

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Storytelling Elements as Success Factors in Award-Winning Advertising: A Mixed-Methods Analysis of D&AD Television Campaigns

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Abstract

The Design & Art Direction Awards represent one of the most prestigious competitions in advertising, art direction, and design, operating for 62 years in the UK and 37 years internationally. This study examines storytelling elements in advertisements that won the iconic "Black Pencil" and "Yellow Pencil" awards in the "TV and Cinema Advertisements" category, investigating whether storytelling serves as a factor in award recognition. The research applied content analysis to 69 award-winning television advertisements, quantifying storytelling elements through a coding form based on theories by Vogler, Booker, Propp, and Todorov. Data was analyzed using frequency analysis and independent samples t-tests with index variables. Results revealed that narrative advertisements (95.7%) won more awards than argumentative ones, as did those using humor (79.7%), containing characters (89.9%), featuring plot structure (87.0%), and incorporating conflict (73.3%). Difference tests demonstrated that storytelling elements do not vary according to sector, country, or time period, indicating universal applicability. The findings establish that narrative sophistication, rather than demographic targeting or temporal adaptation, drives creative recognition in advertising excellence. This study provides important indicators for agencies seeking D&AD Award success, demonstrating that classical storytelling principles transcend cultural and contextual boundaries in award-winning advertising.

Keywords: Advertising, Storytelling, D&AD, Advertising Design, Art Direction.

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Öz

Design & Art Direction Ödülleri, reklam, sanat yönetimi ve tasarım alanındaki en prestijli yarışmalar arasında yer alır ve İngiltere’de 62, uluslararası düzeyde 37 yıldır düzenlenmektedir. Bu çalışma, "TV ve Sinema Reklamı" kategorisinde "Siyah Kalem" ve "Sarı Kalem" ödülü kazanmış reklamlardaki hikaye anlatımı unsurlarını inceleyerek, hikaye anlatımının ödül kazanmada bir etken olup olmadığını araştırmaktadır. Araştırmada 69 ödüllü televizyon reklamına içerik analizi uygulanmış, Vogler, Booker, Propp ve Todorov teorilerine dayanan kodlama formu ile hikaye anlatımı unsurları sayısallaştırılmıştır. Veriler frekans analizi ve bağımsız örneklem t-testi ile analiz edilmiştir. Sonuçlar, anlatı içeren reklamların (%95.7) nedensel olanlara göre daha fazla reklamda kullanıldığını, mizah kullananların (%79.7), bir karakter içerenlerin (%89.9), bir senaryo yapısı olanların (%87.0) ve çatışma barındıranların (%73.3) daha fazla ödül aldığını göstermiştir. Fark testleri, hikaye anlatımı unsurlarının sektör, ülke ve zamana göre değişmediğini, evrensel uygulanabilirlik gösterdiğini ortaya koymuştur. Bulgular, demografik hedefleme veya zamansal adaptasyondan ziyade anlatı sofistikasyonunun reklam mükemmeliyetinde yaratıcı tanınma sağladığını göstermektedir. Çalışma, D&AD veya benzeri bir yaratıcılık odaklı ödül hedefleyen ajanslar için önemli göstergeler sunmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Reklam, Hikaye Anlatımı, D&AD, Reklam Tasarımı, Sanat Yönetimi

Introduction

"Each of us has a story inside. Storytelling is a natural component of society and culture. Story depends on language and is transmitted through contemporary tools... Each generation of every culture has taken advantage of the tools available to them and developed their own storytelling methods" (Frazel, 2010).

Storytelling has been an inseparable part of life since humans began transferring observations to cave walls. These first narrative attempts found new expansion areas through language and developed media channels, continuing today in different formats by incorporating images and videos (Benjamin, 2006). Advertising represents one of the primary ways stories and narratives are transmitted, appearing as pervasively in our lives as stories themselves (Weilbacher, 1984; Jenkins, 2006).

However, not all advertisements present themselves through stories. Advertisements can appear in narrative style or argumentative form. While argumentative advertisements offer instructive propositions about product appeal, narrative-style advertisements present stories related to product consumption moments (Munch, Boller, & Swasy, 1993). Research establishes that narrative advertisements are more persuasive, evoke more positive emotions, cause fewer negative cognitive responses, and create favorable brand attitudes (Escalas, Moore, & Britton, 2008; Green & Brock, 2000).

The Nielsen Global Trust in Advertising Survey found that consumers trust recommendations from their peers far more than direct advertising, suggesting a need for brands to adopt a friendlier discourse through experience-sharing and storytelling (Nielsen, 2012; Fog, Budtz, Munch, & Blanchette, 2010). This aligns with well-established theories explaining *why* storytelling is so persuasive. When an individual becomes immersed in a story, they are mentally "transported" into its world, a state that can temporarily lower critical skepticism and foster a more positive attitude toward the embedded message or brand (Green & Brock, 2000; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). It is this power to captivate and persuade that often separates merely functional advertising from true creative excellence.

While the creative process in advertising can often feel mysterious (Sasser & Koslow, 2008), organizations like D&AD provide a tangible benchmark for excellence, seeking work that is built on a "brilliant idea," demonstrates "excellent execution," and is "relevant to the subject matter" (D&ADa, 2025). Examining the narrative elements within these award-winning campaigns, therefore, offers a unique opportunity to uncover the patterns of creative success.

Given that an integrated, quantitative analysis of narrative theories has not previously been applied to a prestigious sample like the D&AD awards, this study adopts an exploratory research design. Rather than confirming or falsifying a pre-existing model, its primary objective is to map this "creative terrain." By analyzing the presence, frequency, and interplay of elements from various narrative theories, this research aims to build a foundational understanding for future, more focused inquiry. To achieve this, the study will first explain structuralist models (the skeleton of the narrative), archetypal models (the actors), and thematic models (the content), before presenting findings on the extent to which these elements feature in award-winning advertising.

Structures Shaping Narrative in Advertising

The success of an award-winning advertisement depends not merely on a brilliant idea, but equally on how this idea is packed to resonate with the audience (Richards & Curran, 2013). This process revolves around two fundamental elements: advertising appeals that target the audience's emotional and rational motivations, and advertising execution styles that transform these appeals into concrete narratives (Babacan, 2015). These two components determine whether an advertisement becomes merely an informative announcement or an engaging story that draws viewers in (Barnard, 2005).

Advertising Appeals: The Emotional and Cultural Anchors of Narrative

Advertising appeals serve as strategic tools that define which values and emotions a brand wishes

to be associated with in the audience's mind (Aaker & Myers, 1975). These appeals may address universal human emotions or draw upon specific cultural codes.

Universal Emotional Appeals

Advertising appeals carry values and motivations determining advertising's main message, making products attractive by connecting them with emotions (Moriarty et al., 2018). The most frequently employed appeals in advertising typically exist along rational and emotional axes (Brennan & Binney, 2010). For the scope of this study, seven fundamental emotional appeals stand out (Becan, 2014):

- ***Humor***: Aims to establish a positive connection with the brand by making the audience laugh. It incorporates elements of surprise, exaggeration, or absurd situations.
- ***Freedom***: Appeals to desires for individualism, adventure, and exploration. This approach appears particularly often in automobile or travel advertisements.
- ***Happiness***: Centers warm emotions such as family, love, and tranquility, positioning the brand as trustworthy and genuine.
- ***Fear***: Highlights a problem (such as security vulnerabilities or social exclusion) and presents the brand as the solution to this problem. Insurance or hygiene product advertisements exemplify this approach.
- ***Social Status***: Transforms the brand into an object of desire through concepts of luxury, success, and privilege.
- ***Sexuality***: Uses elements of beauty and physical attractiveness to capture attention and evoke desire.
- ***Fantasy***: Aims to make the brand unforgettable by surprising viewers with surreal and magical elements.

Appeals Based on Cultural Values

Advertisements reflect the culture in which they emerge. Hofstede's cultural dimensions provide a

powerful framework for understanding how appeals may differ across various societies (Mooij, 2019):

- ***Power Distance***: In cultures where hierarchy matters (high power distance), advertisements emphasize themes such as respect for elders or expert opinions, while egalitarian (low power distance) cultures favor more individualistic and anti-authoritarian themes.
- ***Individualism/Collectivism***: In individualistic cultures, "I"-focused advertisements emphasizing personal achievement (such as "Because I'm worth it") prove effective, while collective cultures prefer "We"-focused narratives highlighting family and social harmony.
- ***Masculine/Feminine Values***: Advertisements in cultures with "masculine" values like competition, achievement, and winning tend to be more assertive and ostentatious. In cultures where "feminine" values such as compassion, modesty, and quality of life predominate, softer and relationship-oriented narratives are employed.
- ***Uncertainty Avoidance***: In cultures with high uncertainty avoidance, advertisements provide rational assurances such as scientific evidence, detailed product information, and expert opinions. In opposite circumstances, result-oriented, more metaphorical and ambiguous narratives can be effective.

Advertising Execution Types

Execution styles determine the format in which the appeals are presented to the audience. Whether an advertisement becomes a boring "lesson" or an engaging "drama" depends on the chosen execution style (Franzen, 1994; Mooij, 2009). The primary styles include:

- ***Announcement***: This represents the most basic style, focusing on providing information about the product. It typically follows a simple structure where the product is displayed or its features are listed.
- ***Lesson***: This style presents direct arguments to persuade the audience. It encompasses formats where a presenter speaks, user testimonials are shared, or product demonstrations show how

something works. This style directly tells the audience "You should buy this product because..."

- **Drama:** In this style, the message is conveyed indirectly through a story. It includes dialogue between characters, slice-of-life scenarios, or problem-solution narratives. The audience occupies the position of an external witness observing events.
- **Entertainment:** Its primary purpose is to entertain the audience. It establishes an emotional connection between the brand and audience using humor, music, or show elements. The message is embedded within the entertainment.
- **Association Transfer:** This enriches the brand's meaning through an associated person (such as celebrity endorsement), lifestyle, or metaphor. For example, advertisements comparing a sports car's speed to a predatory animal exemplify this style.
- **Imagination & Special Effects:** This aims to visually impact the audience and make the narrative more memorable by using surreal visuals, animation, and advanced cinematic techniques.

In conclusion, the creative genius of an award-winning advertisement lies in the synergy between selecting the right appeal and bringing this appeal to life through the execution style that will most profoundly affect the target audience (Brierly, 2001). This study aims to reveal how these structures come together in D&AD award-winning advertisements to tell universal and timeless stories.

An Integrated Perspective on Narrative Theories: Structures, Archetypes, and Themes

Narratives have served as fundamental means of transmitting our experiences, values, and culture throughout human history (Brooks, 1992). Whether in fairy tales, films, or advertisements, stories captivate, educate, and connect us to one another. Yet what makes a story effective? Narrative theorists seeking to answer this question have examined the underlying structures, character archetypes, and thematic depths that define compelling

storytelling. This study aims to provide a comprehensive perspective on narrative theory by bringing together the contributions of prominent thinkers such as Christopher Vogler, Tzvetan Todorov, Vladimir Propp, Christopher Booker, and Aristotle. While exploring the distinct perspectives each theorist brings to the narrative world, we will also examine comparisons and interactions between these models. The goal is a better understanding for the complex nature of storytelling and reveal the fundamental elements of effective narratives.

The Anatomy of Narrative - Structuralist Models

Structural models that form the backbone of narratives help us understand how stories are constructed and what impact they have on audiences and readers. Two prominent figures in this field are Christopher Vogler and Tzvetan Todorov.

Christopher Vogler and The Hero's Journey

Christopher Vogler developed "The Hero's Journey" model by adapting Joseph Campbell's monomyth concept to modern storytelling. This model presents a universal narrative pattern in which a hero departs from the ordinary world, faces challenges, undergoes transformation, and returns changed. Vogler's 12-stage journey follows the story's flow and character development step by step:

- **Ordinary World:** The familiar, conflict-free environment where the hero exists at the story's beginning.
- **Call to Adventure:** An event or situation that will draw the hero from their ordinary world.
- **Refusal of the Call:** The hero's initial state of avoiding or fearing the adventure.
- **Meeting the Mentor:** The emergence of a guide who will provide the hero with guidance, knowledge, or tools.
- **Crossing the Threshold:** The hero's departure from the ordinary world and step into the unknown.
- **Tests, Allies, and Enemies:** The challenges, allies, and adversaries the hero encounters in the new world.

- **Approach to the Inmost Cave:** The hero's approach to the dangerous place where they will face their greatest fear.
- **The Ordeal (Death and Rebirth):** The moment when the hero faces the greatest challenge, confronts death, and undergoes transformation.
- **Reward:** The gain or knowledge the hero obtains after the ordeal.
- **The Road Back:** The hero's journey back to the ordinary world, often filled with new dangers.
- **Resurrection:** The hero's final and greatest test before returning to the ordinary world, a final purification.
- **Return with the Elixir:** The hero's return to their ordinary world transformed, with new insight or an "elixir" to share.

Vogler's model describes a structure frequently seen in Hollywood films and popular narratives. By emphasizing the character's internal and external journey, it enables the audience to identify with the hero and grow alongside them (Vogler, 1992).

Todorov and Narrative Equilibrium

Todorov analyzes narratives through concepts of equilibrium and disequilibrium. According to his theory, every narrative consists of five stages:

- **Equilibrium:** The state at the story's beginning where everything is orderly and normal.
- **Disruption:** The emergence of an event or conflict that disturbs this equilibrium.
- **Recognition:** Characters or the situation recognizing and confronting the disequilibrium.
- **Attempt to Restore Equilibrium:** Characters taking action to eliminate the disequilibrium.
- **New Equilibrium:** The establishment of a new equilibrium state at the story's end, though this new equilibrium typically differs from the initial one; characters and the world have changed.

Todorov's model emphasizes narrative's fundamental dynamics—the emergence and resolution of a problem. This model simply yet effectively explains stories' cyclical nature and characters' transformation throughout this process (Todorov, 1975).

Vogler and Todorov: A Comparative View

While Vogler and Todorov's models approach narrative structures from different angles, they complement each other. Vogler's "Hero's Journey" focuses more on character personal development and adventure, while Todorov's equilibrium model reveals the story's general flow and plot's fundamental logic. Each of Vogler's stages can fit within Todorov's equilibrium and disequilibrium transitions (Ryan, 2007). For instance, "Call to Adventure" and "Crossing the Threshold" correspond to Todorov's "Disruption" phase, while "The Ordeal" and "Resurrection" can be evaluated within "Attempt to Restore Equilibrium." Both models demonstrate that stories are not random sequences of events but possess specific internal logic and flow. Vogler details more of an archetypal journey, while Todorov offers a more abstract and universal structural framework. Considered together, these two theories provide powerful tools for understanding both a story's external plot and the character's internal transformation.

The Players of Narrative - Archetypal Models

Beyond the plot that forms narratives' foundation, characters serve as elements that advance the story and give it meaning. Vladimir Propp, through his detailed work on folk tales, systematically analyzed characters' functions and roles. Propp's "Morphology of the Folktale" suggests that characters in tales can be viewed as "functions" performing specific actions. These functions are essential building blocks necessary for story progression (Prince, 2003).

Propp identified seven basic character roles (or functions) that recur in fairy tales (Propp, 1968):

- **Villain:** The person or force that initiates conflict in the narrative, harming the hero or other characters (Example: the wolf in Little Red Riding Hood).
- **Donor:** The person who offers the hero a magical object, knowledge, or help, usually after the hero passes a test (Example: the fairy who gives Cinderella her dress).
- **Helper:** The character who physically assists the hero on their journey, carries them, or

provides support (Example: the animals in The Bremen Town Musicians).

- **Princess and Father:** Usually the person who needs rescuing (princess) and the authority figure who provides the reward for this rescue (father). The princess may be the target of the hero's quest (Example: Rapunzel and the king).
- **Dispatcher:** The person who sends the hero on a mission, giving them a quest order (Example: the king sending the prince on a mission).
- **Hero:** The central character of the story; the person who goes on a quest, fights the villain, and usually wins the reward by rescuing the princess. Propp divides the hero into two types: the "victim hero" who is directly exposed to the villain and the "seeker hero" who acts to rescue the villain's victims.
- **False Hero:** A character who initially appears to be a hero but whose true intentions or evil nature is revealed at the story's end (Example: jealous siblings in some tales).

Propp's character theory focuses on characters' functional roles within the story rather than their psychological depth. This approach has proven extremely effective in revealing universal patterns in fairy tales and similar narratives. According to Propp, a tale's basic structure emerges from these functions appearing in a specific sequence. This shows that while different tales may appear different on the surface, they share similarities in deep structure (Propp, 1968).

Propp's theory emphasizes that narratives consist not only of plot but also that specific character types and their actions play critical roles in story progression. This provides a powerful framework for story writers to use in character creation and plot construction, showing that characters should be evaluated not only by their individual characteristics but also by their contributions to the story's general flow.

The Meaning of Narrative - Thematic Models

Narratives are not merely a series of events or characters; they also carry deep meanings, universal themes, and insights into human experience.

Christopher Booker and Aristotle have approached these thematic and semantic dimensions of stories from different perspectives.

Christopher Booker and The Seven Basic Plot Models

In his book "The Seven Basic Plots," Christopher Booker argues that all stories in world literature can be reduced to one of seven basic plot patterns. Influenced by Jung's archetype theory, Booker contends that these patterns reflect universal conflicts and desires lying deep within human psychology. These seven basic stories are:

- **Overcoming the Monster:** The hero confronting and defeating a terrible threat (monster, evil force) (Examples: Dragon Slayer, David and Goliath).
- **Rags to Riches:** The hero rising from an initially poor or disadvantaged position to achieve success and wealth (Examples: Cinderella, Great Expectations).
- **The Quest:** The hero embarking on a long and difficult journey to find something or somewhere valuable (Examples: The Lord of the Rings, Indiana Jones).
- **Voyage and Return:** The hero going to an unknown world, experiencing adventures there, and returning changed (Examples: Alice in Wonderland, The Wizard of Oz).
- **Comedy:** A situation filled with misunderstandings, chaos, and absurdity that ultimately reaches a happy resolution (Examples: Shakespeare comedies, romantic comedies).
- **Tragedy:** The hero's decline due to a flaw or mistake, usually meeting a tragic end (Examples: Romeo and Juliet, King Lear).
- **Rebirth:** The hero falling under a bad influence, nearly dying or completely changing, and finally returning to goodness through rebirth (Examples: Beauty and the Beast, A Christmas Carol).

Booker's theory shows that stories represent not just a plot but also specific thematic and psychological depths. These models explain why stories are so universal and compelling by reflecting fundamental conflicts and solutions of human experience (Booker, 2004).

Aristotle and Poetics

Ancient Greek philosopher Aristotle's "Poetics" is one of narrative theory's oldest and most influential texts. By analyzing tragedy particularly, Aristotle explained a story's fundamental elements and how they come together to form a meaningful whole. According to Aristotle, a tragedy has four basic elements:

- **Plot (Mythos):** The story's most important element. The arrangement of events, a unity with beginning, middle, and end, connected by causal relationships. Aristotle emphasizes that the plot must be "whole," meaning every part must be related to each other and no part can be removed.
- **Character (Ethos):** People who advance the plot and shape the story with their actions. He notes that characters must be believable, consistent, and appropriate.
- **Thought / Conflict (Dianoia):** Themes, ideas, and arguments expressed through what characters say or think.
- **Diction / Message (Lexis):** The language, style, and expression of dialogue and narration.

Among these elements, Aristotle attributes central importance to plot. According to him, plot is a story's "soul," and all other elements serve the plot. A story's effectiveness comes from events following each other in a logical and necessary way. Aristotle's concept of "catharsis" (purification) also relates to the emotions of fear and pity that tragedy awakens in the audience; experiencing these emotions provides a kind of emotional purification (Aristotle, 1987).

Booker and Aristotle: A Comparative View

Booker and Aristotle show similarity in their focus on narratives' thematic and semantic depths, though their approaches differ. Aristotle offers a normative framework focusing more on a story's internal consistency, logical structure, and effect on the audience. For him, plot is a story's most fundamental and determining element. Booker, however, attempts to discover universal patterns and psychological archetypes underlying thousands of years of storytelling. While Aristotle's "Poetics"

serves as a guide for how tragedy should be constructed, Booker's work aims more at classifying existing stories and revealing their common themes.

Booker's seven basic stories can be viewed as different manifestations of Aristotle's plot concept. For example, Booker's patterns like "Overcoming the Monster" or "The Quest" are plots with beginning, development, and end stages containing conflict and resolution as defined by Aristotle. Both emphasize that stories are not random but carry specific order and meaning. While Aristotle emphasizes the story's internal logic and moral dimension, Booker focuses more on how stories reflect universal aspects of human experience. Considered together, these two thinkers show that narratives are not merely entertainment tools but powerful instruments for understanding human nature and universal truths (Abbott, 2008).

Design & Art Direction Awards (D&AD)

Design & Art Direction (D&AD) was established in 1962 by a collective of British designers and art directors, including David Bailey, Terence Dolovan, and Alan Fletcher, to celebrate creative communication excellence and elevate industry standards (D&ADa, 2025). The organization emerged from the "creativity revolution" of 1950s and 1960s American advertising, particularly influenced by pioneers like David Ogilvy and William Bernbach, with the Art Directors Club of New York serving as a primary inspiration (Nixon, 2003; Maguire, 1993).

Founding member Bob Gill articulated the organization's necessity: "When I came to England in 1960, I wondered why we couldn't find something similar to American advertising formations here. London had nothing comparable. So we thought we should do something" (D&AD, 2012). Initially formed as the Design and Art Direction Association of London (DADA) in 1962, it became D&AD in 1967 upon gaining international recognition (Design and Art Direction, 1967).

D&AD's legendary selectivity was evident from its inaugural 1963 ceremony, where among 2,500 submissions evaluated by 25 jury members, only one work received the coveted "Black Pencil

Award" while 16 earned "Yellow Pencil" recognition (D&AD Youtubeb, 2025). This rigorous approach established D&AD's reputation as "one of the most prestigious and difficult awards to win in design and advertising" (Nixon, 2015; Telegraph, 2025).

The organization awards five colored pencils representing different achievement levels: Black Pencil for groundbreaking creativity, Yellow Pencil for outstanding excellence, White Pencil for sustainable projects, Graphite Pencil for standout work, and Wood Pencil for best practices (D&ADb, 2025). With approximately 100 creative professionals serving as jury members across 13 specialized panels, D&AD maintains its institutional philosophy that "creativity makes us who we are" and continues fighting for creative excellence since 1962 (D&AD Youtubeb, 2025).

Research Methodology

Research Purpose and Methodology

This study examines the storytelling elements present in prestigious advertising awards, specifically focusing on D&AD's "Black Pencil" and "Yellow Pencil" awards, which provide unquestionable prestige to industry professionals worldwide. The research aims to identify common characteristics of narrative elements used in award-winning advertisements and create dialogue regarding storytelling layers by establishing an academic foundation through existing literature. Accordingly, an exploratory research methodology has been developed using systematic coding forms based on the theories and models outlined in the literature review.

While existing literature contains studies that have conducted content analysis of leading advertising awards for storytelling elements, these research efforts have remained limited to descriptive stages. An integrated and quantitative analysis of narrative theories on a creativity-focused sample such as D&AD has not been previously undertaken (Balci, 2019). Therefore, this study adopts an exploratory research design rather than a hypothesis-testing approach that aims to confirm or refute a particular model. The fundamental objective of

the study is to map the presence, frequency, and relationships of elements derived from different narrative theories in award-winning advertisements, thereby testing this 'creative ground' and establishing a foundation for more focused future research.

In this regard, the study seeks to transform content characteristics into quantitative data and present them to industry professionals, believing this approach will be meaningful both for incorporating international standards and groundbreaking work from the past into global advertising production, and for anticipating the creativity and execution standards that projects aiming for prestigious awards should achieve.

The research addresses the following questions:

- Has storytelling technique been utilized in the selected sample?
- If employed, how frequently does this occur, and does it contain sufficient intensity to serve as an award-winning force for advertisements?
- Which storytelling elements demonstrate frequent usage, and which do advertising professionals tend to avoid?
- Among storytelling elements, is there a distinctly overused element on a categorical basis (advertising appeals, advertising execution styles, narrative models - structuralist, archetypal, thematic)?

Research Design and Sample Selection

The study employs content analysis methodology to examine all advertisements that received D&AD's two most prestigious awards—"Black Pencil" and "Yellow Pencil"—in the "Television and Cinema Advertisements" category from the organization's international award inception in 1988 to the present. Data obtained through questions designed to identify storytelling elements were quantified using SPSS software to enable macro-level examination of the sample through frequency and percentage analysis.

Over the 36-year period since D&AD opened to international advertising and design community participation in 1988 (D&AD Youtubeb, 2025), among tens of thousands of applications in the

sample category, only 5 advertisements achieved "Black Pencil" recognition while 64 advertisements earned "Yellow Pencil" awards, totaling 69 advertisements. The advertisements were accessed through D&AD's digital archive and organized alphabetically by campaign name. When multiple versions of campaigns existed, they were treated as single units based on consistency in subject matter, messaging, and slogan, as well as their status as components of unified campaigns.

The research developed 19 questions organized into three primary sections:

- Basic Information: Campaign name, award year, advertiser brand, sector, agency, and slogan
- Appeal Elements: General advertising appeals, cultural advertising appeals, and execution style identification
- Storytelling Elements: Advertisement format, advertising appeals and execution types, narrative classifications

To ensure reliable evaluation of the coding framework incorporating specified models and theories, two independent coders first underwent training on the theoretical foundations and engaged in detailed discussions regarding convergent, divergent, and overlapping aspects of the coding categories. Following this preparation, both coders conducted individual coding work without disagreement on any advertisement. However, consensus discussions were required for two advertisements with particularly abstract narratives to determine appropriate narrative categorizations.

Reliability and Validation

Initial pre-testing with two academic coders on 20 advertisements (28.98% of the sample) yielded a Cohen's Kappa reliability coefficient of 0.807. Subsequent testing with additional coders on 25 advertisements (36.23% of the sample) achieved a Cohen's Kappa of 0.760, indicating acceptable inter-coder reliability according to established academic standards. Individual question reliability ranged from 0.324 to 1.000, with most questions achieving acceptable reliability thresholds. The overall Cohen's Kappa of 0.760 demonstrates that the coding

instrument provides reliable and meaningful advertisement evaluation capabilities.

Throughout the study processes, Treadwell's seven-step content analysis methodology guided the research design (Treadwell, 2013). Data collected from each storytelling measurement question were uploaded to SPSS version 23.0 for quantitative transformation and analysis.

To ensure research transparency and reproducibility, all materials including responses from both coders, primary coder data used in analysis, SPSS output files, detailed listings of the 69 advertisements in the sample, and the complete coding framework have been made publicly available through a GitHub repository under Creative Commons licensing for examination by interested researchers and practitioners (<https://shorturl.at/qk1Yp>).

Data Analysis and Findings

The categories discussed within the scope of the research model were applied to 69 advertisements, and the statistical summaries of the questions in the coding form directed to each advertisement are as follows.

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1. Awarded advertisements through the years

<i>Frequency Distribution of Examined Advertisements According to 10-Year Periods (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
1998-2007	38	55.1
1988-1997	17	24.6
2008-2024	14	20.3
Total	69	100

Award-winning advertisements are concentrated between 1998 and 2007 at 55.1%. This decade proved more productive and efficient for winning awards in the "Television and Cinema Advertisements" category, more than doubling the success rate of the first and last decades. Notably, no award-winning advertisements were found from 1988-1994 or 2015-2024. The years 2001, 1997, and 2003 were the most productive for D&AD Award success.

Table 2. Duration of advertisements

<i>Frequency Distributions of the Examined Advertising Durations (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
60-119 sec.	34	49.3
120 + sec.	19	27.5
30-59 sec.	14	20.3
0-29 sec.	2	2.9
Total	69	100

D&AD award-winning advertisements show a clear preference for longer formats, with 49.3% lasting 60-120 seconds and an average duration of 99.01 seconds. This suggests that award-winning creative work requires sufficient time to develop compelling narratives.

Table 3. Brands in examined advertisements by industry

<i>Frequency Distribution of Brands in Examined Advertisements by Industry (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Fast Moving Consumer Goods	20	29.0
Media	15	21.7
Apparel and Accessories	11	15.9
Automotive	6	8.7
Industry and Services	4	5.8
Other (IT)	4	5.8
Healthcare	3	4.3
Entertainment	2	2.9
Telecommunications	2	2.9
Banking & Finance	1	1.4
Logistics	1	1.4
Total	69	100

Fast Moving Consumer Goods (29.0%), Media (21.7%), and Apparel and Accessories (15.9%) dominate the award-winning categories.

Table 4. Origin of advertisements

<i>Distribution of Examined Advertisements by Countries Designed (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
United Kingdom	31	44.9
United States of America	28	40.6
Australia	4	5.8
France	3	4.3
Holland	2	2.9
Sweden	1	1.4
Total	69	100

The UK leads with 44.9% of awards, followed by the US at 40.6%. Together, these countries account for 85.5% of all awards, with only six countries represented total.

Table 5. Type of advertising awards

<i>Frequency of Reward Types in Examined Advertisements (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>%</i>
Yellow Pencil	64	92.8
Black Pencil	5	7.2
Total	69	100

Over 30 years, D&AD awarded only 69 prizes in this category, confirming its exceptional selectivity. The 92.8% Yellow Pencil rate versus 7.2% Black Pencil demonstrates the extreme rarity of achieving the highest recognition.

Advertising Appeals and Execution Styles

Table 6. Attractiveness elements in advertising

<i>Distribution of Examined Advertisements by Countries Designed (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>% in All Attractive-</i>	<i>% in All Ads</i>
Humor	55	29.3	79.7
Freedom	35	18.6	50.7
Happiness	27	14.4	39.1
Social Status	24	12.8	34.8
Fantastic	19	10.1	27.5
Fear	16	8.5	23.2
Sexuality	12	6.4	17.4
Total	188	100	272

Universal appeal elements show humor as the dominant strategy (79.7%), followed by freedom (50.7%) and happiness (39.1%). These results indicate that award-winning advertisements prioritize emotional engagement and positive associations over negative appeals like fear (23.2%) or sexuality (17.4%).

Table 7. Hofstede's elements of attractiveness in advertising

<i>Frequency of Hofstede Attractiveness Elements in the Examined Advertisements (n=69)</i>	<i>f</i>	<i>% in All Attractive-</i>	<i>% in All Ads</i>
Individualism	47	30.3	68.1
Pleasure Pursuit	41	26.5	59.4
Female / Male Roles	31	20.0	44.9
Power Distance	18	11.6	26.1
Short / Long Term Perspective	14	9.0	20.3
Uncertainty Avoidance	4	2.6	5.8
Total	155	100	224

Cultural appeal elements reveal individualism (68.1%) and pleasure pursuit (59.4%) as primary strategies. Given that 85.5% of the awarded advertisements originate from the UK and USA, this finding reflects the Western cultural values that

predominate in D&AD recognition. However, this cultural influence appears selective rather than comprehensive—other Western cultural dimensions show markedly different patterns, with uncertainty avoidance appearing in only 5.8% of advertisements, power distance in 26.1%, and long-term perspective in 20.3%. This selective application suggests that award-winning creativity gravitates toward specific Western values that translate effectively across cultural boundaries, particularly those emphasizing individual agency and experiential satisfaction, while avoiding cultural dimensions that might limit universal appeal or create cultural barriers for global brands.

Table 8. Execution style of advertisements

Frequency of Execution Styles in Examined Advertisements (n=69)	f	% in All Attractive- ness	% in All Ads
Association Transfer	56	29.2	81.2
Entertainment	51	26.6	73.9
Drama	48	25.0	69.6
Special Effects	26	13.5	37.7
Imagination	6	3.1	8.7
Lesson	4	2.1	5.8
Announcement	1	0.5	1.4
Total	192	100	278

Association transfer (81.2%), entertainment (73.9%), and drama (69.6%) dominate execution styles. Significantly, argumentative approaches like announcements (1.4%) and lesson (5.8%) are virtually absent, confirming that award-winning creativity favors narrative and emotional approaches over direct persuasion.

Table 9. Form of advertisements

Frequency of Ad Form Types in Analyzed Ads (n=69)	f	%
Narrative	66	95.7
Argumentative	3	4.3
Total	69	100

The significant preference for narrative form (95.7%) over argumentative (4.3%) reinforces that storytelling is fundamental to award-winning advertising. This near-universal adoption suggests narrative structure is essential for creative recognition.

Findings Related to Narrative Theories

The Anatomy of Narrative - Structuralist Models

Table 10. The Todorov plot in advertisements

Frequency of Occurrence of the Todorov Plot in the Analyzed Advertising Stories (n=69)	f	%
None	21	30.4
Journey to Another World	11	15.9
The Biter-Bit	11	15.9
The Stranger Savior	8	11.6
The Solving of the Riddles	7	10.1
Rise and Fall	5	7.2
The Quest	4	5.8
The Beast Transformed by Love	1	1.4
Redemption	1	1.4
Total	69	100

While 30.4% of advertisements don't follow Todorov's plot structures, the remainder utilize recognizable patterns. "Journey to Another World" and "The Biter-Bit" (both 15.9%) are most common, suggesting award-winning advertising often employs escapism or empowerment narratives.

Table 11. Stages of Vogler's "Author's Journey" in advertising

Frequency of Occurrence of Vogler's "Author's Journey" Stages in Examined Ads (n=69)	f	% in All Attractive- ness	% in All Ads
Call to Adventure	35	13.6	51.5
Reward	35	13.6	51.5
Crossing the Threshold	33	12.8	48.5
Tests, Friends, Enemies	33	12.8	48.5
Ordinary World	33	12.8	48.5
Ordeal	30	11.7	44.1
Ruler	19	7.4	27.9
Approach	13	5.1	19.1
None	7	2.7	10.3
Meeting the Mentor	7	2.7	10.3
Rejection of the Call	6	2.3	8.8
Path to Return	4	1.6	5.9
Resurrection	2	0.8	2.9
Total	257	100	377

Vogler's "Hero's Journey" stages appear frequently, with "Call to Adventure" and "Reward" both at 51.5%. The high occurrence of foundational stages like "Ordinary World" (48.5%) and "Crossing the Threshold" (48.5%) indicates that award-winning advertising successfully establishes narrative context and character motivation.

Table 12. Scenes of Vogler's "Author's Journey" in advertising

Frequency of Occurrence of Vogler's "Author's Journey" Scenes in Analyzed Ads (n=69)	f	% in All Attractive-ness	% in All Ads
Scene 1: Departure	50	34.5	72.5
Scene 3: Initiation	39	26.9	56.5
Scene 2: Collapse	30	20.7	43.5
Scene 4: Return	19	13.1	27.5
None	7	4.8	10.1
Total	145	100	210

Scene analysis shows "Departure" (72.5%) dominates, encompassing initial narrative setup through the character's commitment to action. "Initiation" (56.5%) follows, covering the character's trials and growth. This pattern suggests award-winning advertising excels at establishing compelling beginnings while varying in resolution approaches.

The Players of Narrative - Archetypal Models

Table 13. Propp's character types in advertisements

Frequency of Execution Styles in Examined Advertisements (n=69)	f	% in All Attractive-ness	% in All Ads
Hero (Protagonist)	52	34.2	75.4
Villain (Antagonist)	43	28.3	62.3
Donor	17	11.2	24.6
Helper	16	10.5	23.2
Dispatcher (Operator)	9	5.9	13.0
None	8	5.3	11.6
False Hero	6	3.9	8.7
Princess and the father	1	0.7	1.4
Total	152	100	220

Propp's character analysis shows hero in 75.4% of advertisements and villain in 62.3%. The prevalence of these archetypal roles confirms that award-winning advertising employs classic narrative structures. Supporting characters like donors (24.6%) and helpers (23.2%) appear less frequently but remain significant.

The Meaning of Narrative - Thematic Models

Aristotelian analysis reveals that virtually all advertisements contain core narrative elements: message (98.6%), character (89.9%), plot (87.0%), and conflict (73.9%).

Table 14. Aristotelian narrative elements in advertising

Frequency of Aristotelian Narrative Elements in the Examined Advertisements (n=69)	f	% in All Attractive-ness	% in All Ads
Message	68	28.1	98.6
Character	62	25.6	89.9
Plot	60	24.8	87.0
Conflict	51	21.1	73.9
None	1	0.4	1.4
Total	242	100	350

Only one advertisement lacked these elements entirely. This demonstrates that classical storytelling principles underpin contemporary award-winning advertising.

Table 15. Level of conflict in advertising stories

Frequency of Propp Character Types in Analyzed Advertisements (n=69)	f	%
Minor Challenge	29	42.0
No Conflict	15	21.7
Ordinary World	13	18.8
Dilemma	6	8.7
Big Issues	6	8.7
Total	69	100

While 95.7% of advertisements use narrative form, conflict levels vary significantly. Minor challenges dominate (42.0%), while 40.5% of advertisements avoid conflict entirely by depicting ordinary worlds or having no conflict. This suggests that award-winning advertising often relies on subtle tension rather than dramatic confrontation.

Table 16. Booker's Seven Basic Story Model in advertising

Frequency of Occurrence of Booker's Seven Basic Story Models in the Analyzed Advertising Stories (n=69)	f	%
None	14	20.3
Defeating the Monster	13	18.8
Comedy	13	18.8
Quest	11	15.9
Rebirth	9	13.0
From Poverty to Riches	5	7.2
Tragedy	3	4.3
Journey and Return	1	1.4
Total	69	100

One-fifth of advertisements don't fit Booker's models, but "Defeating the Monster" and "Comedy" (both 18.8%) lead identifiable patterns. "Quest" narratives (15.9%) also feature prominently. These results indicate that award-winning

advertising gravitates toward empowerment, humor, and self-actualization themes that resonate universally with audiences.

Narrative Complexity Index & T-Test Results

Table 17. Index variables driven from the coded variables

Index Variable (n=69)	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Dev.	Range
Ad Attractiveness	0.14	0.71	0.389	0.181	0.57
Hofstede Attractiveness	0.17	0.83	0.374	0.188	0.66
Types of Ads	0.14	0.57	0.397	0.130	0.43
Aristotelian Elements	0.20	0.80	0.701	0.189	0.60
Character Types	0.13	0.50	0.275	0.110	0.37
Hero's Journey	0.06	0.89	0.323	0.205	0.83
Story Complexity	0.15	0.64	0.408	0.107	0.49

Award-winning advertisements most consistently employ classical narrative structure (message, character, plot, conflict). This suggests that fundamental storytelling architecture is essential for creative recognition. Despite their literary importance, specific character archetypes (hero, villain, donor) appear selectively. This indicates quality over quantity in character development rather than comprehensive archetypal casting. The Hero's Journey framework demonstrates the most diverse application, suggesting flexible adaptation of this model across different creative approaches.

Table 18. Independent samples T-Test results

Comparison (n=69)	Variables Tested	Significant Differentiation	p-Values	Key Finding
Country Origin (UK vs. Other)	All 7 Indices	None	0.513 – 0.937	0.181
Time Period (1988-2002 vs. 2003-2024)	All 7 Indices	None	0.292 – 0.658	0.188
Product Type (Goods vs. Services)	All 7 Indices	None	0.180 – 0.842	0.130

The results reveal a pattern of universal storytelling principles in D&AD award-winning advertising. Despite testing three fundamentally different categorical variables, no statistically significant differences emerged across any of the seven storytelling complexity indices. The absence of differences between UK and other countries (p-values .513-.937) is particularly striking given that UK and US productions dominate 85.5% of awards. This suggests that award-winning storytelling transcends national boundaries and cultural contexts. Rather than reflecting local creative traditions,

D&AD recognition appears to reward universal narrative principles that resonate across cultures. The lack of significant changes between 1988-2002 and 2003-2024 periods (p-values .292-.658) indicates that classical storytelling frameworks remain consistently relevant despite three decades of technological advancement, digital transformation, and evolving consumer behavior. This consistency suggests that fundamental human responses to narrative structure are stable and that award-winning creativity relies on enduring rather than trending storytelling approaches. The similarity between physical products and services (p-values .180-.842) demonstrates that effective storytelling strategies work regardless of offering type.

Discussion

This study's findings provide compelling evidence for the universality of narrative principles in award-winning advertising, yet several important limitations must be acknowledged. The analysis of 69 D&AD award-winning advertisements reveals that classical storytelling frameworks transcend cultural boundaries, technological changes, and product categories—a finding that challenges assumptions about the cultural specificity of creative excellence.

The dominance of Western countries (UK and US accounting for 85.5% of awards) raises questions about cultural bias in the sample. While the statistical analysis showed no significant differences in narrative complexity between UK and other countries, this geographic concentration may reflect D&AD's historical origins and judging panel composition rather than universal creative superiority. The organization's British roots and industry networks likely influence both submission patterns and evaluation criteria, potentially creating systematic advantages for English-speaking markets.

Temporal limitations also warrant consideration. The concentration of awards between 1998-2007 (55.1%) suggests this period represented either a golden age of television advertising creativity or reflects changing submission patterns and award criteria. The absence of awards from 1988-1994 and 2015-2024 may indicate shifts in creative

focus toward digital platforms not captured in our television-focused sample. This temporal clustering limits our ability to generalize findings across different advertising eras.

Conclusion and Implications for Further Research

This content analysis of 69 D&AD Black and Yellow Pencil award-winning advertisements from 1988-2024 reveals that creative excellence in advertising rests upon universal narrative foundations that transcend cultural, temporal, and categorical boundaries. The most significant finding demonstrates that award-winning storytelling operates according to fundamental principles rather than local adaptations or trending approaches.

Statistical analysis confirms narrative universality across all dimensions tested. Independent samples t-tests showed no significant differences between UK and other countries, across three decades, or between physical products and services on any storytelling complexity indices. This consistency indicates that D&AD recognition rewards fundamental narrative excellence rather than cultural specificity, temporal innovation, or product-adapted strategies.

The preference for positive emotional engagement over negative appeals (humor 79.7% vs. fear 23.2%) and narrative execution over argumentative approaches (95.7% vs. 4.3%) demonstrates that award-winning creativity builds connections through attraction and storytelling sophistication. Universal appeal elements showed stronger relationships with story complexity than cultural-specific appeals, suggesting globally resonant emotional strategies prove more critical for recognition than demographically targeted approaches.

Narrative models exhibit varying degrees of structural adoption. Aristotelian elements achieve near-universal implementation (message 98.6%, character 89.9%), while Vogler's Hero's Journey shows selective application (Call to Adventure 51.5%, Reward 51.5%) and Booker's thematic patterns appear in only specific contexts (Defeating the Monster 18.8%, Comedy 18.8%). This hierarchy indicates that basic storytelling architecture serves

as essential infrastructure, with more complex narrative frameworks providing strategic enhancement rather than foundational requirements.

Execution types reveal dramatic transformation from traditional advertising approaches. Association transfer (81.2%), entertainment (73.9%), and drama (69.6%) overwhelmingly dominate creative expression, while argumentative methods remain virtually absent (announcements 1.4%, lessons 5.8%). This pattern demonstrates that award-winning creativity has fundamentally shifted toward narrative engagement over direct persuasion.

The integration across these dimensions suggests that creative excellence emerges from sophisticated coordination: positive universal appeals provide emotional foundation, classical narrative structure ensures comprehensibility, and narrative execution styles deliver engaging presentation. This multi-layered approach distinguishes award-winning work from conventional advertising through strategic storytelling complexity rather than single-dimension innovation.

These findings challenge assumptions about creative cultural specificity while validating classical storytelling's enduring relevance in commercial communication. The consistency across technological transformation and cultural evolution indicates that fundamental human responses to narrative structure remain remarkably stable.

Future research should expand beyond Western award systems to validate narrative universality across Eastern contexts and examine regional variations in storytelling excellence. Digital platform analysis represents a crucial frontier, investigating how classical principles adapt to social media, streaming formats, and interactive technologies. Experimental studies examining audience response to specific narrative elements could provide empirical validation for theoretical relationships identified here. Longitudinal tracking extending beyond thirty years might reveal cyclical patterns while industry-specific analysis could determine whether specialized narrative approaches enhance creative recognition in particular sectors.

Declarations

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Data Availability: The data analyzed in this study were obtained from the publicly accessible D&AD digital archive. All research materials, including coding forms, coder responses, SPSS outputs, and the full dataset of 69 advertisements, are openly available via a GitHub repository under a Creative Commons license (<https://shorturl.at/qk1Yp>).

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