AI-based captioning strategies to enhance accessibility to the deaf and hard-of-hearing, and Vaseline in its “Vaseline Verified” applied data science to scientifically verify user-generated content. “Night Fishing” by Hyundai depicted the application of technology in vehicles with the help of filmmaking, whereas “Call of Discounts” by Mercado Livre applies a gaming platform in its integration with their promotion. The other Grand Prix-winning campaigns depicted the multiple uses of technology and innovation like AI & drone mapping, AI algorithm training, AI-powered brand builder, and Google Street View interaction.

Purpose-Driven Marketing & Inclusivity

In seven Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix winners, this trend of advertising creativity was spotted. This trend is strongly associated with social responsibility, but with the focus on inclusivity and changing the system using advertising. These campaigns aimed to raise the voices of marginalized groups and redesign the narratives of society, as exemplified by the Channel 4 campaign on the 2024 “Paris Paralympics 2024: Considering What?” where the representation of disability was approached in a natural way. The purpose-driven campaign of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences, “Caption with Intention”, which received several Grand Prix awards in Cannes Lions 2025, also shows accessibility to the deaf through technology with the intention to be inclusive. The “AXA Three Words” by AXA was also seen in this advertising creative trend, as the campaign created awareness in order to curb domestic violence using the updated insurance policy. The purpose-driven campaigns on various issues, such as equality and inclusivity, are also exhibited in other winners of the Grand Prix.

Human-Centered Storytelling

The trend of Human-Centered Storytelling was spotted in seven winning Grand Prix campaigns that were dedicated to genuine emotional appeal, individual stories, and cultural backgrounds to evoke empathic response in the viewers. Hyundai’s “Night Fishing” tells immersive experiential narratives, and the entire film was shot using car cameras. The story is centered on people and the environment. With the help of the program, “Paris Paralympics 2024: Considering What?”, Channel 4 demonstrated the real storytelling and portrayal of

the disabled athlete. The story in Telstra's "Better on a Better Network" was depicted using rural communities, whereas the rest of the winning campaigns narrate their stories in terms of human experience, such as commuter experiences and a human approach to health.

Immersive Brand Experience

The Immersive Brand Experience trend appeared in seven Grand Prix-winning campaigns, which created interactive and sensory brand experiences, specifically, the "tracking bad bunny" music campaign by Rimas Music, which used Google Street View to create an immersive brand experience for fans. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences presents the immersive experience with the use of film in "Caption with Intention," and it helps the deaf audience to gain accessibility to it. Hyundai's "Night Fishing" also used cinematic brand experience, in which the entire film is filmed with a Hyundai vehicle. Finally, the "Call of Discounts" by Mercado Livre displayed the use of the game as a means of bringing brand experience.

Creative Commerce & Business Transformation

This trend emerged in six Grand Prix winning campaigns leveraging creativity to reshape business and commerce models, exemplified by AXA's "AXA Three Words" transformative integration of social impact into insurance products and in Indian Railways' "Lucky Yatra" campaign which transformed the train tickets into lottery tickets where passengers had a chance to win cash prizes in every trips they made, generating 685 millions rupee in train ticket sales, a 34% increased.

Other notable Grand Prix winners include "Preserved Promos" by Ziploc, which demonstrated commerce innovation; "Call of Discounts" by Mercado Livre, which uses gaming-commerce integration; "B2B: Act Like You Know" by GoDaddy, showcasing the business demonstration; and "Price Packs" by Penny, which demonstrates the retail innovation through packaging.

Craft & Artistic Excellence

This trend was identified in six Grand Prix-winning campaigns that showed higher quality in design, filmmaking, and animation practices, strengthening the notion of craftsmanship as the most important aspect of award-winning creativity. The use of cinematic craft by Hyundai was demonstrated in the "Night Fishing," and the design innovation is demonstrated in the "Caption with Intention" campaign, where the captions were created and innovatively designed with the use of

technology so that the deaf could access the same feelings and emotions of a film as others. Finally, stop-motion animation in Telstra's "Better on a Better Network" commercial is a perfect example of the spirit of craft and artistic quality in contemporary advertising.

Humor & Pop Culture

Humor & Pop Culture trend has emerged in four entries, using humor and cultural references to reach the audience, like in the KitKat's "Phones Break" campaign that gives the audience a humorous approach to technology addiction. The other campaign that has a humorous approach is the New Zealand Herpes Foundation, "The Best Place to Have Herpes." Finally, "B2B Act Like You Know" from GoDaddy showed how a B2B campaign could be creatively played out through entertainment.

Brand Experience & Activation

The Brand Experience & Activation trend emerged in the four winning campaigns of the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix. On experiential marketing and direct consumer interaction, the campaign "Caption with Intention" was used in various fields of creativity. The involvement of users in Apple's brand experience of Apple's "Shot on iPhone" proves that a properly integrated brand experience can promote the campaign to the first place among trending topics on the most popular news platforms, where 498 million films were viewed. Finally, the "Preserved Promos" demonstrated the innovative activation idea that resulted in the campaign generating more than two billion impressions.

Cross-Channel & Integrated Campaigns

This trend appeared 3 times in campaigns such as GoDaddy's "Act Like You Know," where the campaign uses a multi-channel approach, and Dove's "How a Soap Brand Created a Global Self-Esteem Movement," which demonstrates a creative use of cross-channels and platforms to drive the movement.

Cultural Storytelling & Tribute

Cultural Storytelling & Tribute trend appeared twice in the 2025 Grand Prix-winning campaigns. Advertising history tribute was used in the storytelling of "The Final Copy of Ilon Specht" by L'Oréal, bringing new life to the 50-year-old slogan "I'm Worth It" without changing a single word; this slogan is one of the most influential in the world, written

by Ilon Specht. Puerto Rican culture is represented and portrayed in the “Tracking Bad Bunny” campaign by Rimas Music.

Experiences & Pop-up Marketing

This advertising creative trend occurred twice in the Grand Prix-winning entries. The use of interactive experience and gaming experience was demonstrated in “Tracking Bad Bunny” and “Call of Discounts” respectively.

Sustainability & Environmental Focus

Among 2025’s Grand Prix winners, only one campaign displayed the Sustainability & Environmental Focus trend, which is “The Amazon Greenventory” from Natura. This campaign demonstrated the importance of environmental conservation with the use of technology.

Although the last four trends (i.e., Cross-Channel & Integrated Campaigns, Cultural Storytelling & Tribute, Experiences & Pop-up Marketing, and Sustainability & Environmental Focus) were slightly less frequent, they still introduced depth to the creative world—emphasizing the necessity of cross-channel storytelling, cultural identity, and environmental protection in modern advertising.

Collectively, these trends show that in the year 2025, a synergistic integration balance of creativity and social purpose is the best characteristic of winners of the Cannes Lions Grand Prix. They do not only use creativity to entertain or sell but to bring about impactful change in society, be inclusive, and use technology in an ethical way. Besides, the wide geographical range evidenced by Grand Prix winners from France, the USA, India, South Korea, and Singapore, points to the growing consensus around the world on these creative priorities.

Discussion

The analysis of the 2025 winners of the Cannes Lions Grand Prix shows a fundamental change in the way advertising excellence is conceptualized on a global scale. Whereas previous research has focused on the primacy of Social Responsibility & Brand Activism ($n = 9$) and Technological Innovation ($n = 8$), the results here lead to the assumption that the patterns described here are not as superficial as commercial considerations, but rather part of an industry-wide change.

The Pressures of Brand Activism

The high visibility of social responsibility programs, such as AXA’s “Three Words” and Dove’s “Real Beauty,” is evidence that social

responsibility programs have become a prime medium for social discourse in the modern advertising setting. Nonetheless, this evolution is an invitation for critical reflection about the current celebratory narrative of progress. While such campaigns are about matters of compelling importance to our society such as domestic violence and healthcare equity, there exists a disjunction between altruistic goals and the so-called originality bias, which tends to pervade award-winning adjudication processes. As noted by West and colleagues (2013), judging mechanisms tend to focus on the technical execution rather than on sustained strategic market impact, thereby creating a risk of “diversity washing” unless backed up by actual corporate action.

The Paradox of Automation

The simultaneous rise of AI-driven creativity and the return of a focus on human-centered storytelling creates a strategic conundrum. AI is being used more often to add efficiency to the narrative, but conversely, the industry is also trending towards “human-centered” narratives in order to avoid the risk of creative homogenization. Consequently, the future for creative excellence may best be characterized as a double - process dynamic, which is the use of automated tools for convergent tasks in conjunction with the preservation of divergent cognition (originality, empathy, and cultural nuance) that is uniquely available to human creators.

Contradictions in Glocalization

The findings highlight the fact that, while technological tools have global applicability, the best campaigns are those that respect the cultural histories of the region. For example, the implicitly nuanced imagery preferred by the Chinese market is in contrast with the explicitly advocacy-driven approach found among Western winners and hence illustrates a “chasm” between universal standards of creative acceptance and local cultural sensitivities.

Modern narratives in the creative industry show a sharp move towards campaigns that dedicate creativity and direct social good, creating interest in both practitioners and policymakers. The destigmatization campaign of the New Zealand Herpes Foundation and the program of domestic violence insurance developed by AXA are examples of the way in which strategic creativity can be purposively aimed at promoting social change, supporting the idea of advertising as a social change agent introduced by Fusea and Grad (2025). Such

results prompt agencies and brands to become more integrative in their approaches that are impact-driven with the adoption of technological tools and the prioritization of human narratives, which is a combination that will be of great importance to the future development of creative leadership.

This paper empirically traces the defining boundaries of the current advertising excellence, as proposed by Cannes Lions 2025, thereby producing empirically informed recommendations that can be of practical help to practitioners. Based on the thorough review of the current database on the Cannes archives, the results describe the recognizable trends in strategic positioning, communicative style, and implementation pattern, which make it impossible to achieve the long-term cultural and commercial relevance. When pooled together, these findings provide a solid evidence-based foundation of modern strategy, messaging, and implementation; at the same time, these insights contribute to the further development of complementary theoretical frameworks in marketing research.

Nevertheless, regardless of the opportunities from a large body of evidence, a number of methodological limitations are still valid. Only publicly accessible award records and campaign materials were used in the investigation, thus gaining little understanding of the internal development procedures and the dynamics of reception by the audience, as admitted by Um (2019) and Kačerauskas (2020). Future research needs to be done with longitudinal impact analysis and cross-cultural outlooks, as is advised by Tur-Viñes et al. (2024), to gain a better understanding of the sustained effectiveness and applicability of these creative methods.

Scholarly writings have repeatedly emphasized the profitability of situating social intent on a pedestal next to technological refinement to obtain creative uniqueness and engagement with an audience. This synthesis is positively reflected in all the winners of the 2025 Cannes Lions Grand Prix, confirming the forecast made by Fusea and Grad (2025), who declared that creativity will gradually become both a cultural critique and a technological advancement.

In sum, this investigation of Cannes Lions 2025 Grand Prix winners resulted in the confirmation of and provided an extension to previous studies by Um (2019), Charyton (2017), Tur-Viñes et al. (2024), Fusea and Grad (2025), and Kačerauskas (2012, 2015, 2020). A major transformation in the arena of advertising creatives has been witnessed

as of late with the emergence of socially involved, tech-savvy, and more strategically adept campaigns. This kind of labor not only challenges existing conventions but re-modulates the normative systems through which artists and designers work. A continued investigation of this convergence of societal pertinence, technology, and a strategic aptitude will thus form the foundation of sustainable advancement in theory and practice, and one where imaginative and demonstrable effectiveness are inseparable.

Conclusion

The empirical study of the Grand Prix winners of the 2025 Cannes Lions Awards is evidence of a fundamental change in the way global advertising excellence is defined, with creative excellence being defined through the intersection of societal contribution and technology sophistication. By identifying thirteen prevailing creative trends, this study provides an empirical framework to understand how the prevailing creative codes are in the process of being rewritten. The strong predominance of Social Responsibility & Brand Activism ($n = 9$) and Technological Innovation ($n = 8$) suggests that the industry has evolved towards a double-process dynamic, balancing the efficiency of automated tools such as AI with the indispensable human touch necessary for an emotional resonance and a cultural authenticity. This research highlights that success today is based on the elevation of the mundane into conspicuously distinctive forms, and therefore validates the affective turn in which advertising can be seen as a sensory-rich event rather than a static text.

The findings provide significant contributions to both the academic and applied areas. Theoretically, the study builds and extends the sociology of cultural production by mapping the signaling of excellence through heuristic-driven mechanisms that emphasize originality and divergent thinking while maintaining strategic brand alignment. Practically, it identifies the pinnacle strategies that catalyze vast global involvement—epitomized by the example of Indian Railways “Lucky Yatra” that showed how a well-crafted creative strategy can directly change business models. Ultimately, the winners in 2025 represent a more globalized culture of advertising that manages the tensions between the universal technological development and the specific histories of cultural differences in the particular markets.

Moving forward, the changing nature of these trends offers a number of critical avenues for further study to gain a better understanding of this

shifting landscape. Future studies should focus more on longitudinal analyses to figure out if the current focus on social activism represents a permanent industry shift or simply represents a fleeting fad motivated by award-cycle heuristics. Specifically, scholars should pursue the originality bias and study long-term market effectiveness of Grand Prix winners compared to non-awarded but high-performing campaigns to settle the age-old debate on the legitimacy of creative accolades to translate into measurable brand growth. Additionally, because AI is becoming a mainstream creative partner, there needs to be a deeper inquiry into how ideation competency will replace mechanical execution as the determining factor for professional success. Finally, future studies should examine cross-cultural differences in the manifestation of the social responsibility experience, especially in conservative markets where explicit advocacy—e.g., the representation of the LGBTQ+—remains nuanced; also, future research should ensure that the global benchmarks established herein are not exclusive to diverse regional realities.

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About the Authors

SALAS SUPALAKWATCHANA (salas.s@bu.ac.th) is an instructor at the Communications and New Media department, Faculty of Communication Arts, Bangkok University and is also an advertising Creative Director at We Are Social Thailand.

XIN FAN (xin.f@bu.ac.th) is an instructor at Bangkok University International, specialised in media, global communication, TV directing, and cultural studies.

