

## Why Measuring Creative in MMM is No Longer Optional and Why it Really Matters

Marketing Mix Modelling (MMM) has long helped marketers understand how media investments drive sales. Yet experienced professionals often encounter a familiar puzzle: two campaigns with similar media spend can deliver very different results. The missing link? Creative quality.

Traditional MMMs typically ignore the impact of ad content, leading to misattribution and missed opportunities. This white paper explores why integrating creative effectiveness into MMM is no longer optional. Backed by Kantar's data and expertise, we'll show how creative metrics sharpen attribution, boost ROI, and transform MMM into a more powerful tool for marketing effectiveness.



**By Mauro Fusco**

Global Brand & Media Analytics  
EMEA Lead at Kantar

# Why Traditional MMM Falls Short Without Creative Metrics

The creative effect, the impact of an ad’s quality and persuasiveness has historically been absent from most MMMs. Without a way to quantify creative quality, they have never been entirely accurate in parsing out which results are due to the media channel versus the ad content itself. The model gets “confused” when similar media pressure yields different results. For example, if Campaign A and Campaign B each ran on the same channels with comparable budgets, but one vastly outperformed the other, a standard MMM might inaccurately attribute the difference to some unobserved factor or simply treat it as noise. In reality, the driver could be that Campaign A’s creative assets were far more compelling.

Kantar’s new modelling approach with creative quality data modelled natively confirms this. Ads that achieve above 70 STSL creative scores reported an average incremental sales uplift of 25-30% over the performance expected from media alone. Of course, the average can mask some figures, so it’s important to highlight that many ads produce insignificant uplift – not to mention some exceptions that contributed negatively compared to what would be expected to that level of media pressure – whereas some outstanding creatives that have scores STSL above 85 have managed to generate up to **55% sales uplift versus what’s expected for an average campaign execution with the same media pressure.**

## ROI Decomposition

Decomposed ad impact

■ Creative

■ Media factors

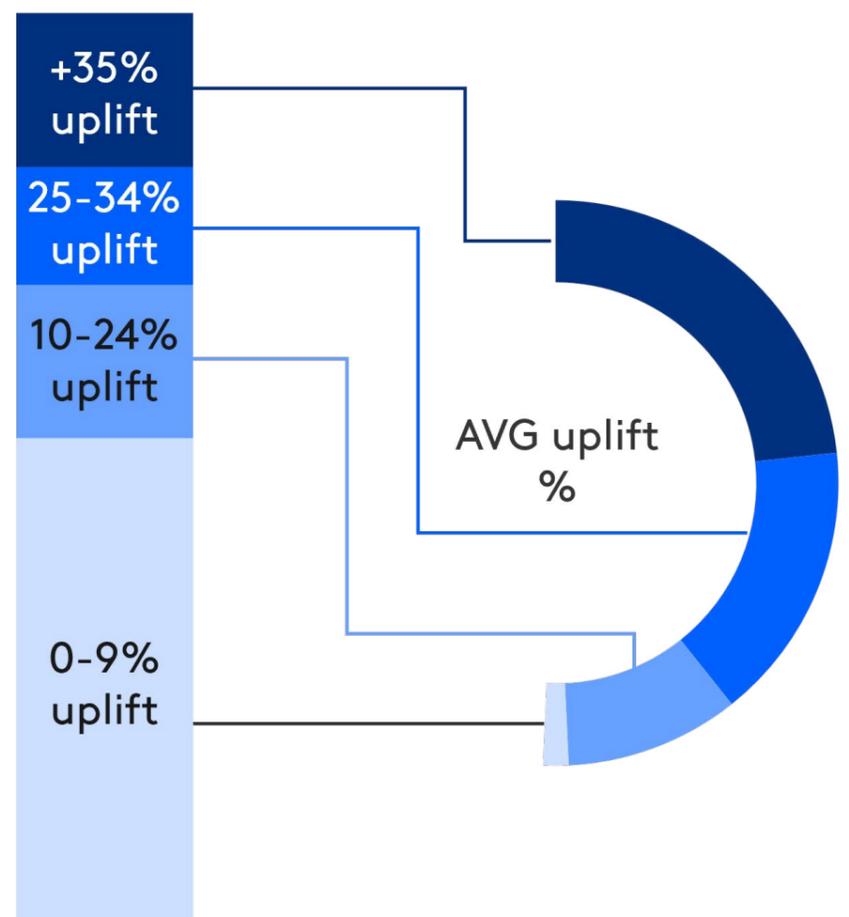
Media contribution that can be directly attributed to Creative Quality (STSL)

Media contribution attributable to pressure, phasing, daypart, channel mix, synergies, saturation levels



## Average creative uplift range

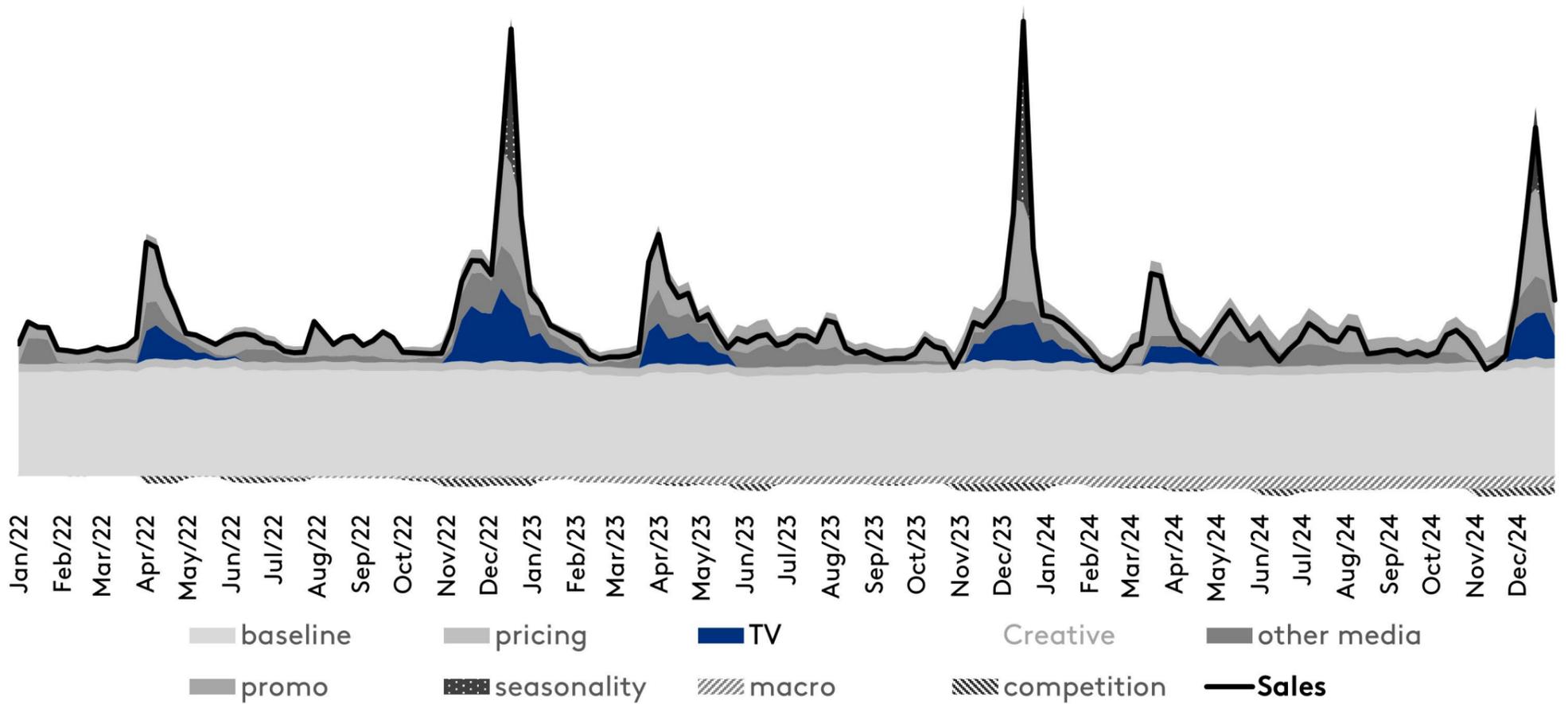
Incidence of ads by % uplift growth



This delta increase was not due to media weight or channel, but rather due to creative effectiveness. That is precisely the type of error that traditional models without creative quality input would be hard-pressed to explain why identical spends produced such different sales outcomes. This lack of precision can lead to misattribution of credit: e.g. the model might over-credit a channel or timing, when really it was the ad content making the difference.

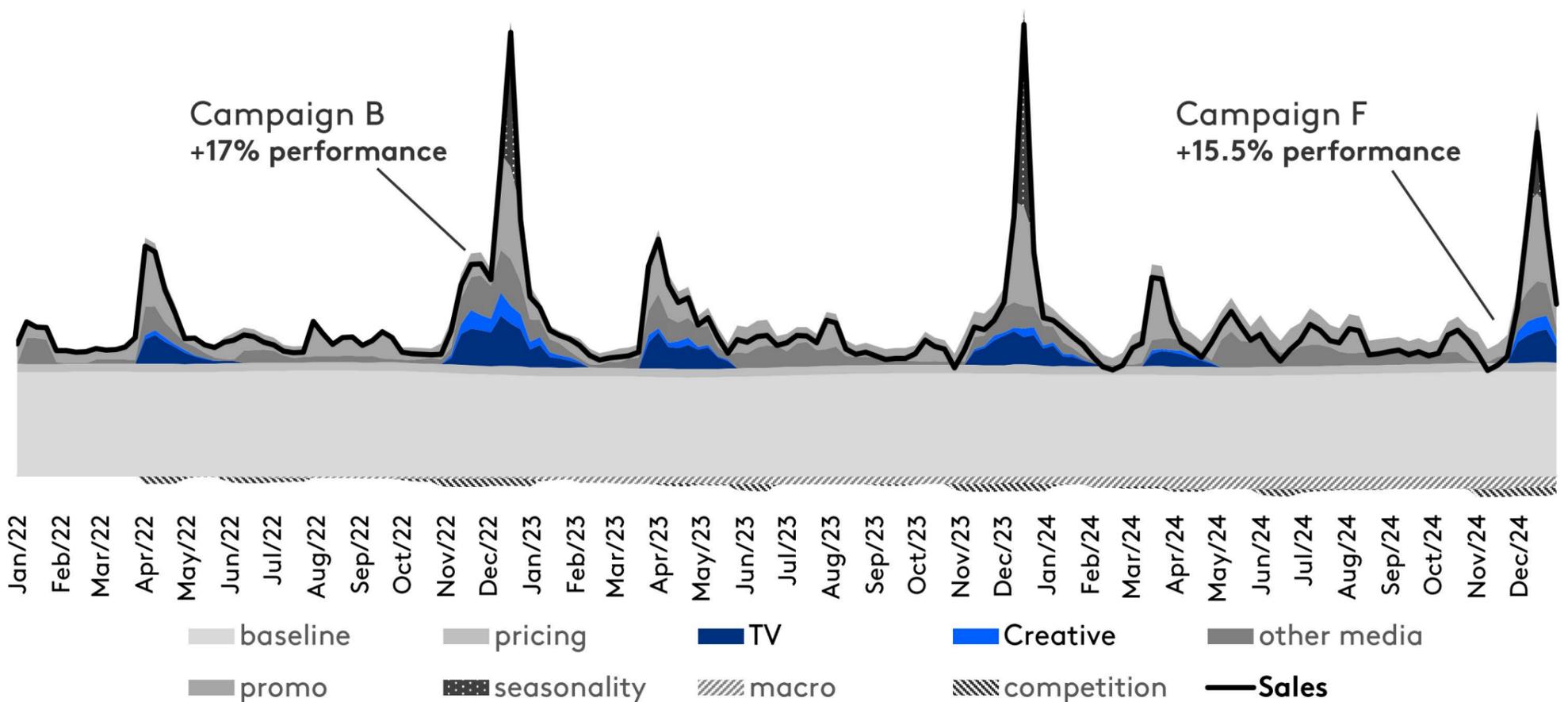
**Figure 1: A model with no creative quality split (Beverage - Europe/2022-24)**

Modelled sales - TV contribution split highlighted



**Figure 2: This is the same case as Figure 1, sharpened with creative quality scores modelling. (Beverage - Europe/2022-24.)** We can see that campaign B performed better than F due to its improved Kantar creative effectiveness STSL score.

Modelled sales - TV + Creative Quality contribution split highlighted



# Creative Quality: A Key Driver of ROI

As such, creative quality is the major factor behind a campaign's success or failure. Numerous studies have tried to quantify how much advertising performance comes down to the creative. The numbers vary, but all point to the same conclusion: creative quality explains a huge share of the variance in campaign performance.

Kantar's databases show that creative execution is one of the key contributors to marketing efficiency, which can be further enhanced by media reach or frequency and leveraging cross-media synergy. In other words, creative excellence can amplify the effectiveness of your media investment by 50% or more. Creative does not function independently, but they play a key role in driving a media plan effectiveness in achieving ROI.

For marketing executives, these figures are a wake-up call. If creative quality accounts for roughly one-third of your ROI, ignoring it in your mix model means ignoring one of the biggest levers of your marketing performance. High quality ads do not just add a little extra lift; they can make your media spend work exponentially harder. In practical terms, a superbly crafted message can transform a modest media plan into a major sales driver, whereas a weak ad can squander even a massive ad budget. MMMs that include a metric for creative quality can capture this effect, distinguishing between a channel that "doesn't work" and one where the creative that does not work.

# The Benefits of Including Creative Quality in MMM

## **Integrating creative effectiveness scores into MMM's greatly improves accuracy and ROI.**

- Sharper channel attribution: When accounting for creative effects, the model can more accurately assign credit to the right drivers. This prevents channels or platforms from being unfairly blamed for poor results (when the real issue was subpar creative) or over-credited for great creative that made the channel look unusually effective. In short, it separates “how much we spent and where” from “how well the message landed.” This improves insights and campaign planning.
- Higher predictive power: Creative quality helps explain performance variance that traditional factors could not. Creative metrics reduce model noise and improve predictions. Analysts often see the model's stats or accuracy improve when a reliable creative metric is added, because a major omitted variable bias is being resolved. As a result, forecasts and optimisations derived from the model become more robust and dependable. Kantar's new holistic MMM platform explicitly bakes in creative quality alongside media inputs for this reason.
- ROI uplift and efficiency: When you know which creatives are truly compelling, you can amplify media ROI by focusing spend behind proven winners or markets with high performing ads, effectively stretching each dollar further. Creative-informed MMMs guide spend and messaging. It turns marketing mix modelling from a pure media allocation tool into a more holistic campaign optimisation tool (media and message combined). To be clear, the MMM cannot optimise creative itself. What it does is that it can also take into consideration the media creative predicted performance while iterating the optimal media spend.
- Alignment of creative and media teams: Creative metrics align with media and creative teams. It quantifies the value that creative development brings, in the same currency (sales or ROI) that media investments are judged. For creative teams, this can validate their efforts and provide learning (e.g. what kind of ads and creative elements tend to work best or would a celebrity/influencer featuring my ad would pay off). For media teams as well as the CMO, it provides a more balanced scorecard of campaign effectiveness, ensuring that factors like ad quality and cultural resonance are considered alongside media pressure and targeting efficiency. In effect, measuring creative quality is not merely an academic exercise; it makes the MMM a more complete reflection of reality, accounting for the persuasive power of the creative in addition to the raw media metrics. Not to mention that consumers are then acknowledged as rational and emotional beings, rather than rather than going on autopilot and reacting directly to media pressure.
- Ability to optimise creative assets: Most importantly, by scoring ads and including those scores in the model, marketers can identify which ads or messages to roll out more broadly and which to cut or adapt. Traditional MMM was great for budget allocation but did not tell you much about how to make the ads themselves better, how to improve the resonance of a message. By scoring ads and including those scores in the model, marketers can identify which ads or messages to roll out more broadly and which to cut or adapt. Over time, this drives higher marketing efficiency: you're not just allocating spend to the right channels, but also ensuring each channel gets the strongest possible creative. This is a pivotal improvement in moving from analysing something you “cannot optimise” (as some sceptics viewed creative) to actively sing both media and creative for maximum ROI.

# Challenges exist but are manageable

- Data availability and consistency: Historically, one reason MMMs ignored creative is that creative performance data wasn't readily available for all campaigns. You might have qualitative reviews or a few ad testing results, but not a quantified score for every asset and channel in your historical data. Without consistent creative scores, it's hard to include an econometric framework. This led some practitioners to make crude assumptions – for example, treating all ads as equal, or using a dummy variable for a very exceptional campaign. Such approaches based on prior assumptions rather than measurement proved inaccurate and insufficient. A framework that just “assumes” creative impact (or uses a simplistic one-size-fits-all proxy) will likely mis-estimate contributions, because creative effects vary widely across campaigns. In short, garbage in, garbage out: a creative metric must be grounded in real evaluation, or it can mislead the model.
- Complexity and degrees of freedom: Including creative variables (especially if you have many campaigns) can complicate modelling. If every campaign or ad were given its own variable, you'd quickly run into an overfitting problem (too many variables for the data points available). Modellers need to be smart about how they bring creative into the mix – whether by grouping into tiers, using a continuous score, or pooling campaigns – to avoid blowing up the model's complexity. This is a technical hurdle, but one that can be managed with the right approach of treating creative quality as an index variable that works in tandem with each campaign's flight per period. The good news is that modern AI-driven MMM tools can handle more granular data and have techniques to incorporate these new variables without overfitting them. Just be sure your AI model is culturally and market sensitive, because creative efficiency does vary hugely per market.
- Subjectivity and measurement quality: Not all creative scoring methods are equal. One concern is that creative quality can be subjective, traditionally determined by focus groups or expert panels. If the metric used is unreliable or biased, it could introduce noise into the model. For example, an internal five-star rating given by a heavy user profile group might not correlate with the broad real-world impact, thus not actually helping the model. This is why it is crucial to use validated, predictive measures of creative effectiveness. Measuring creative is only beneficial if you measure it well.
- Organisational buy-in: Bringing creative into MMM crosses a traditional silo – it requires creative teams to appreciate econometric modelling and analytic teams to value creative testing data. There can be resistance on either side: analysts might be unsure how to quantify something as “artistic” as creative, and creatives might be wary of their work being reduced to a number. Overcoming this requires executive buy-in and education. The effort is well worth it, but it is a change management point to consider. The benefit is that it forces a common language of success for both creative and media translating directly into business impact.

# New Solutions: AI to the Rescue of Creative Measurement

AI now enables scalable creative scoring. In the past, you might only test a few “hero” ads (e.g. via LINK copy testing or focus groups) due to cost and time, leaving many ads unmeasured. Now, LINK AI (Kantar’s AI-based copy testing toolkit) can score creative in a way that links to sales outcomes, eliminating subjectivity and guess work finally, and evaluating all your past ads rapidly, filling in the historical data gaps. AI fills creative data gaps for MMM.

LINK AI has been trained on huge databases of ads with survey-based known outcomes. It analyses hundreds of thousands of dimensions of an ad at pixel and second level including imagery, facial emotions, story arcs, audio cues, text, etc. and predicts how that ad would score on proven effectiveness metrics (like persuasion, branding, or sales lift). The latest generation of these models has been validated to closely match human-based ad testing results with accuracy. By leveraging AI, marketers can inexpensively score 100% of their creatives, both video and static, past and present, within minutes each. This removes the biggest barrier to including creative in MMM: lack of good data. We now can generate “creative quality” data at scale. For example, imagine you have three years of marketing data for MMM but only a handful of ads had any research. An AI tool can be run on every TV commercial, digital video, banner, billboard or print ad used in that period, giving each a quantitative set of scores. Those scores can then be fed into the mix model to help explain performance differences. In essence, AI is helping quantify the unquantified. This not only improves model accuracy, but it also provides insight into why certain campaigns over- or under-performed beyond just “they spent more/less or it was the wrong moment.” It’s filling in the blind spot of MMM.

It’s worth noting that as we bring in creative data, we should remain mindful of quality control. Using AI does not mean the end of consumer surveys; these models should be calibrated periodically to catch up with the latest cultural changes and trends. This means we still need consumers testing ads with surveys, so AI-creative models can have their parameters sharply updated. But the promise shown so far is huge. In fact, some forward-looking MMM practitioners are already partnering with creative intelligence platforms to integrate this seamlessly. The momentum is clearly towards making creative scoring a standard part of the modelling toolkit.

# The Next Wave of Marketing Mix Modelling

Creative-inclusive MMMs are the future of marketing measurement. We often say, “creative is king,” and now the data and tools have caught up to let us crown it as such in our models. Early adopters of creative-inclusive MMMs are finding that they get richer insights and more actionable guidance. They can pinpoint not just which channels drive ROI, but why two ads on the same channel performed differently, and how much boost a better concept might give to next quarter’s plan.

This is quickly becoming the next wave of marketing efficiency measurement. LIFT ROI, Kantar’s AI-based MMM framework for example, explicitly considers all factors, from media investment to creative quality and sets them all into an optimisation platform. In other words, the industry is recognising that media and creative go hand in hand in driving results, and our models must reflect that.

For marketing and media executives, the implication is clear: measuring creative impact is no longer a luxury or a post-campaign curiosity; it is integral to robust marketing optimisation. Those who continue to use MMMs that assume “all ads are created equal” will miss opportunities to improve both their messaging and media allocation. By contrast, those who embrace creative-quality metrics will gain a competitive edge, understanding the true drivers of performance. Better creative drives smarter budgeting and stronger ROI.

---

## About the author:

Mauro Fusco heads Brand & Media Analytics for Kantar across EMEA. With 30 years in marketing measurement, he helps brands turn data into growth. A frequent speaker in major capital cities across Europe and the Americas, Mauro has earned awards such as the MRS Winner of the Year, an IPA Effectiveness Award, and France’s 100% Media Innovation Silver Trophy.

## Special thanks to

Dibu John Philip and Avadhoot Jathar of the Kantar development team, whose dedication has strengthened the framework behind our MMM approach and whose generous contributions of data and insight enriched this article.

Kantar is the world's leading marketing data and analytics business and an indispensable brand partner to the world's top companies. We combine the most meaningful attitudinal and behavioural data with deep expertise and advanced analytics to uncover how people think and act. We help clients understand what has happened and why and how to shape the marketing strategies that shape their future.