APP INSTALL MARKETING STUDY
VIDEO CREATIVE BEST PRACTICES
JUNE 2016

adCOLONY
by **O** Opera
MEDIAWORKS

About This Study

As the mobile app stores continue to become increasingly crowded, so the job of the app install marketer becomes ever more challenging. While advanced audience targeting and look-alike modeling can improve a campaign's likelihood of success, there is yet another important consideration when launching a campaign: the creative.

So what makes a video ad creative successful? What drives higher install rates? To find out, we indexed over 11,000 ad creatives for over 2,500 apps, tagging each with the specific creative elements featured within, from use of voiceover or other sound effects to text callouts and live action. In total, **over 10 billion mobile video ad impressions** were analyzed, and we found:

- The creative durations that perform best
- Which languages are most important to localize for
- When to use —and when to avoid— live action
- When featured characters work ...and when they don't
- Winning combinations for audio
- And much more

To share the findings of the study in a meaningful yet digestible format for app install marketers, this report opens with a few best practices and high level trends followed by a deep dive into 23 unique app genres.

Table of Contents

CREATIVE TRENDS OVERVIEW
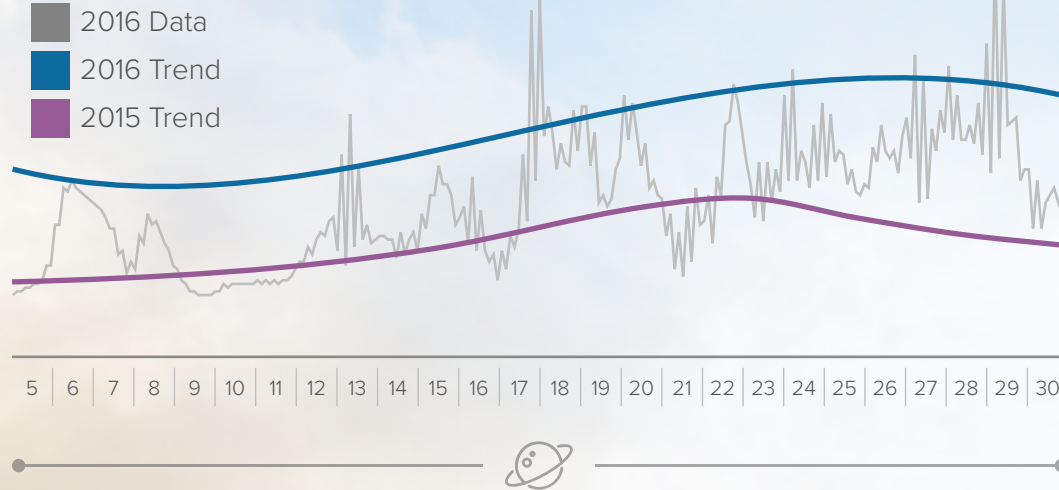
Creative Best Practices

While the specific creative elements that are most effective for each genre vary wildly and are covered in depth later in this report, a few overarching trends and best practices are clear:

- **Audiences are more engaged.** As ads become richer and more immersive than ever before, users are more receptive to longer creatives that approach more traditional durations.

- **Localization is key** for global campaigns, and the majority of the top 100 app install marketers are already leveraging it.

- **Be authentic**. Giving the user a realistic perspective of the in-app experience is critical. Don't distract with too many special effects or other out-of-app elements.

- **Stand out.** Know your competition. Sometimes it pays buck the trend and to stand out creatively from other apps in your genre.

- **Cast audio in a supporting role**. While the right mix of audio can enhance the user's emotional response to the creative, it mustn't be a narrative crutch or a distraction from highly detailed visuals.

- **Live action is risky**. While featured characters and celebrities can improve ad recall and showcase heuristic benefits, they can also outshine the app itself. Likewise, poorly executed finger-tapping or in-device framing can distract users and deter installs.

Optimal Video Duration

Install Rate

- 2016 Data
- 2016 Trend
- 2015 Trend

| 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | 9 | 10 | 11 | 12 | 13 | 14 | 15 | 16 | 17 | 18 | 19 | 20 | 21 | 22 | 23 | 24 | 25 | 26 | 27 | 28 | 29 | 30 |

While unique video durations continue to be the most effective on mobile, creatives are trending slightly longer this year. While 20 to 25 second videos drove the highest install rates in 2015, this year creatives that are 23 to 29 seconds in duration have seen the strongest performance.

Why has this happened? As app stores become more competitive, these additional seconds can allow the publisher to better convey what makes their app unique, thereby piquing user interest to install. Nevertheless, mobile user attention and patience is limited; as such, extending creative beyond 28 or 29 seconds is not recommended and offers diminishing returns.

For straightforward apps in less competitive categories, marketers have also found success with 17 to 18 second creative. Slightly longer than the standard 15 second spot, effective ads of this duration typically feature quick cuts and sharp animations, often cycling through as many as 6 or 7 distinct scenes.

Localization Lift

Install Rate Impact

- ■ French
- ■ German
- ■ Spanish
- ■ Korean
- ■ Japanese
- ■ Russian

Chart bars:
- + 3%
- + 16%
- + 37%
- + 41%
- + 44%
- + 48%
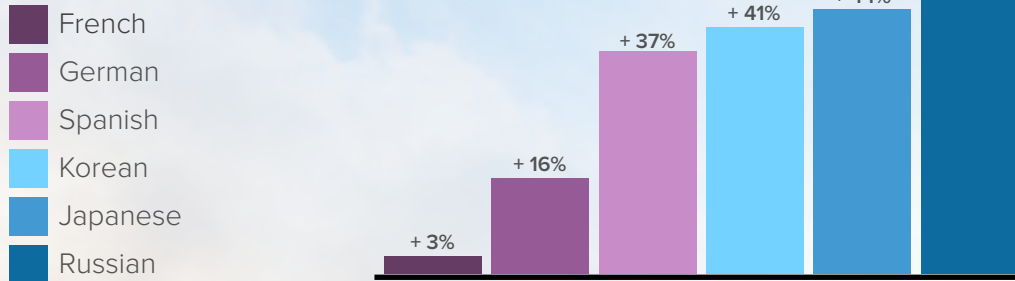
With 68% of the top app install marketers expanding their campaigns into more geos in 2016, localization is more prevalent than ever before. In fact, 80% of the top marketers already localize creative for their user acquisition campaigns, and the majority are localizing for 5 or more geos. While localization does require additional work, the returns are typically worth it.

Examining language localization trends in Q1 of 2016, we found that localizing global campaigns in Russian, Japanese, Korean, and Spanish yielded considerable install rate boosts. Meanwhile, localizing for French or German yielded modest IR improvements.

Granted, there are varying degrees of localization. While translating text overlays is a cost effective of localizing ad creative, relying on this alone will not yield maximum results. The most savvy app install marketers go further, using regionally appealing voices, music, and even live actors. After all, the more a user can identify with a particular creative, the more persuasive the creative becomes.

Animation Mix

Legend:
- Animation
- In-App Footage
- Combined

Categories: CTR, CVR, IR
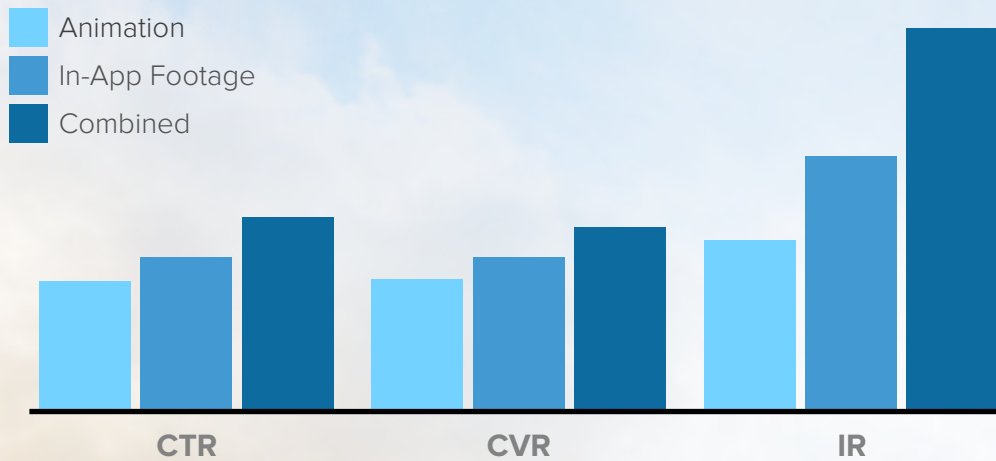
When developing ad creative, the temptation is always to enhance the perception of the in-app experience, often with custom animations. While this can help, overuse of custom animations or sound effects may portray an the app in an unrealistic manner.

Consequently, some users are turned away by the excessive animations, and others become disillusioned once they install the app and discover that the actual experience is quite different.
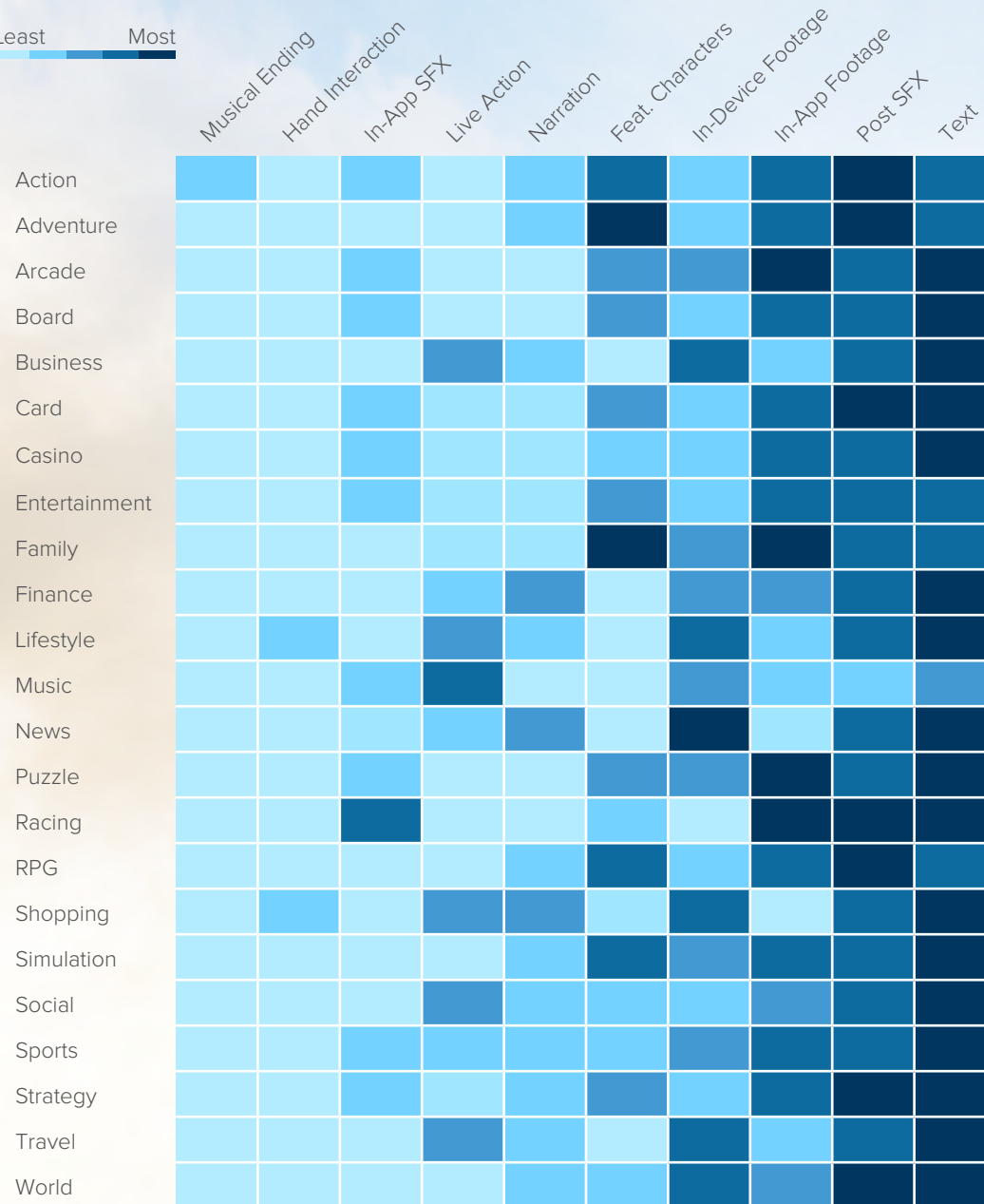
For an optimal user experience and campaign performance, it's advisable for app creatives to use a mix of in-app footage and custom animations. In fact, videos utilizing both in-app footage and custom animation have:

- 26% higher CTR and 19% better CVR than in-app footage alone
- 50% higher CTR and 39% better CVR than animation alone

Creative Prevalence Summary

Least — Most

	Musical Ending	Hand Interaction	In-App SFX	Live Action	Narration	Feat. Characters	In-Device Footage	In-App Footage	Post SFX	Text
Action										
Adventure										
Arcade										
Board										
Business										
Card										
Casino										
Entertainment										
Family										
Finance										
Lifestyle										
Music										
News										
Puzzle										
Racing										
RPG										
Shopping										
Simulation										
Social										
Sports										
Strategy										
Travel										
World										

Creative Effectiveness Summary

Least   Most

	Live Action	Hand Interaction	Musical Ending	In-Device Footage	In-App SFX	Text	Narration	Feat. Characters	Post SFX	In-App Footage
Action										
Adventure										
Arcade										
Board										
Business										
Card										
Casino										
Entertainment										
Family										
Finance										
Lifestyle										
Music										
News										
Puzzle										
Racing										
RPG										
Shopping										
Simulation										
Social										
Sports										
Strategy										
Travel										
World										

Action Games

Install Rate Impact

- In-Device Usage
- Text
- Featured Characters
- In-Game SFX
- Hand Interaction
- Live Action

Chart values:
- In-Device Usage: - 12%
- Text: - 11%
- Featured Characters: - 11%
- In-Game SFX: + 16%
- Hand Interaction: + 66%
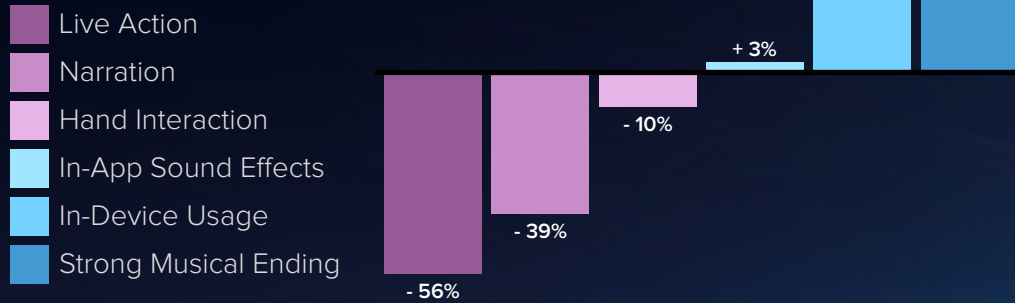- Live Action: + 88%

Over 1000 creatives for over 200 apps were included in the analysis for action games. A highly competitive category, the baseline install rate for these apps was lower than the overall average.

Nevertheless, ads that leveraged hand interaction or live actors enjoyed install rates notably higher than the overall average, and considerably higher than the genre's baseline. However, only a small percentage of ad creative leveraged these tactics. As such, it may be speculated that the comparative rarity of these tactics may be what differentiated these apps & piqued user interest to install. Meanwhile, one third of creatives in this genre used in-game sound effects to add interes, which resulted in a modest IR boost.

On the under performing end, usage of in-device gameplay footage, large text callouts, or featured characters all hurt install rates. Granted, fans of this genre are most interested in the action, not the personalities of in-game characters, distracting text, or framing that hinders visibility of gameplay.

Adventure Games

Install Rate Impact

- Live Action
- Narration
- Hand Interaction
- In-App Sound Effects
- In-Device Usage
- Strong Musical Ending

+ 24%
+ 20%
+ 3%
- 10%
- 39%
- 56%

Nearly 500 creatives for over 100 apps were included in the analysis for adventure games. Although a relatively competitive category, the baseline install rate for these apps was markedly higher than the study average.
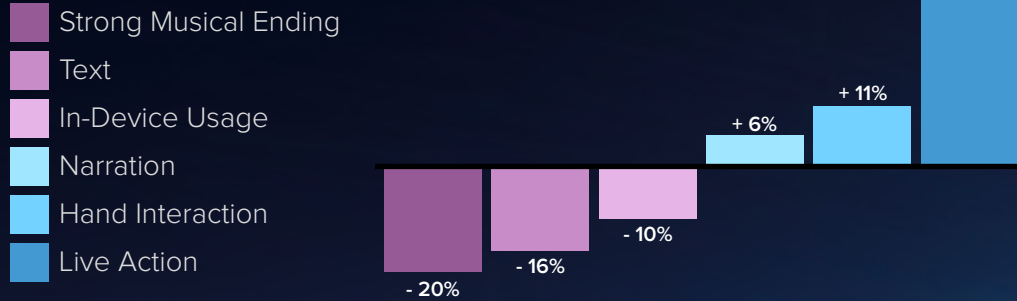
An interesting dichotomy discovered was the disparate performance of ads that leveraged narration versus those whose audio were more affective in nature. While the use of audio narration correlated with an install rate 56% below the genre baseline, the use of in-game sound effects and a strong musical ending correlated with a modestly to moderately boosted install rate.

The use of hand interaction also proved to be a detriment to driving installs. While users responded positively to in-device gameplay portrayals, ads that showed physical hand interaction was a detractor.

Looking at the data collectively, it is clear that fans of this genre are better swayed when in-app visuals tell the story without distraction & when audio is used to enhance the mood and not used as a narrative crutch.

Arcade Games

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- Text
- In-Device Usage
- Narration
- Hand Interaction
- Live Action

Chart values: - 20%, - 16%, - 10%, + 6%, + 11%, + 34%

Nearly 300 creatives for 75 apps were included in the analysis for arcade games. A less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 41% higher than the study average.
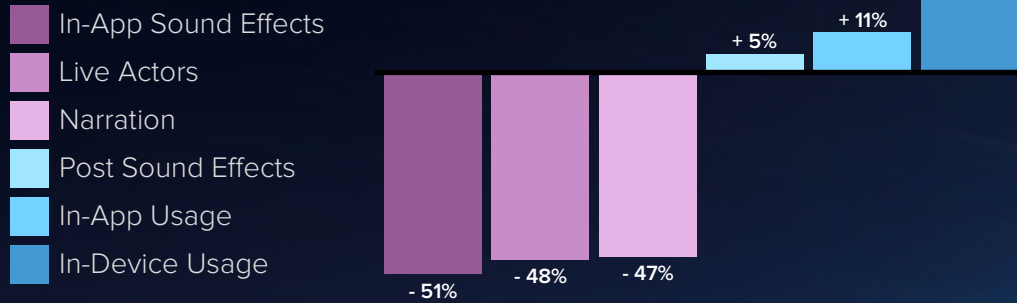
Unlike adventure games, the use of live actors in arcade game ad creative proved to be an excellent tactic for the 5% of apps that used it. In a similar vein, a small number of creatives used hand interaction to showcase gameplay mechanics and enjoyed a modest IR boost (11%) for doing so. Simply, these ads better conveyed an enjoyable in-app experience than their competitors.

Interestingly, while using text overlays is a frequently effective tactic for app install marketers and is heavily used in arcade ads, it proved to be too much of a distraction and correlated with a 16% drop in install rates.

Taking a step back, it is clear that the arcade games that best differientiated themselves from similar ads were those that enjoyed the highest install rates.

Board Games

Install Rate Impact

- In-App Sound Effects
- Live Actors
- Narration
- Post Sound Effects
- In-App Usage
- In-Device Usage

+ 23%
+ 11%
+ 5%
- 51%
- 48%
- 47%

A slightly smaller segment of this study, 122 creatives were included in the analysis for board games. A less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 71% higher than the study average.
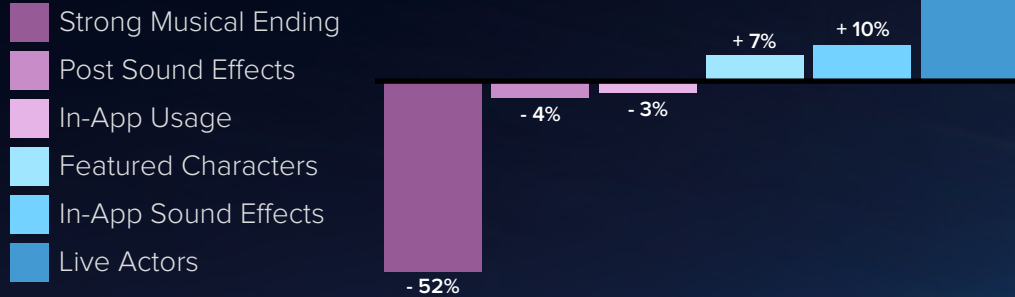
What is most interesting about this genre is the nuances between various types of audio. While prominently featuring in-game sound effects negatively affects install rates, adding special sound effects through post has a modestly positive effect. Similarly, usage of live actors or voiceover narration also is a deterrent to download.

In this sense, it may be construed that ad creative for board games is best when audio departs from reality and is used merely for effect.

Meanwhile, showcasing gameplay both full-screen (in-app) and framed within a device (in-device) is critical for boosting install rates. In short, while audio should detach from reality, visuals should emphasize it.

Card Games

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- Post Sound Effects
- In-App Usage
- Featured Characters
- In-App Sound Effects
- Live Actors

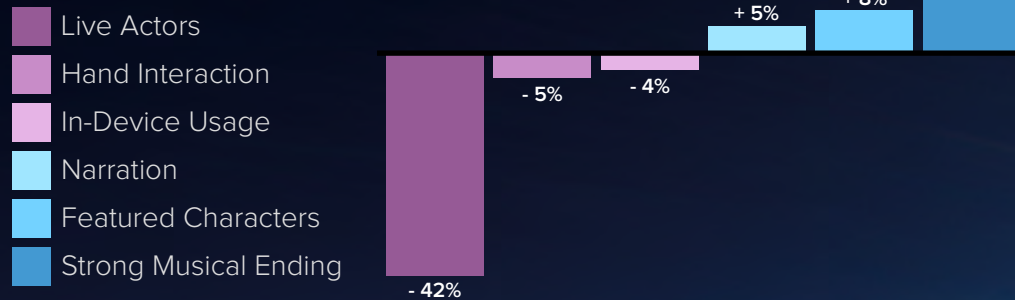Chart values: - 52%, - 4%, - 3%, + 7%, + 10%, + 27%

Over 400 creatives for over 400 apps were studied in the analysis of card game app install ads. A modestly competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 35% lower than the study average, and was the lowest of all the gaming categories.

What's most interesting about this app category is that the strategies that work best for card game app install ads is essentially the opposite of what works for boad games. While successful board game ads focused on realistic visuals and unrealistic audio, ads for card games perform best when they avoid overly produced or dramatic audio and downplay the in-app experience.

Instead, card game ad creatives perform the best when live actors and featured characters are used to give the game personality, downplaying the actual in-app experience. To tie these visually appealing subjects to the app, in-game sound effects are occassionally used.

Casino Games

Install Rate Impact

- Live Actors
- Hand Interaction
- In-Device Usage
- Narration
- Featured Characters
- Strong Musical Ending

- 42%   - 5%   - 4%   + 5%   + 8%   + 12%

Over 500 creatives for over 120 apps were studied in the analysis of casino game app install ads. A moderately competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 18% lower than the study average.
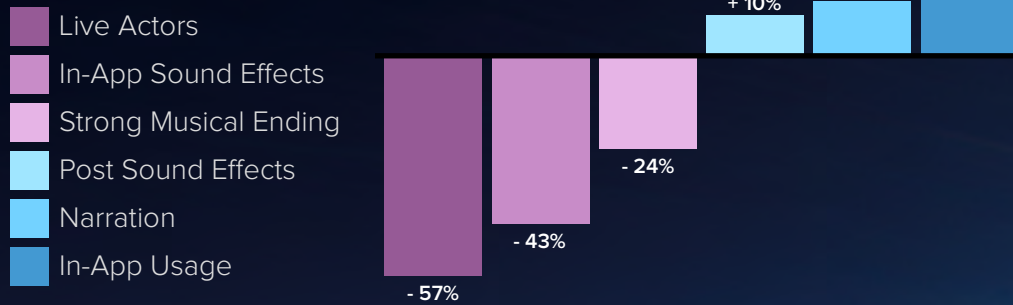
The most immediately apparent trend from the data was the detrimental effect real-life elements had on install rates. For instance, the 10% of creative that used live actors suffered from a considerably lower IR rate than the genre benchmark. Meanwhile, showing hand interactions or framing the app within a device were correlated with a modest install loss.

Rather, creatives fared better if they simply enhanced the in-app experience with memorable characters. Considering the personalities and characters that are plastered on the real-life casino signage, this trend is not too surprising.

Install rates were further boosted by narration and a strong musical ending, suggesting that fans of this genre respond well to audible excitement, much like the clamor of a casino in Las Vegas lures passersby.

Family Games

Install Rate Impact

- Live Actors
- In-App Sound Effects
- Strong Musical Ending
- Post Sound Effects
- Narration
- In-App Usage

- 57% (Live Actors)
- 43% (In-App Sound Effects)
- 24% (Strong Musical Ending)
+ 10% (Post Sound Effects)
+ 13% (Narration)
+ 17% (In-App Usage)

Over 200 family game creatives were analyzed in the study. A notably less competitive category, apps in this group enjoyed an install rate that was 34% higher than the study average.
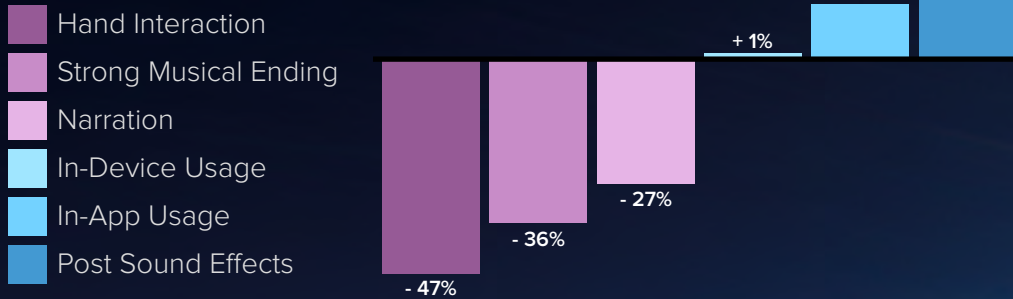
Interestingly, when marketing games that are meant to appeal to families, showcasing live actors (and thus families) in the ad creative is not an effective tactic. Fortunately, only a small percentage of apps (9.5%) used this tactic.

Simply, live action distracted from the in-app experience. While it is important that these casual titles have mass appeal, it is much more effective to allow the human element to live as narration only, as this correlated with a 13.5% lift in install rates.

Taking a deeper look at the audio, it is clear that fans of family oriented games are best captivated by voiced-over narrative that is enhanced with audio effects than with creative that relies solely on in-game audio or strong musical finishes.

Puzzle Games

Install Rate Impact

- ■ Hand Interaction
- ■ Strong Musical Ending
- ■ Narration
- ■ In-Device Usage
- ■ In-App Usage
- ■ Post Sound Effects

- 47% - 36% - 27% + 1% + 12% + 16%

Over 700 creatives for 160 apps were studied in the analysis of puzzle game app install ads. A somewhat less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 26% higher than the study average.
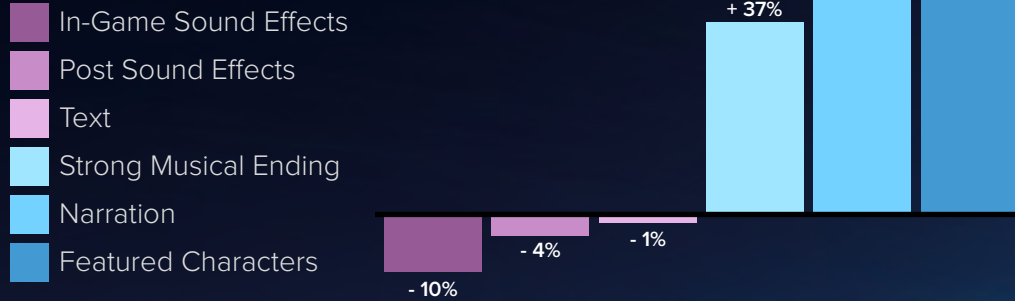
From the data, it is clear that ad creatives that focus on the gameplay experience — whether directly or framed within a device — are most effective at driving installs for puzzle games.

Looking at the effect audio has on conversion, it's clear that distractions like narration or strong musical endings are undesirable. However, when subtle punches of sound effects are added to key moments in the creative, install rates enjoy a 16% boost.

Simply, to encourage installs of puzzle games, app install marketers are best served when their creative focuses on providing a realistic perspective of the (likely catchy) in-app experience with minimal additions or distractions.

Racing Games

Install Rate Impact

- In-Game Sound Effects
- Post Sound Effects
- Text
- Strong Musical Ending
- Narration
- Featured Characters

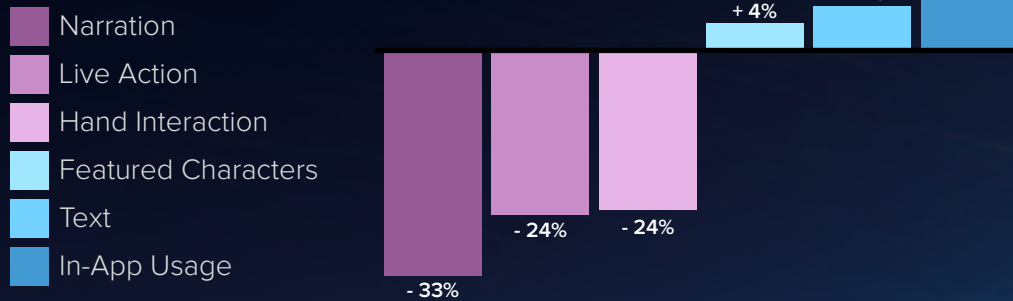Bar values: -10%, -4%, -1%, +37%, +43%, +44%

Over 87 million completed video ad views were studied in the analysis of racing game app install ads. A notably less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for these apps was 53% higher than the study average.

An immediately interesting insight from the data is the nuanced differences in install rate based on the types of audio effects used. While narration punctuated by a strong musical ending drives a considerable (43-44%) IR boost, in-game or post sound effects correlate with a sub-par install rate. Similarly, inclusion of on-screen copy resulted in a minor decrease in IR. From this, it may be construed that over usage of sound effects or text callouts distracts users from the typically stellar visuals of racing games.

Interestingly, the use of featured characters was the top creative element associated with a boost in install rates. As many racing titles are fairly straight forward, the minority of creatives (24%) that featured characters were able to add some much-needed personality, setting these respective apps apart & piquing user interest to drive installs.

20

Role-Playing Games

Install Rate Impact

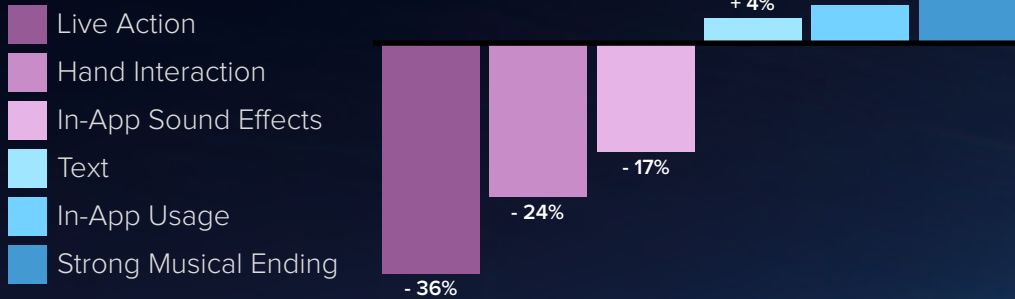|	
■	Narration
■	Live Action
■	Hand Interaction
■	Featured Characters
■	Text
■	In-App Usage

- 33%   - 24%   - 24%   + 4%   + 7%   + 9%

Nearly 1800 creatives for over 400 role-playing games were analyzed in the study. A considerably competitive app category, the baseline install rate for RPGs was 35% lower than the study average.

Understanding that the most successful RPGs are those which are immersive, it was not too surprising that creative elements that drove the user's thoughts outside of the app experience fared the worst at driving installs. Narration, live actors, and hand interaction all correlated with a considerably lower install rate.

Conversely, creative elements that enhanced the user's understanding of the app experience without distracting from it were the most successful. For instance, while text and narration can both tell a story, narrative reminds the user of an outside world, whereas on-screen copy keeps the user focused on what's happening in the game. The utilization of featured characters adds to this effect by providing memorable elements to the creative.

Simulation Games

Install Rate Impact

- Live Action
- Hand Interaction
- In-App Sound Effects
- Text
- In-App Usage
- Strong Musical Ending

+ 9%
+ 6%
+ 4%
- 17%
- 24%
- 36%

Over 800 creatives & for simulation games were analyzed in the study. A notably less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for simulation games was 36% higher than the study average.
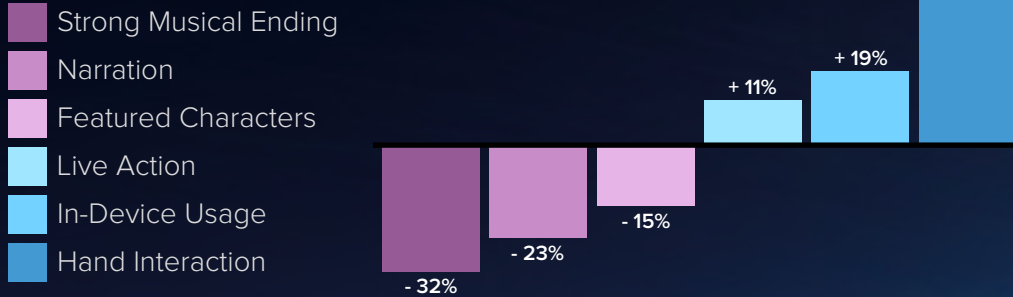
Another app category wherein users respond well to immersion, real-life elements of live actors and hand interactions proved to be the least effective creative elements for driving installs. Fortunately, only a small number of ad apps used live actors (11.6%) or hand interaction (4.9%) in their creatives.

Rather, creatives fared the best when they more prominently featured in-app gameplay and told its story through the use of text overlays. Considering the micro-animations that often take place in games of this genre, this tactic is both logical and advisable.

To culminate the ad in an emotional manner that inspires installs, the most effective creative leveraged a strong musical ending. This helps build enthusiasm for what could otherwise be perceived as dry or too sequential.

22

Strategy Games

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- Narration
- Featured Characters
- Live Action
- In-Device Usage
- Hand Interaction

+ 40%

+ 19%

+ 11%

- 15%

- 23%

- 32%

Over 1400 creatives & for nearly 300 strategy games were analyzed in the study. A niche yet competitive app category, the baseline install rate for simulation games was 27% lower than the study average.
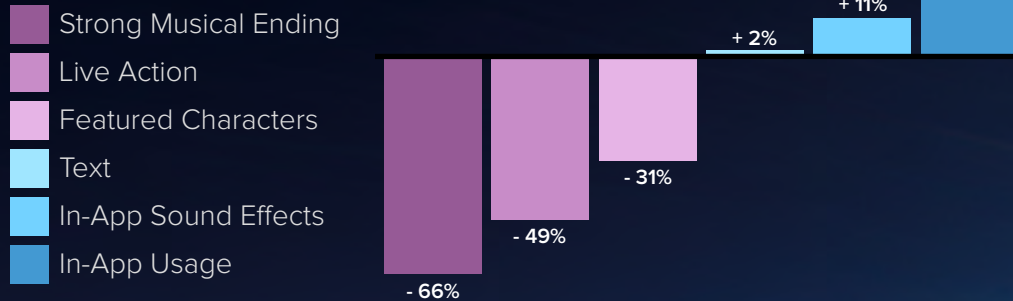
Much unlike simulation games and RPGs, fans of strategy games are not easily swayed by featured characters or musical endings. Neither does a narrative voice-over help, as it frequently detracts from on-screen action.

Rather, ad creative that helped users understand the gameplay experience fared the best. Top tactics included framing gameplay within a device & showing how users control the action with close-up hand interaction shots. The use of live actors also helped by both showing that the games were not only intense and exciting, but that they were enjoyable as well.

Simply, one thing is clear: potential users of strategy games would rather be shown than told. As a result, the small share (< 8%) of apps leveraging all three top tactics are enjoying a considerably higher IR than their competitors.

23

Word Games

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- Live Action
- Featured Characters
- Text
- In-App Sound Effects
- In-App Usage

Values shown on chart:
- Strong Musical Ending: - 66%
- Live Action: - 49%
- Featured Characters: - 31%
- Text: + 2%
- In-App Sound Effects: + 11%
- In-App Usage: + 21%

Over 60 million completed video views for word games were analyzed in the study. A relatively less competitive app category, the baseline install rate for word games was the highest in the study & over double the baseline.

As these apps draw appeal for their addictive gameplay and other catchy features, ad creative performed best when it focused on in-game elements. For instance, 80% of apps effectively leveraged in-app gameplay to boost IR 21%. To augment visuals, 90% of apps leveraged text overlays to tell the story. Those who didn't fell below IR baselines for the category.

When it came to audio, subtlety was key. The 20% of apps who simply punctuated gameplay with in-app audio enjoyed a 11% higher IR. Meanwhile, the 10% that went overboard with strong musical endings suffered.
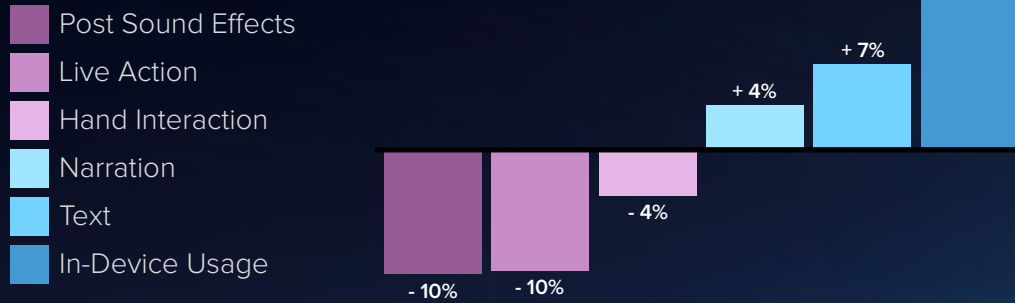
Live actors and featured characters likewise proved ineffective. In short, users were most effectively swayed by straightforward ads that focused on the in-app experience and did not distract with music or personalities.

24

Business Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Post Sound Effects
- Live Action
- Hand Interaction
- Narration
- Text
- In-Device Usage

- 10%	- 10%	- 4%	+ 4%	+ 7%	+ 13%

Nearly 50 ad campaigns for business apps were analyzed in the study. A notably competitive app category, the baseline install rate for business apps was 47% below the study average and 50% below the non-gaming average.
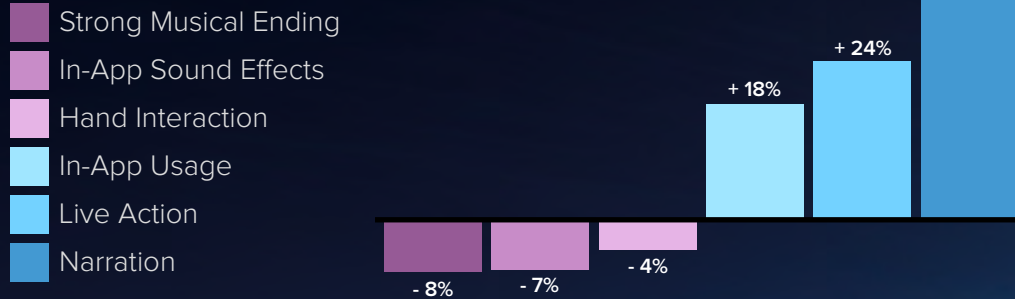
Reviewing the data, it is evident that creative elements that are exciting for other audiences and apps are distracting for business app installers. For instance, the mere use of a hand interaction shot to convey the app experience correlated with a 4% install rate loss. Including a live actor only hindered results further.

Rather, the most convincing ad creatives used to the point shots of the app in use and clearly explained benefits with on-screen copy.

Examining audio settings, creatives fared the best when they leveraged narration to explain features of the app and did not distract from these features with frivolous sound effects.

Entertainment Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- In-App Sound Effects
- Hand Interaction
- In-App Usage
- Live Action
- Narration

+ 36%
+ 24%
+ 18%
- 4%
- 7%
- 8%

Over 1500 creatives for nearly 350 entertainment apps were analyzed in the study. Interestingly, this app category served as the barometer, with an install rate on par with that of the overall study.
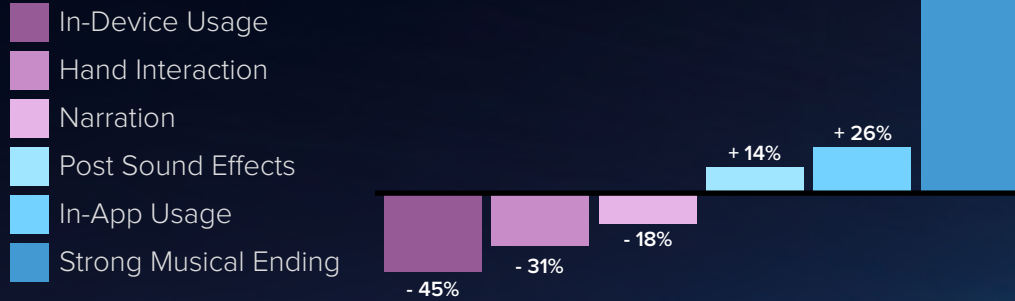
Perhaps the most interesting aspect about the data is the stark difference in performance between ads with narration and those with strong musical endings or sound effects. After all, one would expect upbeat music to be a natural fit with entertainment. However, these artificial audio additions failed to convert users. Rather, live actors with narration proved the most effective, boosting install rates 23.9% and 35.5%, respectively.

While showcasing in-app usage was important for swaying users, adding hand interactions reversed the effect, causing a slight decrease in IR.

From this data, it is clear that to drive installs for entertainment apps, ad creative should focus on the in-app experience while bringing it to life with live actors and narration, avoiding disorienting audio effects or music.

Finance Apps

Install Rate Impact

- In-Device Usage
- Hand Interaction
- Narration
- Post Sound Effects
- In-App Usage
- Strong Musical Ending

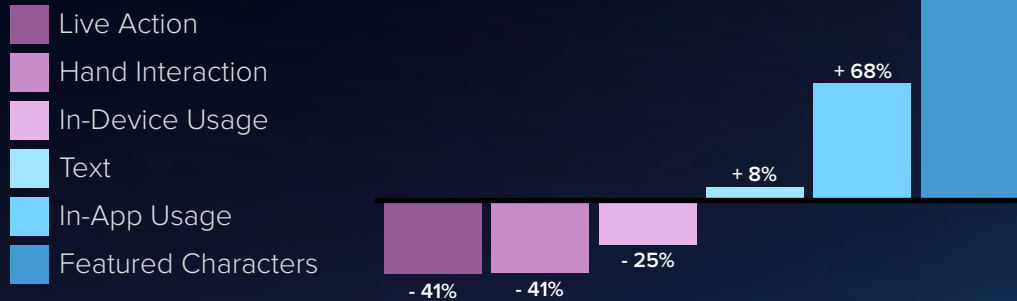Chart values: - 45%, - 31%, - 18%, + 14%, + 26%, + 119%

Nearly 29 million completed video views for finance apps were analyzed in the study. Although not the most overpopulated category, install competition proved fierce, with the category IR 38% below the study average.

Cue the dramatic music! While a strong musical ending is a distraction for many app genres, they performed splendidly for the small minority (5.8%) of finance apps that utilized them, driving over double genre's IR average. Much more commonly, a majority (76.5%) of apps chose to use sound effects in their ad creative, a tactic which also correlated with improved install rates.

Beyond audio, installers of finance apps were best swayed by creative that provided a clear sense of how the app functioned through extensive shots of in-app activities. Framing these shots within a device or with hand interactions was too distracting, however, leading to sub-par install rates. Similarly, voiced-over narrative also proved to provide less than ideal performance, suggesting that users of these apps would rather let the in-app footage do the talking.

Lifestyle Apps

Install Rate Impact

- ■ Live Action
- ■ Hand Interaction
- ■ In-Device Usage
- ■ Text
- ■ In-App Usage
- ■ Featured Characters

+ 123%

+ 68%

+ 8%

- 41%

- 41%

- 25%

Over 300 ad creatives for over 100 lifestyle apps were analyzed in the study. A moderately competitive category, install rates were on par for the study average and were only 5% lower than other non-gaming apps.
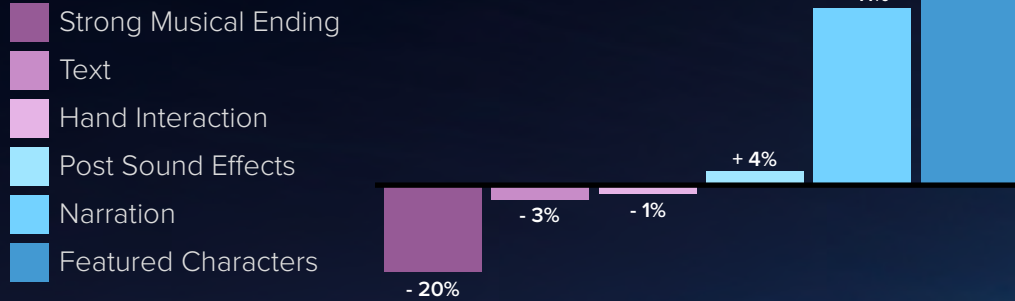
Interestingly, while the use of featured characters correlated with the strongest install rates in the category, live action and hand interaction correlated with the worst. Thus, it can be inferred that while featured characters are needed to give a given lifestyle app personality, overuse of live action or finger tapping detracts too much the true focus: the in-app experience.

Similarly, ad creatives that framed the app within a larger context also fared poorly. Unfortunately, the majority of creatives leveraged this tactic. The successful minority were those that focused on full-screen portrayals of the in-app experience, supporting install rates 67% higher than the baseline.

Most commonly, text was used to offer provide context for in-app footage, driving a modest 8% IR increase for the 82% of creatives using the tactic.

Music Apps

Install Rate Impact

- ▇ Strong Musical Ending
- ▇ Text
- ▇ Hand Interaction
- ▇ Post Sound Effects
- ▇ Narration
- ▇ Featured Characters

Bar chart values: - 20%, - 3%, - 1%, + 4%, + 41%, + 47%

Over 200 creatives for music apps were analyzed in the study. A relatively well-received app category, install rates were 57% higher than the study average and 48% higher than other non-gaming apps.
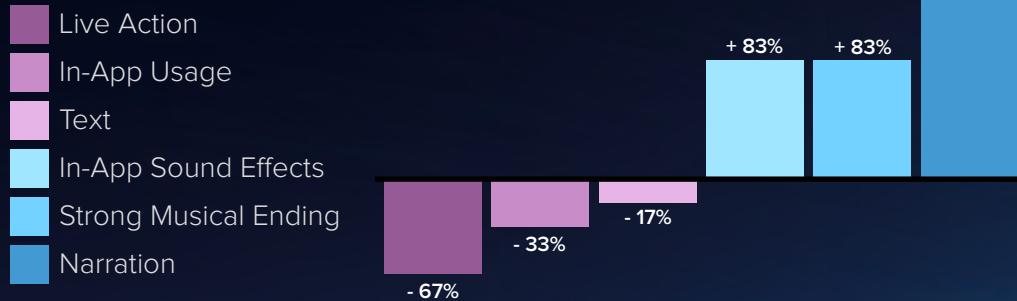
Albeit counterintuitive at a surface level, analysis showed that strong musical endings actually do not help drive installs for music apps. As creatives in this genre typically feature music and other in-app sounds throughout, blasting music on the end was rather ineffectual.

Instead, music apps best stood out from their competitors when they took the less common approach of featuring character-based narrations. Interestingly, under a third of music apps used this tactic.

With respect to visuals, on-screen copy was used by half of the ad creatives to a mildly negative effect. Hand interactions were only used by one in seven apps, and likewise proved to be an unreliable tactic.

News Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Live Action
- In-App Usage
- Text
- In-App Sound Effects
- Strong Musical Ending
- Narration

+ 136%

+ 83%   + 83%

- 17%

- 33%

- 67%

Over 50 creatives for news apps were analyzed in the study. A considerably competitive app category, install rates for news apps were the lowest in the study, averaging 78% below the baseline and 79% below non-gaming apps.
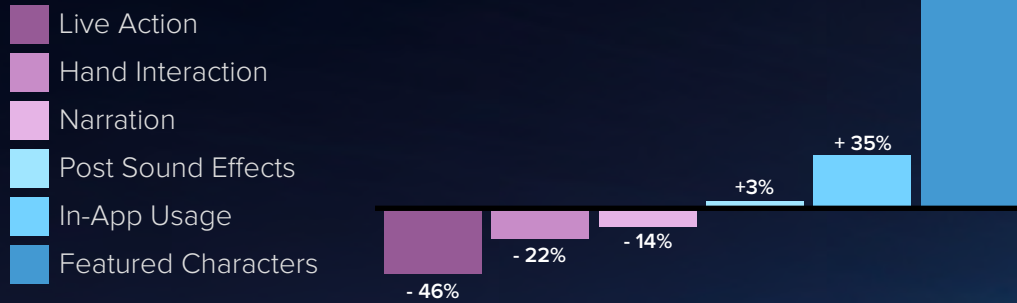
As an app genre that characteristically features text-heavy content, it wasn't surprising to uncover that usage of text overlays correlated with a decrease in install rate. Adding text on top of more text simply isn't appealing. Furthermore, the overwhelming majority of creatives used text overlays, so creatives using this tactic simply did not stand out from their competitors.

Rather, creatives fared the best when features were described via narration, punctuated with in-app sound effects, and brought to a dramatic close with music. Alas, only 15% of total creatives used these tactics, suggesting that part of their success may be due in part to their relative rarity.

In short, when marketing a news app, excellent creative is distinctive, leverages audio effectively, and avoids overwhelming users with heavy copy.

31

Shopping Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Live Action
- Hand Interaction
- Narration
- Post Sound Effects
- In-App Usage
- Featured Characters

Chart values: - 46% (Live Action), - 22% (Hand Interaction), - 14% (Narration), +3% (Post Sound Effects), + 35% (In-App Usage), + 152% (Featured Characters)

Over 300 creatives for over 80 shopping apps were analyzed in the study. A somewhat competitive app category, install rates for shopping apps were 24% below the baseline for the study & 29% below other non-gaming apps.
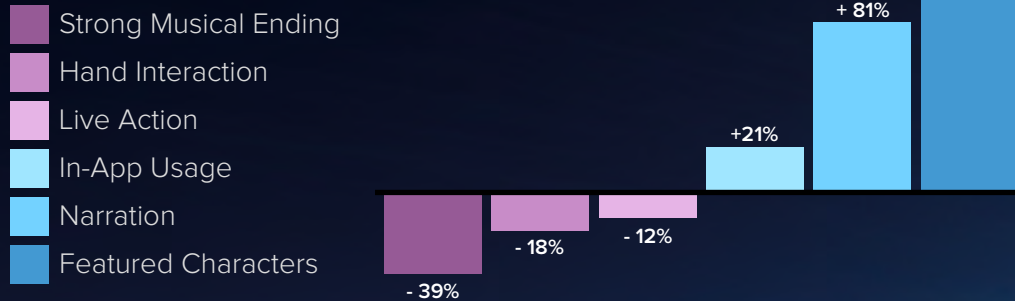
A testament to the importance of knowing your competition so that your ad creative can stand out comparatively, 3% of the ad creatives for shopping apps utilized featured characters in their ads to astounding effects.

While this may suggest that adding personality to the creative is needed to hook users, it's equally important to not take attention too far away from the app itself, as the IR declines associated with live action, hand interaction, and narration suggest.

Thus, it is not too surprising that the slightly more common minority of creatives that prominently featured in-app usage also garnered a respectable 35% IR boost.

Social Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Strong Musical Ending
- Hand Interaction
- Live Action
- In-App Usage
- Narration
- Featured Characters

Chart bars (left to right): - 39%, - 18%, - 12%, +21%, + 81%, + 98%

Nearly 300 creatives for over 70 social apps were analyzed in the study. A rather competitive app category, install rates for social apps were 60% below the baseline for the study & 62% below other non-gaming apps.
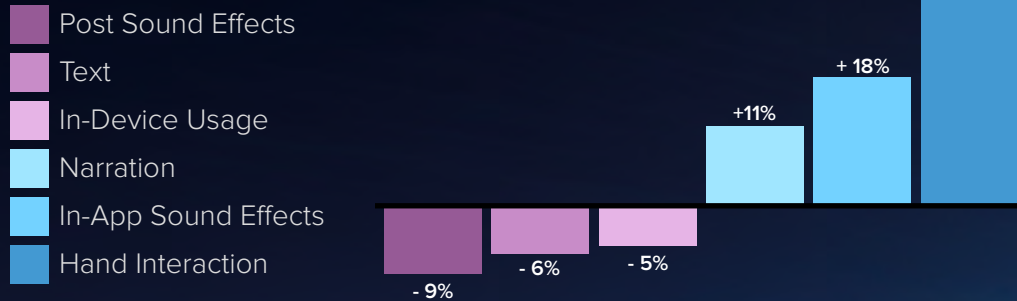
When it comes to social apps, it's important to show the potential user how they will interact with the app and other users. As such, it is critical to feature characters prominently within the creative, as doing so can nearly double install rates. However, too much live action and time spent outside of the app experience is a distraction, and often correlates with a slight decline in IR.

With respect to audio, it's imperative to make it personable and purposeful. Ad creatives that featured live narration fared far better than those without. Meanwhile, those that relied heavily on strong musical endings fared poorly.

Simply put, special effects aren't needed to drive users to install a social app. Straightforward storytelling with a focus on characters and the in-app experience is all that is needed.

Sports Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Post Sound Effects
- Text
- In-Device Usage
- Narration
- In-App Sound Effects
- Hand Interaction

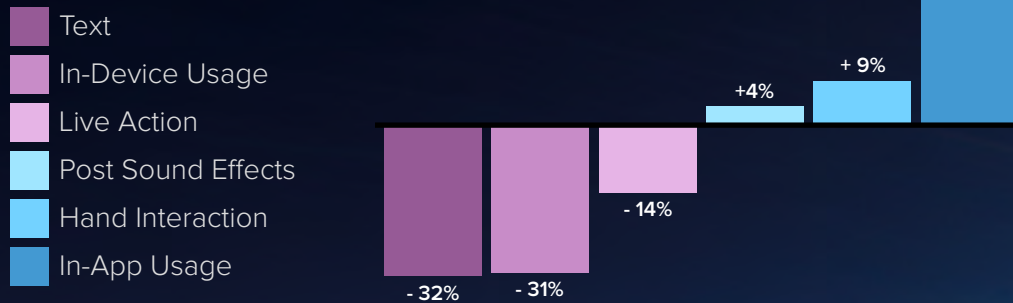+ 30%

+ 18%

+11%

- 9%

- 6%

- 5%

Over 130 creatives for nearly 50 sports apps were analyzed in the study. A relatively well-received and popular app category, install rates for sports apps were 87% above the baseline & 77% above other non-gaming apps.

The key to developing successful creative for sports app install ads is to focus on interactivity and verbal storytelling that is only punctuated by in-app sound effects. Fans of this genre do not want to read about features via on screen copy, and using such tactics correlates with a 6% drop in install rates.

Likewise, framing the in-app experience within a device to make room for this on-screen copy also diminishes the creative's effectiveness. Instead, allow the in-app footage to take up a majority of the screen and leverage hand interaction (IR +30%) with responsive sound effects to keep the viewer interested. Extraneous sound effects not native to the app experience are not recommended, however.

Travel Apps

Install Rate Impact

- Text
- In-Device Usage
- Live Action
- Post Sound Effects
- Hand Interaction
- In-App Usage

+ 29%

+ 9%

+4%

- 14%

- 32%

- 31%

Nearly 100 creatives for travel apps were analyzed in the study. A rather competitive app category, install rates for travel apps were 46% below the baseline & 49% below other non-gaming apps.

What's most intriguing about the data for travel apps is that live action was actually a deterrent to installs. Used by 46% of category ad creatives, live action was associated with a 14% lower IR than the category baseline. Simply, while devoting a large portion of the frame to live actors on vacation may help users daydream about their next vacation destination, it fails to convey the merits of the given travel app or inspire an install.

Instead, creative that offered close-up shots of hands interacting directly with the app to book travel were much more effective. Similarly, creative that devoted a high percentage of screen time and space to direct in-app footage performed the best overall.

In short: sell them on the app's features, not the vacation.

EXAMPLES & END NOTES

Creative Showcase

For examples of individual mobile ad creatives that have performed well and follow a number of the creative best practices covered in this study, check out the AdColony Creative Showcases below:

- On the Move with Last Empire War Z — how strategic camera movements can create depth & interest.

- Creatures & Callouts in Dragon Stadium — how text callouts and featured characters can captivate audiences

- Smashing Copy & DomiNations — how truly integrated copy can highlight app features without blocking the action

- Forthright Features and Covet Fashion — how to focus on the in-app experience with closeups & snappy cuts

- Cooking Fever & Sizzling Effects — how text overlays, animations, and other effects can make users crave an app

- Ambient Effects and the Clash of Kings — how effects, text, & character closeups can sustain user attention

- Personalizing Puzzles with Best Fiends — How to successfully mix custom animations, characters, and finger tapping

- Monster Busters & Endearing Antagonists — How to hook users with catchy music, & prominent characters

- Hidden Agendas and Clear Callouts — How to mix special effects with in-app animations.

Glossary of Terms

Featured Characters — The use of a prominent protagonist, whether animated or a live actor.

Hand Interaction — The use of a hand, typically of a live actor, to depict app interaction via finger tapping, swiping, and other gestures.

In-App SFX — The use of sound effects that are native to the app experience, though volume may be enhanced.

In-App Footage — The clear and prominent portrayal of direct, in-app footage, typically consuming the vast majority of the frame.

In-Device Footage — The framing of in-app footage within a device to provide context, allowing room for additional visual elements but reducing the size and prominence of the content within the device.

Live Action — The use of live actors in a real-world setting, often used to show the enjoyment of those who use the app or its social features.

Narration — The use of voice-over audio to tell the creative's story, usually to describe key features of the app.

Post SFX — The use of sound effects that are not native to the app experience, often used to

Strong Musical Ending — The use of music within the last few seconds of the creative, typically crescendoing to generate install excitement.

Text — The use of on-screen copy non-native to the app, typically used to explain app features or call the viewer to action.

End Notes

About the Data

All data included in this study is pulled from 2016 AdColony platform data. Install rate impacts listed are relative to the baseline install rate for that particular genre. For instance, if a genre's average install rate was 1%, but creative with a particular feature averaged an install rate of 1.2%, this will be noted as a 20% improvement in install rate.

Additional Readings

For additional mobile marketing and monetization studies and best practices, visit www.adcolony.com/insights.

Creative Resources

Many of the videos featured in this report were developed by Opera House, our in-house full service creative studio with over 65 dedicated creatives & developers. With offices around the globe, they help app install marketers fuel campaigns with captivating & engaging ad creative.

About AdColony

Known for its proprietary Instant-Play™ HD mobile video ad technology, AdColony is a leading mobile advertising & marketing platform offering growth, engagement, and monetization solutions for an extensive network of apps. As a trusted mobile partner, AdColony works with Fortune 500 brands and over 85% of the world's top grossing publishers. AdColony is a division of Opera Mediaworks and has 20+ offices worldwide.

Thank you!