

MARKETING COLLOQUIA

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THE CREATIVITY PARADOX: SOLICITING CREATIVE IDEAS UNDERMINES IDEATION

ABSTRACT: When developing product ideas and original marketing content, firms and marketers often organize ideation activities to harvest a rich set of new ideas. We explore a popular paradigm for guiding these activities—explicitly requesting creative ideas—in the context of consumer idea generation contests. We demonstrate that this common practice can paradoxically undermine ideation, decreasing the total number of novel ideas that contestants generate (i.e., ideas rated as surpassing the threshold of average novelty). A single paper meta-analysis across six incentive-compatible ideation contests on different products (toy, office supply, toiletry, and mobile app) involving close to 2,000 contestants estimated that soliciting creative ideas resulted in 1.49 fewer novel ideas per contestant, which amounted to a 20% decrease in productivity and a loss of 500 unique novel ideas in total. This productivity loss occurs because soliciting creative ideas prompts people to self-impose a high standard, which leads to a unique cognitive process that restrains (instead of expands) their thinking. This research also offers important solutions for marketers to ensure the productivity of ideation and fuel innovation.