

Competitive Messaging and Creative Interpretation

When is a change in search, shopping or sales really a creative effect, and when is it offers, events, inventory or product timing?

An excerpt from one of the 50+ industry guides I designed to teach an AI analyst how an experienced auto analyst reasons. The guides drew only on public information; no client data went into them. Examples are illustrative, not client results.

Market focus	U.S. mainstream (non-luxury) automotive: Hyundai, Kia, Toyota, Honda, Ford, Chevrolet, Nissan, Subaru, Volkswagen, Mazda
Refresh	Quarterly, or when brand messaging or sales-event framing changes materially
Confidence	High for publicly visible messaging and shopping-flow cues; medium for inferred creative strategy
Stated limit	Improves interpretation of message effects. Does not prove creative causality or replace lift studies, copy testing, MMM or geo experiments.

Required reasoning order

1. What changed?
2. What kind of message was likely in market? (value, capability, design, safety and trust, electrification, easy shopping)
3. Which funnel stage should that message move first?
4. Did the observed metric move in a way that matches the message type?
5. What else could explain the movement?
6. What should be checked next?

Core principle: creative moves the funnel before it moves sales

Likely creative-led Message launches → branded, campaign and model traffic rise → comparison and build activity rise → shopping and lead metrics rise → sales follow with a lag	Likely offer-led Offer launches → offer-page and payment traffic spike → quotes rise → sales rise quickly
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If the first movement appears only in offer sessions, payment starts or quote requests, the more likely explanation is offer or affordability mechanics, not the message.

What each message type should move first

Message type	Should move first	Rule for the agent
Value / affordability	Offer sessions, payment starts, finance and quote requests	If only branded search rises, the creative drew attention without a retail response
Design / premium	Model pages, galleries, build starts, comparisons	Comparison and build activity should rise before quotes
Capability / utility	SUV and truck model pages, inventory search, quotes, test drives	A lift isolated to broad awareness may not be real consideration
Safety / trust	Model detail, comparisons, conversion quality	Modest traffic with better lower-funnel conversion can still mean it worked
Electrification	EV and hybrid model pages, range and charging content	Awareness-only movement is normal; don't call it failed unless lower-funnel movement was expected

Easy shopping	Digital-retail starts, local-price requests, payment tools	Judge on lower-funnel tool usage, not brand traffic
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False positives: what looks like a creative win but often isn't

- **Incentive change:** APR, lease or cash moved in the same window.
- **Inventory change:** shoppers converted because the vehicle was finally available.
- **Sales-event timing:** named events produce spikes that are partly calendar-normal.
- **Launch or redesign:** a new product creates attention regardless of creative quality.
- **Reviews and awards:** a strong review cycle inflates attention without any media change.

Standard annotation, with an illustrative example

Result: A compact SUV's model-page traffic and comparison views rise; offer sessions and quote requests stay flat.

What changed: Model and comparison activity increased; lower-funnel activity did not.

Likely message type: Consistent with design, technology or consideration-stage messaging, not a retail offer.

Most likely explanation: The campaign improved product evaluation and shortlist entry but has not yet changed purchase intent.

Main confounders: Inventory, incentive competitiveness, launch or review timing, lag to retail action.

Business implication: Consideration may be improving, but it is too early to call a sales win.

What to check next: Build starts, inventory search, payment-tool use and quote requests over the next 2-4 weeks.

The one question the guide answers: does this pattern look like a true message effect, or is it more likely driven by offers, events, inventory or product timing? If uncertain, say which variables are needed before making a stronger claim.

Excerpt, edited for length. The guide told the agent how to reason about results held in a separate governed data layer; it contains no Innocean or client data.