

How to Do Creative Strategy That Gets You the Best Possible ROI

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Some context

Hi, this is Rishab. Hitarth and I have spent the last 6-7 years spending crores on Meta ads (3 at Innovist and another 3 at Outwrk now) and fairly understand what works and how has meta evolved throughout these years.

This document is written so as to keep a repository of all our learnings and to bring all our current and future team members and clients on the same page as how to do creative strategy that makes you win at meta ads.

This document broadly covers -

- [Beauty \(and history\) of meta ads](#)
- [Creative is the new targeting \(and why\)](#)
- [How to think about creative strategy](#)
- [Metrics to track](#)
- [Creative planning \(instead of media planning\)](#)
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Beauty (and history) of meta ads

Some history first. This is important. Facebook used to be a desktop first platform until 2012 where the ads used to be displayed on the sides and not between the feed. But the internet was transitioning to mobile. Mobile didn't have space on the right side. So if they had to put ads on the front and center, they must be v good. User's attention will be pointed at these ads like no other ads before.

It's also a good thing, since these will get user attention, they're also much more valuable. When facebook first ship ads, it's pretty irrelevant and crappy. And the only thing that matters for facebook is people sticking to it. Their inventory is eyeballs which comes back everyday and spends more time. There's an internal debate to reduce the number of ads that show up on feed. However, they realise the only way to make it better is to show users **way more ads**, not less and learn what do people like and click on and purchase. So that's what they do. And now the ads that we see are super relevant.

But what we need to remember is that meta needs eyeballs that stick to its platform (its DAU MAU ratio is as high as 84%). So ads have to be freaking good (**as good as organic content**) so that users stick.

The 4 eras of Meta ads (and how we got to today)

Now zoom out. The way ads work on meta has changed dramatically every 3-4 years. Knowing this history helps you understand why doing what worked 5 years ago will get you fired today.

1. The Targeting Era (2012-2018) - This was the era where audience targeting was god. You could pick an interest like 'yoga', layer it with 'women aged 25-34 in Tier 1 cities', and reach exactly those people. Creative was almost an afterthought - a decent static image with a discount offer would print money at ₹40-50 CPMs. This is the era where Mamaearth, boAt, Lenskart, etc. were built. If you knew how to 'hack' audiences, you could build a brand on cheap clicks.

2. The Lookalike Era (2018-2021) - Facebook (now Meta) realised marketers also had their customer base which were a way better signal than interest stacking. So they introduced Lookalike Audiences - upload your purchaser list, and Meta finds you 1% / 2% / 5% similar people. This was magic. Brands with even 1000 purchaser data points could scale to ₹10L+/month on Meta. The platform got smarter than the marketer. Andromeda's great-great-grandfather, you could say.

3. The Post-iOS 14.5 Era (2021-2024) - In April 2021, Apple dropped the App Tracking Transparency (ATT) bomb. Users could now 'Ask App Not to Track' - and majority said yes. Overnight, Meta lost the ability to track user behaviour across apps and websites. CPMs jumped. ROAS dropped. Lookalikes became less accurate. Brands panicked. Meta scrambled. This forced them to build a whole new infrastructure - CAPI (Conversions API), Advantage+ campaigns, and eventually, Andromeda.

4. The Andromeda Era (2024-now) - In December 2024, Meta announced Andromeda - a new AI-powered ads retrieval engine that processes thousands of ad candidates per impression using deep neural networks. It is much more powerful than the previous system. By October 2025, it was rolled out globally. The OLD question was: 'Who should see this ad?' The NEW question is: 'Which ad should this person see?' This is the single biggest shift in Meta ads since the platform was built. It's why we've written this document.

Read this twice. The platform that used to reward marketers who were better at picking audiences now rewards marketers who make more, better, and more diverse creatives. You stopped being a media buyer. You became a creative strategist. That's the entire game.

Creative is the new targeting (and why)

Open Instagram and check your own IG feed. You'll see a bunch of content that's super relevant to you. Through common sense, you would know that no one selected an audience while posting a reel. It's all curated for you. ***Then why should a brand have to selected an audience while publishing an ad?*** This is the essence of ads targeting these days.

So, this means ***creative does the targeting.***

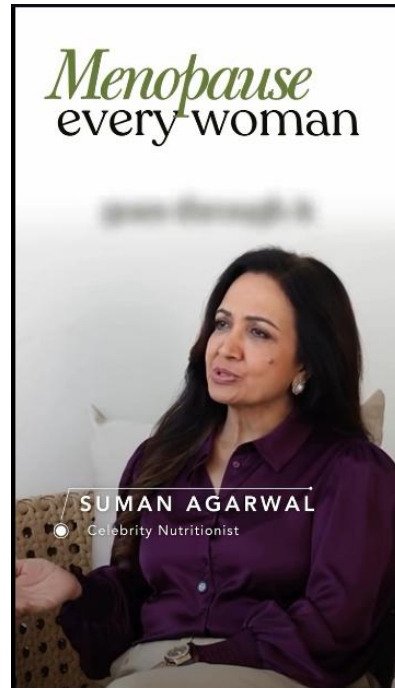
When you brief a creative, you're not just briefing a script. You're briefing an audience. Every layer is a vote:

- The casting (age, gender, look) - tells Meta this is for people like this
- The language (Hindi / English / Hinglish / regional) - self-explanatory
- The setting (kitchen / gym / bedroom / office) - signals lifestyle
- The pain point you open with - signals what kind of buyer they are and their awareness level
- The pace and cuts (slow, calm vs. fast, snappy) - signals age and platform native-ness

In the old TV days, you had one ad and one audience. In the IG age, you have ten ads, each picking its own crowd from the same broad pool. The good ones know their crowd before they shoot.

Let me show you an example.

Check the below ad screenshot:



	030925_WMV40_Video_LeemaInfluencer...	₹90
	25-34	₹29
	45-54	₹23
	18-24	₹19
	35-44	₹13
	55-64	₹3
	65+	₹
	030925_WMV40_Video_LeemaInfluencer...	₹90
	Female	₹60
	Male	₹29

	240325_WMV40_Video_SumanInstaPost_...	₹37
	45-54	₹17
	35-44	₹15
	55-64	₹15
	25-34	₹15
	18-24	₹
	65+	₹
	240325_WMV40_Video_SumanInstaPost_...	₹37
	Female	₹36
	Male	₹1

First ad speaks to a daughter (and some sons) in her late 20s to buy the product for their moms. Second ad speak directly to the user. In both the cases, we didn't put any targeting options. Demographics data is sorted by amount spent and the ads have automatically spent on the TG that would resonate the most with ads. Brilliant, no?

So, the audience-targeting muscle is now mostly useless. Meta also recommends: broad targeting, Advantage+ placements, automated optimisation. The system performs best when you let it figure out delivery. Our job is to feed it diverse, well-made creatives.

'But Rishab, do I literally just leave everything blank?' Almost. There are a few exclusions that still earn their keep, and being sloppy here will burn your budget. Here's our rulebook:

New vs Engaged vs Existing - This is the one piece of targeting that genuinely improves performance. Separate prospecting (people who haven't engaged with you) from retargeting (engaged users, website visitors, ATC abandoners, video viewers and buyers). A healthy split for a scaling D2C brand: 70% prospecting (broad), 30% retargeting. The creative for these two audiences is totally different - prospecting needs to introduce the problem and brand; retargeting can be direct with offers, social proof, and urgency.

Niche category/B2B sales - While the creative can do the targeting, but in most of niche or b2b sales cases, we've seen interest based or lookalikes still do well.

How to think about creative strategy

There are 4 layers of research you must do before you write a single line of script. Spend a few days on these and you'll have 50 ad ideas instead of 5.

1. Product research

Before you can sell anything, you have to know what you're selling. There are 4 layers to understanding a product before creating an ad.

a. Product benefits (not features) - You must understand what does the product does for a consumer and be able to articulate it in simple terms. It's important to understand the end consumer benefit and not just the product benefit so that you can understand why would the customer buy the product. For example -

- **Wellbeing Magnesium Pills** - Fall asleep faster, wake up without tightness in your muscles (and not Magnesium bisglycinate form, high bioavailability, 300mg elemental magnesium per serving)
- **Noise cancellation Headphone** - Get into deep focus anywhere – whether you're on a packed metro or in a noisy office (and not Active noise cancellation with 40dB reduction)

Quick test: read your ad copy out loud. If you sound like the product label, you've written features. If you sound like a friend recommending a fix, you've written benefits. Re-write till you're option B.

b. Differentiation - Try and understand why should the customer buy this product instead of competitor/incumbent. Most new products scale because they are offering something better than what was available earlier and you need to gain market share. To help with a few examples -

- **Chemist at Play underarm roll on**
Incumbents - Mask smell or reduce sweat

Their claim - Sweating isn't bad. Kills odour causing bacteria instead of just masking the smell. Also lightens the underarm (so that's 2 differentiation)

- **Whole Trust Whey Protein**

Incumbents - Make you stronger but added fillers

Their claim - lightest protein ever and no bloating

2. User research

If product research tells you 'what to sell', user research tells you 'how to sell it, to whom, and in what words'. This is the part most agencies skip because it's slow and unsexy. Don't skip it.

a. Awareness levels - Eugene Schwartz wrote about this in 1966 in Breakthrough Advertising. Sixty years later, it's still a great framework to think about who your buyer is. There are 5 levels of awareness, and your creative has to match the level of the buyer you're going after.

- **Unaware** - They don't know they have a problem. Hardest to convert. Need education first. Example: A 28-year-old who hasn't connected 'bad sleep' with 'low magnesium'.
- **Problem aware** - They know they have a problem but not the solution. They're Googling, Reddit-ing, asking friends. Example: 'I can't sleep, what do I do?'
- **Solution aware** - They know solutions exist but haven't picked one. Comparing categories - melatonin vs magnesium vs ashwagandha.
- **Product aware** - They know your product but haven't bought. Reading reviews, watching unboxings, waiting for a sale.
- **Most aware** - They know everything, just need a nudge. Show them the offer, they'll buy.

Why this matters: an ad written for a most-aware buyer ('15% off today only!') will flop with an unaware buyer ('huh, why would I need this?'). And an ad written for an unaware buyer ('Did you know magnesium

deficiency affects 70% of Indians?') will bore a most-aware buyer who's ready to swipe up and buy.

Your creative mix should map roughly to where your buyers are. Most new age D2C brands in India would have 80% of their market in Unaware + Problem Aware. So 80% of your creatives should be doing education + problem agitation.

b. Talk to customers - Get on a 20-minute call with 5 of your brand's real customers every month. Ask them:

- What was happening in your life that made you look for [category]?
- Where did you first hear about us? Walk me through what you saw.
- What were you using before? Why did you switch?
- What's the single biggest change you've seen since using the product?
- If you had to describe this to a friend in WhatsApp, what would you type?

The last question is golden. The exact words they use become your ad copy. Words like 'bloating', 'heaviness', 'gas nahi ho raha tha' - these are the words you bake into hooks. Marketers in conference rooms invent words like 'gut wellness solution'. Real people say 'mera pet bhaari rehta hai'. Sell to real people, in their words.

c. Talk to the brand team - Your client / founder / brand team usually knows things the data doesn't. They've probably read every Amazon review and every IG dm (my ex-boss did). Don't treat them as approvers - treat them as a research source. Ask:

- What's the most common DM you get about this product?
- What's the most common obstacle to buying this product?

- What's the unexpected use case customers told you about?
- Which influencer's content has driven the most organic sales?
- Which testimonial / review do you keep re-reading because it captures it perfectly?

d. Triggers (a.k.a. the 'when') - A trigger is the moment in someone's life when they go from 'meh' to 'shit, I need to fix this'. Great creatives recreate that moment in 3 seconds. For a protein powder, the trigger might be 'not farting in front of your office colleagues all day'. For a magnesium supplement, 'scrolling Instagram at 2am for the third night in a row'.

Make a list of every realistic life moment that pushes someone toward your category from the above discussions. Each trigger is potentially a creative angle. The more triggers you can name, the more creatives you can plan.

e. Use cases and personas - Don't define a persona as 'Riya, 28, lives in Mumbai, likes yoga'. That's useless. Define personas as use-case clusters. For example, a magnesium supplement might have 4 personas:

- 'The exhausted founder' - sleeps 5 hrs, wakes up with brain fog, tries everything, optimisation-obsessed
- 'The gym bro post-workout' - wants muscle recovery, sees magnesium as a stack-add
- 'The new mom' - broken sleep cycles, hair fall, wants something safe to take while feeding
- 'The 50+ aunty' - joint pain, leg cramps at night, looking for non-medicine relief

Same product. Four totally different ads. Four totally different audiences. This is the whole game in 2026 - more concept diversity = better ad performance.

3. Competitor research

- Someone has almost certainly already figured out what works in your category
- More media spend / distribution wins in the long run - you need to know who's already winning that
- Category leaders set the buyer's mental model - you're either matching, breaking, or replacing it

a. Use the Meta Ad Library obsessively - This is free, public, and underused. Go to facebook.com/ads/library, pick your country, search a competitor's name, and look at:

- How many ads they have live right now (this signals spend level)
- Which ads have the highest impression
- Which ads have multiple variants (they invested in iterations because the base concept worked)
- Their hooks, their pace, their formats, their casting

b. Identify the category leader's mental model - Every category has a default mental model the leader has imposed. For ghee, the mental model used to be 'big yellow tins, generations old, trust trust trust' (Amul). Then Two Brothers came in and said 'A2 cow ghee, bilona method, conscious choice'. You're either reinforcing the dominant mental model or breaking it. Both can work - but pick consciously.

c. Don't just look at direct competitors - If you're selling protein, also look at peanut butter brands, healthy snack brands, fitness apps. Same buyer, different category. Their ads will teach you adjacent angles you'd miss otherwise.

d. Use tools - Adsflo, Foreplay, Atria, GetHookd, Motion, and similar tools let you save and tag competitor ads at scale. If you can't afford

a tool, a shared Notion / Google Sheet with screenshots and tags works just as well in early days.

4. Angles

After all that research, you should have a fat list of: triggers, personas, awareness levels, competitor angles you can borrow or break. Now you collapse all of that into 'Concepts' - which is the working unit of creative briefing.

An concept is a single, sharp idea behind a creative. Examples:

- 'Mom's magnesium for 50+ joint cramps' (persona + trigger)
- 'Why you wake up tired even after 8 hours' (problem-aware + curiosity hook)
- 'UGC: I tried this for 14 days, here's what happened' (proof + format)
- 'Founder talking head: why we put 300mg instead of 100mg' (differentiation + brand trust)

Every creative you ship should be traceable to a specific concept. If you can't name the concept in one sentence, it's a fuzzy brief and it'll come back as a fuzzy ad.

a. Find existing best-performing ads - Inside your own ad account, look at your top 10 ads by ROAS over the last 90 days. Then look at the next 10. Notice patterns. Is it always founder-led? Always testimonial? Always Hinglish? Always under 30 seconds? Always opening with a problem? You're not looking for the one 'winner', you're looking for the structural pattern that wins. That pattern becomes your concept template.

b. Scroll reels with intent - Every team member should spend 30-45 min a day scrolling reels with the intent of capturing hooks. Save anything that stops your thumb. Forget whether it's your category - the hook

itself is the lesson. Apple's ad, a Zomato meme, a fitness creator's rant - all sources. Build a shared swipe folder.

c. Have teams set up algos - This is meta-level (no pun intended). Train each of your team members' personal IG and FB feeds to show your category's ads. How? Follow competitor pages. Like the products you study. Click the ads. Watch their videos to completion. Within 2 weeks, your feed becomes a personal research dashboard - Meta will keep serving you the best ads in your category. Free, ongoing, and infinitely more useful than any report.

d. Have a shared 'concept bank' - Run a Notion / Sheets doc with: concept name, hook example, target persona, awareness level, status (untested / live / winner / killed). Aim for 30-50 angles always sitting in the bank. Every weekly meeting picks 5-8 from the bank to actually produce that week. The bank is your inventory; production is the assembly line.

e. Hooks - A hook is the first 3 seconds of the ad. Period. It's the one job: stop the scroll. Once you know your product benefits, differentiation, triggers and angles, hooks practically write themselves. The hook is just a punchy way of dramatising the trigger or the differentiation.

Some hook templates that make your creative juices flow:

- Pattern interrupt: 'I was today years old when I found out...'
- Direct callout: 'If you have oily skin, this is for you.'
- Provocative statement: 'Stop buying whey protein. Here's why.'
- Result first: 'I dropped 8 kgs in 90 days. Here's exactly what I changed.'
- Mistake/myth bust: 'You're drinking coffee wrong. This is making you anxious.'
- Visual disruption: an unusual close-up, an unexpected texture, a strange action in frame

- Question hook: 'Why is your hair falling more this year than last year?'

Research gives you raw material. The real skill is choosing what to make. This is the step that separates brands and most get it wrong by trying to produce everything. Volume isn't taste. The brands that scale are the ones with the intuition to back a few concepts hard instead of spreading thin across all of them.

That judgment gets sharper when it's written down. Keep a concept tracker - what won, what died, what's still untested - so you're building on every past bet instead of guessing fresh each month. Something like this:

Concept	Product	Awareness	Angle	Demographic	Format	Trigger	Hook
1	Magnesium	Problem unaware	Magnesium deficiency	MF 25-35	Authority	Blood test misses magnesium	Most people get their blood test done but miss out on
2	Magnesium	Problem aware	Foggy Brain	MF 25-35	Creator talking head	Busy voices in head	Visual - person with consistent background noise
3	Magnesium	Problem aware	Muscle soreness	MF 25-35	White board	Soreness post workout	I was today years old when I found out
4	Magnesium	Solution aware	Daily requirement	MF 25-35	Founder ad	Others brands don't have 200mg	Look at the back label of your magnesium

There's one exception though to this framework though.

Most of the awareness and product differentiation point doesn't apply much to fashion and accessories. In these categories, the buyer has seen ten thousand product shots, a hundred "elevate your wardrobe" lines, every discount, every model-on-white-background. So the differentiation problem doesn't go away - it intensifies. Commodity and education-led categories compete on awareness. Fashion competes on sophistication and identity.

So your "concepts" in fashion aren't built on what stage of understanding the buyer is at. They're built on different axes entirely:

1. Identity / self-image - Nobody buys a bag for utility, they buy who it makes them. The concept axis is which version of themselves the product signals - "quiet luxury", "the one effortlessly put-together friend", "main character at brunch", "I have my life together". These are your personas, but defined by aspiration and identity, not by problem-awareness. This is the single biggest replacement for the awareness ladder.

2. Occasion / use-case - This is where the persona-as-use-case logic ports over cleanly - it just isn't about a problem, it's about a moment. "Wedding guest season", "first day at the new job", "the dress that survives a 14-hour travel day", "gym-to-coffee without changing". The same SKU is genuinely different ads for different occasions. This is your concept diversity engine in fashion.

3. Style tribe / aesthetic - Old money vs. streetwear vs. minimalist vs. Gorpcore vs. traditional. The same product photographed and framed for one tribe is invisible to another. A concept here is which aesthetic world you're speaking into - and crucially, the creative casts the audience exactly like the previous framework: the model, the setting, the music, the edit all signal "this is for people like you," and Meta delivers accordingly.

4. The hook/objection layer that does survive - Even with no awareness gap, fashion has real friction concepts: fit and sizing anxiety, "will it look like the photo," fabric/quality skepticism, returns hassle, "is this worth the price." Each of these is legitimate concept territory. A whole ad about fit confidence, or about the fabric in motion, counts as a concept on its own.

The discipline from the rest of this doc holds exactly: don't treat your market as one homogeneous blob, build distinct concepts for genuinely distinct buyers, and let the creative carry the targeting signal. What changes is *how you slice the market*. In an education-led category, you slice by awareness. In fashion and accessories, you slice by identity, occasion, and aesthetic.

Metrics to track

Meta Ads Manager will show you 350+ metrics if you let it. 95% of those are noise. Tracking too many metrics is the same as tracking none - you don't know what to act on. Here's exactly what to look at and why.

1. Only ROAS matters (eventually)

Let me be blunt. At the end of every month, the only number that matters to the brand owner is: 'did I make more money than I spent?' That's ROAS (Return on Ad Spend) - revenue from ads ÷ spend on ads. If your ROAS is 3.5x and the brand needs 3x to be profitable, you're a hero. If it's 1.8x, no other metric will save you.

Here's the controversial part - CTR (click-through rate) and CVR (conversion rate) don't reliably correlate with ROAS. Read that twice. We've had ads with 0.5% CTR that printed money and ads with 4% CTR that lost money. Why? Because CTR captures attention efficiency, but ROAS captures purchase intent. An ad with a clickbait hook can have huge CTR and zero buyers. An ad with a slow start and a niche promise can have small CTR and crazy ROAS because every clicker is in-market.

This is why ranking creatives by CTR is one of the most common mistakes we see some media buyers make. Rank by ROAS. Always.

2. Hook rates and hold rates (the creative diagnosis tools)

These are the two metrics that tell you WHERE your creative is leaking. Neither is in Meta Ads Manager by default - you have to add them as custom metrics.

Hook Rate = 3-second video views ÷ impressions × 100

Hook rate measures how scroll-stopping your first 3 seconds are. Think of it as your ad's first impression in real life - did the person stop walking and look, or keep moving?

Benchmarks (Meta):

- Below 20% - your hook is broken. Re-shoot the first 3 seconds before anything else.
- 20-25% - baseline acceptable, room to improve
- 25-35% - good, scale-worthy
- 35%+ - elite. These are the ads that print money for months.

Hold Rate = ThruPlays (15s or full video) ÷ 3-second views × 100

Hold rate measures whether the people you hooked actually stayed for the story. A high hold rate means your body delivers on the hook's promise.

Benchmarks (Meta):

- Below 30% - the body of the ad isn't earning attention. Tighten edits, drop the slow middle, deliver the promise faster.
- 30-40% - average
- 40-50% - good
- 50%+ - elite

The diagnosis logic:

- Low hook + low hold = the ad is just bad. Kill it.
- High hook + low hold = great opening, bad story. The hook over-promised or the body is boring - iterate the script while keeping the hook.
- Low hook + high hold = great content for people who stay, but no one stays. Re-cut the first 3 seconds; everything after is fine.
- High hook + high hold + low ROAS = your ad is good content but the offer / product / landing page is the bottleneck. Fix the funnel, not the creative.

4. CPM, CTR, CVR - the supporting cast

These are not your hero metrics, but they help you diagnose what's going on.

CPM (Cost per 1000 impressions) - How much Meta is charging you to show the ad. Rising CPMs = either increased competition (auction is hot), or your creative is getting penalised by the algo (low engagement signals), or both. A sudden CPM spike on a previously stable account = first place to check is creative fatigue (frequency creeping above 3-3.5).

CTR (Click-Through Rate) - Of people who saw your ad, what % clicked. Useful for diagnosing whether your CTA / value-prop is sharp enough at the end of the ad. But don't worship this - as discussed, it doesn't reliably correlate with sales.

CVR (Conversion Rate on Landing Page) - Of people who clicked, what % bought. This is largely a function of the landing page, the offer, and (importantly) the alignment between your ad and your landing page. If CVR is below 1%, the problem is almost never the ad - it's the landing page. Common Indian D2C CVRs: 1-3% on cold traffic, 3-7% on warm.

Frequency - How many times the average person has seen your ad in the selected date range. Above 2.5 in 7 days on cold audiences = creative fatigue is starting. Above 4 = full-blown fatigue, ROAS is dropping. Refresh creative.

2. Retention curve (unrelated to ads, but most imp. in the long run)

ROAS tells you 'did this month work?'. The retention curve tells you 'will this brand exist in 12 months?'

Retention curve = % of first-time buyers who buy again in month 1, month 3, month 6, month 12. For consumables (skincare, supplements, food), a healthy month-3 repeat rate is 20-35%. Below 15% in these categories

means either the product isn't great, or your follow-up is broken, or you're acquiring the wrong customers or through wrong messaging.

Why this matters for creative strategy: if your retention curve is strong, you can afford to spend more on Meta (because LTV will cover the higher CAC). If retention is weak, no amount of ad optimisation will save you - you're filling a leaky bucket faster.

As a thumb rule, the LTV:CAC ratio must be $> 3x$ in 3 years period for a business to be healthy. This requires a separate note, so might cover this separately

Creative planning (instead of media planning)

In the old days, marketers did 'media planning' - deciding which audience to target, what budget to allocate to which interest, how to split between prospecting and retargeting. Today, with Andromeda doing 90% of that work, the strategic act is creative planning - deciding what to produce, in what volume, for which concept, at what frequency.

Creative is fatiguing faster over time

CPMs in India are up 20-30% since 2023. Consumer attention has shrunk. Every advertiser is producing more, so the user's feed has more competing brands than ever. The same ad that ran for 4 months in 2019 now decays in 2-3 weeks.

Why does fatigue happen?

- If you won't watch the same organic reel twice, why would you watch the same ad twice
- Once the average user sees your ad 2.5+ times in a week, engagement craters
- Meta interprets low engagement as 'this isn't great content' and throttles your delivery
- Your CPM rises (you're competing harder for the same eyeballs)
- Your hook rate drops (people recognise it and scroll past)
- Your ROAS quietly slips, then collapses

The signal to refresh isn't when ROAS has already crashed. It's when frequency on cold audiences crosses 2-3 in a week AND your CTR has dropped 20%+ from its peak. By the time ROAS is dropping, you're already late by 7-10 days.

More is not always better

'So Rishab, should I get my clients to just produce 100 ads a month?'
No. Volume without quality is just noise - and it dilutes the signal for

Meta's algo. We've seen brands ship 100 ads a month and underperform brands shipping 20. Why? Because most of those 100 ads were minor variations (same script, new background music) and Meta groups them as one and learns nothing new.

The right metric is unique CONCEPTS shipped, not unique files. One concept can have 3-5 variations (different hooks, different CTAs, different lengths).

Concept diversity > format diversity. A founder talking head and a UGC testimonial are different formats. 'Why your sleep is broken' and 'Why your gym performance plateaus' are different concepts. Meta rewards the latter much more.

Thumb rules we live by

Heuristics, not gospel. But they've held up across 50+ brands and 6+ years.

1. Minimum 15-20 new ads per month - Even if 2 become winners, you would be able to spend max 2-3L/mo on them.

2. The 70:30 rule - 70% of your monthly production should be iterations on what's already working - new hooks for a winning concept, new variations of a proven format, new testimonials in the same style as your winners. The other 30% should be totally new bets - fresh angles, untested formats, weird ideas. Without the 70%, you have no compounding. Without the 30%, you're a dead brand walking the day your one winner fatigues.

3. One ad per 1L of monthly spend (approx) - Roughly, you need 1 new creative for every Rs 1L spent per month, with a floor of 20.

4. Creative production cost should be < 10% of media spend - If you're spending Rs 1 Cr/month on Meta, your creative production budget should

be under Rs 10L/month. If you're paying Rs 50K per UGC video and producing 20 of them, that's Rs 10L of creative cost for only 20% of the requirement - the math doesn't work. Use micro-influencers, in-house UGC, AI-assisted edits, batch shoots. The economics of creative-as-the-lever only work when production stays cheap.

Quick math check: brand spending Rs 20L/month on Meta should ship ~20 unique ads/month at a total production cost of < Rs 2L/month. That's ~Rs 10K per video on average. Totally doable with UGC creators at Rs 5-10k per piece, founder-led content at near-zero cost, and a small studio budget for the polished hero ads.

The Creative Plan template

Every month, before you produce anything, sit down and plan. The plan is a sheet with one row per creative, with these columns filled in BEFORE you brief anyone:

- **Product / SKU level** - Which product is this ad for? (For multi-SKU brands, allocate the creative count roughly in proportion to revenue contribution - your hero SKUs get more ads.)
- **Trigger** - Which life moment / pain point are we dramatising in this ad?
- **Persona (age + gender + use case)** - Who is the casting / language / setting signalling to?
- **Angle** - One sentence describing the core idea. 'Founder talking about why we don't use palm oil.' Done.
- **Format** - UGC / founder / talking head / podcast / creator / static / carousel / animation
- **Awareness level** - Unaware / Problem / Solution / Product / Most aware

A sheet with these 6 columns and a clear creator/assignee for each row is the entire monthly creative plan. Anything more is overengineering.

Creative testing framework

There are 2 frameworks that we've seen work so far:

Framework 1: you can't learn anything from an ad that didn't get enough spend.

Rule 1: Spend at max 10% of your budget in testing new creatives - Say you're spending 1cr/month and create 100 new ads, you can afford to spend 10k/creative just to test whether they work. Say you spend 20L/mo and create 30 new ads, you can spend 6.7k/creative to test over a period of 3-7 days.

Practical setup: spin up a 'Creative Testing' campaign separate from your main scaling campaigns. Inside it, create 2 ad sets with broad targeting (or with light persona settings if your category demands it). Drop the new creatives into both ad sets. Run for at least 7 days or until each creative has hit the min. spend, whichever is later.

Rule 2: If something picks up in an ad set, scale it there - If a creative is showing strong ROAS in one of the two test ad sets (above your target), just increase the budget on that ad set by 20-30% / day until it stabilises. You may also move this to a scaled ad set for the same product with other winners.

Rule 3: If a winner doesn't pick up because other ads have taken over - Sometimes you can see in the data that a creative is good (high hook rate, decent CTR, decent purchases) but Meta won't allocate budget to it because there's a HERO ad in the same ad set eating all the spend. Classic algorithm problem - Meta loves the existing winner too much.

The fix: put the potential winner into a new, separate ad set with NO hero ad. Give it room to breathe. If it's genuinely good, it'll pick up there. If it doesn't pick up even without competition, then yes - it's just an average ad pretending to be a winner.

What 'picks up' means (don't kill too early)

Common mistake: people kill ads after 2 days because spend is low or ROAS looks bad. Wait. Most creatives need at least 4-7 days of delivery to truly stabilise. The first 48 hours can be misleading in both directions - sometimes a great ad has a slow start (Meta is still figuring out who to show it to), and sometimes a bad ad has a hot first 24 hours (Meta showed it to a small high-intent pocket, then quality drops).

Kill rules (after min. spend OR 7 days, whichever first):

- Hook rate < 15% - pause. The opening doesn't work.
- CTR < bottom 20 percentile at an account level - pause. The body / CTA isn't working.
- ROAS < 50% of your target after min. spend - pause.
- Zero purchases on min. spend - pause.

Keep / scale rules:

- ROAS at or above target after min. spend → increase ad-set budget by 20-30% / day
- ROAS 50-80% of target but high hook + hold + CTR → keep running, may improve as algo learns

How to scale a winning ad set without breaking it

Scaling is where you can blow up perfectly good campaigns. The instinct is to 2x or 3x the budget overnight. Don't. Meta's learning phase will reset, the algo will get confused, and you'll watch your ROAS halve in 48 hours.

Rules:

- Increase budget by no more than 20-30% per day
- If you really want to scale faster, DUPLICATE the winning ad set with a higher budget rather than editing the original

- Don't add new creatives to a winning ad set - they'll cannibalise spend from the winner. Test new creatives in your testing campaign first.

Understand unit economics

Last section, and arguably the most important one. Because if the unit economics are broken, no amount of creative wizardry will save the brand. We've seen agencies do gorgeous creative work for brands that simply couldn't afford the CAC their margin allowed for, and watched both sides lose.

Category economics - know what's actually possible

Every category has a natural CPM, CPC, and CVR range, set by the buyer's search intent and the auction's competition level. You can't fight this gravity - you can only work with it. Trying to make a low-margin food brand work at 5x ROAS is like trying to make a fish climb a tree.

Baseline benchmarks (Indian D2C, 2026):

- **CPC** - ₹4-₹20 depending on category. Higher CTR creatives push CPC down dramatically.
- **CVR (Landing page)** - 1-3% on cold traffic for most D2C, 3-7% on warm / retargeting.
- **CAC** - ₹200-₹800 for most categories; premium / niche brands can hit ₹1,500+.

The four numbers every founder + agency must know

Before you spend a single rupee on Meta, sit with the founder and lock these:

1. Gross Margin % - Revenue per order minus COGS, payment gateway, shipping, returns and taxes. For a healthy D2C brand, this should be 50-70%.

2. Break-even ROI = $1 \div \text{Gross Margin \%}$ - If your gross margin is 50%, you need a minimum 2x ROI to break even on marketing. If it's 33%, you need 3x. If it's 25%, you need 4x. Mind you - this is ROI and not ROAS

which means Total sales / Ad spends as there are categories where you won't make money on the first purchase.

3. CAC payback period - How many months does it take for a customer's repeat purchases to 'pay back' your acquisition cost? Healthy D2C target: under 6 months. If your CAC is ₹600, AOV is ₹800, and gross margin is 50%, each order gives back ₹400. So payback is '1.5 orders'. If your customers re-order every 4 months on average, payback is ~6 months.

4. LTV:CAC ratio - Should be > 3x in 3 years for the business to be healthy. Below 2x and the brand is burning. Above 4x and the brand is probably under-spending on growth.

How to actually USE this in creative strategy

Here's where unit economics directly shapes creative decisions, which most strategists miss:

- **If your AOV is low (<₹500)** - The landing page must incentivise pushing the AOV above the certain threshold by bundling products
- **If your category has long buying cycles (mattresses, appliances, premium beauty)** - More content needs to be problem-aware / education-led. Retargeting becomes critical. Don't expect first-touch conversions.
- **If your repeat rate is strong (consumables, supplements)** - You can afford to push CAC higher initially because LTV will cover. First-purchase ROAS targets can be relaxed, provided retention infrastructure (email/WhatsApp flows) is in place.

Other general gyaan

Random but important things we've learnt the hard way. Treat this section as the 'things they don't tell you' chapter.

1. Your 'ugly' ad will probably beat your polished one

This is universal in 2026 D2C. The phone-shot UGC video, with bad lighting, real human energy, awkward pauses - consistently outperforms the agency-polished, studio-lit, 4-day-edit hero ad. Why? Because users have learned to filter 'ad' from 'content' in 0.5 seconds. Polish reads as 'ad'. Roughness reads as 'content'.

This doesn't mean don't make polished ads at all - the brand needs visual identity. But your scale ads should look like things a creator would post organically. Save the high-budget polish for hero brand films and TVCs, not for performance creatives.

2. The ad : landing page : offer triangle

Creative is one third of conversion. The other two thirds are landing page and offer. We see brands spending 90% of their time on creatives and 10% on the landing page - wrong split. Every Rupee you spend driving paid traffic to your homepage is a partial waste. Build product-specific landing pages that mirror the ad's exact message and hook.

The 30-second test: open your ad on Instagram, click the CTA, and watch what loads. If the ad talks about 'bloating' and the landing page leads with 'premium herbal wellness solution', you've broken the link.

3. Don't copy competitor ads, decode them

If you literally re-shoot a competitor's ad with your product, you'll lose - they have brand equity you don't. Instead, study WHY their ad works (the hook structure, the pacing, the emotional arc, the offer) and re-express it in your brand's voice. The structure is borrowable. The content has to be original.

4. Refresh creatives every 3-4 weeks, even when ROAS is good

Don't wait for fatigue to start. Preempt it. The brands that scale smoothly are the ones that already have next month's creatives in production while this month's are still printing money. You should build the production pipeline so you're always 30 days ahead, never 7 days behind.

5. The compounding nature of creative wins

This is the most underrated truth in this entire doc. Every winning concept you find isn't a one-time win - it's a TEMPLATE for 5-10 more ads in that style. One winning UGC angle = a quarter's worth of variations. Once you find a vein, mine it ruthlessly. Then, while it's still working, spend your 30% innovation budget finding the next vein. That's how you build a creative engine instead of running a creative gamble.

That's the doc. Treat it as a living thing - we'll keep updating it as Meta keeps changing the game. If you spot something we've missed, or if you've seen something work that contradicts what's here, tell us. The whole point is to keep getting sharper.

- Rishab + Hitarth

Thank you!

Disclaimer: This document represents what's worked for us across 50+ brands and 6 years. It is not a law of physics. Meta will change its algorithm approximately four times before you finish reading this sentence, your category is probably weird in ways we haven't met yet, and your one cousin who "knows marketing" will disagree with all of it. Test everything, trust your numbers over our opinions, and if something here makes you money, we'd genuinely love to hear about it. If it loses you money, you clearly read it wrong.

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