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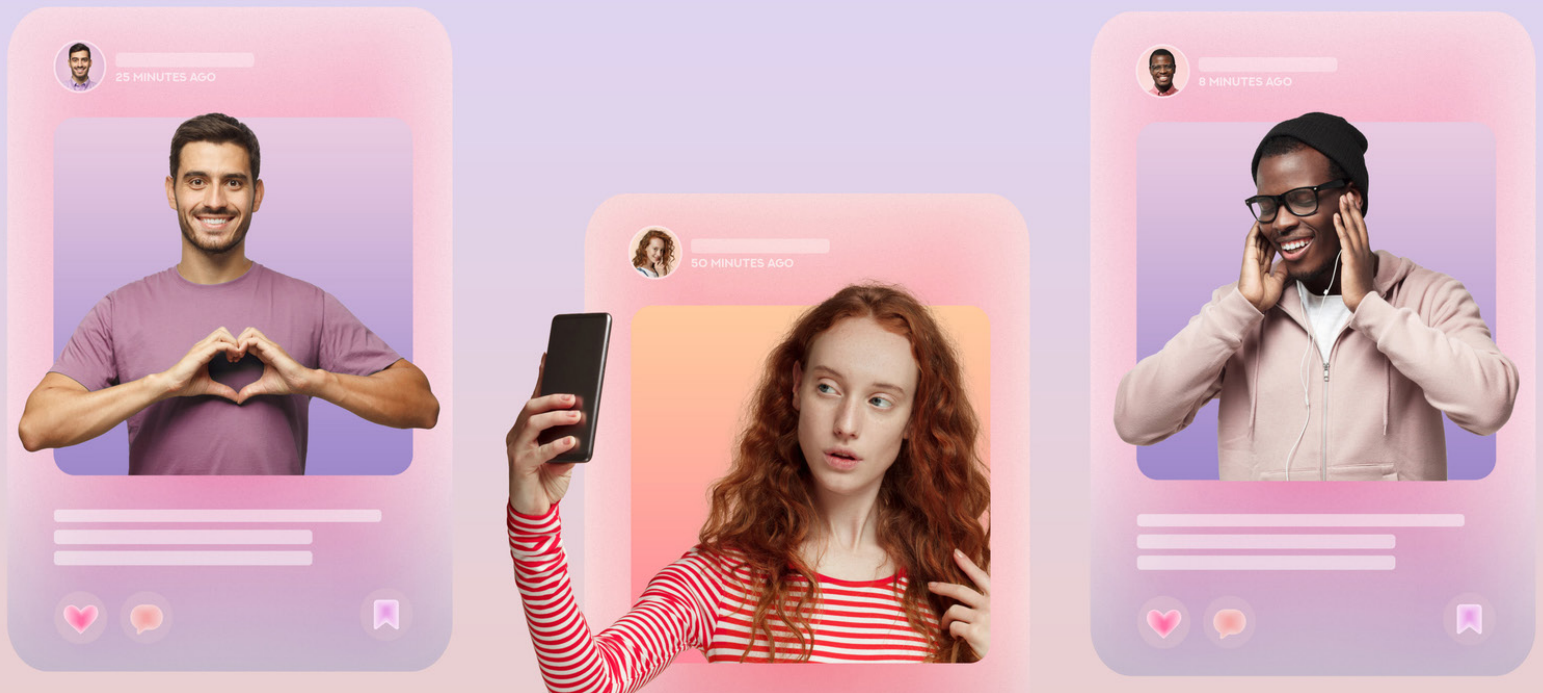
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MEDIA IMPACT REPORT

Creative Diversification in Paid Social

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Digiday Media Buying Summit Recap



/BRIEFING ROOM

Creative Diversification: The Strongest Performance Lever in Paid Social

By **Shuree Jones**, Group Director, Paid Social

Platforms have been telling us about it. Advertising trades have been reporting it. We've been shouting it from the rooftops.

In today's paid social landscape, *creative is the new targeting*.

I would argue that we can finally remove the "new" from that statement, because **we've been talking about creative's impact on paid social for years at Rain.**

Pre-iOS 14, paid social success was largely defined by audience segmentation: understanding your audience, and applying that understanding to in-platform or third-party targeting levers. Creative mattered, of course, but it was often treated as a supporting player rather than the primary growth lever.

Today, that dynamic has flipped.

As automation and machine learning (ahem, AI) reshape how platforms deliver ads, creative has become the most powerful signal advertisers control. In this new environment, the brands that win are not necessarily those with the biggest budgets. Instead, it's those with the most strategically diversified creative.

The Creative-First Era of Paid Social

Meta's ad system has led the charge in AI-driven platform tools, and has steadily automated many of the levers advertisers once relied on: audience targeting, placements, budget distribution, and bid optimization. Tools like Advantage+ (and TikTok's Smart+) push advertisers toward simplified campaign structures while machine learning handles delivery.

Under this paradigm, the platform relies more heavily on creative signals to determine who should see an ad and when. Instead of advertisers manually defining audiences, the system increasingly uses engagement signals from creative to identify potential audiences.

This means that creative strategy is no longer just about brand storytelling with a wide lens. It's now a core component of media performance at every position in the purchase cycle.

Diversification vs. Volume

One of the biggest misconceptions we face when we talk about creative importance in paid social is that success requires simply producing *more ads*. But volume alone won't lead to growth (and may just kill your creative budget in a hurry).

What platforms actually require is creative diversification: developing multiple distinct concepts, narratives, and value propositions, rather than producing minor variations of the same ad.

Meta's AI-driven ads retrieval engine, Andromeda, accelerated this need for diversification. Instead of ranking ads after they enter the auction, Andromeda first uses AI to decide which ads are even eligible to compete, narrowing millions of options down to the most relevant ones. Andromeda powers smarter, faster indexing of creative assets, so the system can better match assets with the right users. The takeaway for advertisers: the more diverse your creative options, the better the algorithm can find the perfect message for each person.



The Operational Challenge: More Creative, Same Budget

The obvious challenge for most brands is that creative diversification requires resources.

Creative production can be expensive, we know this. However, modern paid social requires more frequent refresh cycles and a larger creative library. Brands we work with at Rain are now refreshing creative every two to four weeks to avoid fatigue and maintain performance.

So how can brands meet this demand without dramatically increasing production budgets?

We have a few ideas:

- 1. Shift from building assets to mapping concept frameworks.** Instead of producing isolated ads, build creative frameworks that allow for multiple executions. For example, when concentrating on a particular reason to believe (RTB), map how many different ways that RTB can come through in an ad. Asset mix, audience demographic, strategic hook and persona framing are all pieces of a concept framework. This approach generates multiple creative assets from a single strategic idea.
- 2. Separate concept testing from execution testing.** Creative testing should happen at two levels: concept testing (different messaging angles, different emotional triggers, different audience motivations) and execution testing (hook variations, editing styles, format variations). Concept testing generates the creative diversity algorithms need, while execution testing refines winners.
- 3. Embrace iterative production models.** Modern creative development works best in continuous iteration cycles, not quarterly campaign launches. Aim for 30% of your creative output to be iterative on past top performers, leaning on creative analysis data to guide what to make next.
- 4. Use content creators and influencers strategically.** Integrating content creators and influencers into your paid social creative mix is table stakes in 2026, as more consumers look to human connection in their feeds. These assets also have the major bonus in that they can dramatically expand creative output without traditional production costs. Word to the wise, though—creator-based assets should live within the same concept frameworks that brand produced assets stem from. Think of them as additive to a framework vs net-new.

The trajectory of paid social is clear. Creative is the primary differentiator between campaigns that scale and those that stagnate. The brands that succeed won't simply produce more ads—they'll build systems for creative diversification. Because in the era of creative as the new targeting, the question has moved from "How well can we target our audience?" to "How many ways can we tell our story?"



/NOTEPAD

2026 Digiday Media Buying Summit Recap

By **Kyle Knutsen**, Director, Digital Video

The spring 2026 Digiday Media Buying Summit, like the last few years, focused on the integration of AI into both ad tech and agency workflows.

Many senior leaders are pushing for increased use of AI, particularly in creative development and automated campaign management tools. Though, this isn't always seamless, as teams frequently encounter gaps between leadership expectations and the operational complexities required to deploy AI effectively.



My favorite aspect of the Digiday Summit were the closed-door town hall discussions. There, I heard firsthand agency leaders' pain points around AI. The resounding consensus is that AI opens a world of opportunities, but can cause some growing pains.

Integrating Technology with Foundational Media Expertise

In my opinion, the biggest threat the industry is facing with AI is blind over-adoption, in the sense that the strategic understanding of the data can be lost when results are automated. It takes a trained media professional to understand the complexities of media buy types, endeavors, bigger-picture trends, and ultimately, what's best for a client. It will be imperative for agencies to strike a balance between fully embracing AI, and ensuring teams maintain the foundational understanding necessary to steward their advertiser's campaigns.

Challenges with Data and Attribution in CTV

Separately, there were the age-old questions around data and attribution when measuring lower-funnel KPI performance for CTV. This became abundantly clear within the town hall meetings, where attendees discussed ongoing difficulties with data accuracy, measurement, and cross-channel attribution. The biggest challenges facing the measurement space are data silos, proving out incrementality, and inconsistencies in MMM results. Traditional MMM categorizes TV as a broad, upper-funnel medium.

However, CTV has evolved into a full-funnel channel capable of driving brand awareness, consideration and conversions. By treating CTV the same as linear TV within the modeling, mid and lower funnel impact is often not fully captured. This can produce underreporting of CTV's effectiveness and can often lead to budget migration to other channels with stronger signals as a result.

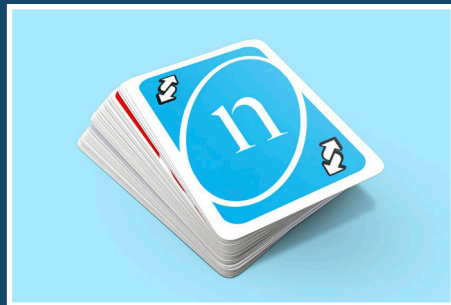
A point made by many of the keynote speakers was to emphasize proprietary tech stacks, while ensuring that a healthy company culture is being promoted. These inherently may not seem to be related, but responsible integrations with AI play hand-in-hand with accountable media professionals. The agencies that strike the balance between automation and human-powered insights will ultimately maximize efficiencies while building client trust.

At Rain, we believe real value comes from combining the speed AI technology enables with strategic judgement, driven by years of media expertise.

/QUICK HITS



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