

PRACTITIONER THEORIES AT THE ADVERTISING AGENCY:
EVIDENCE ON THE ACADEMICIAN-PRACTITIONER GAP AND THE PROFESSIONAL
STATUS OF ADVERTISING

by

GERGELY NYILASY

(Under the direction of Leonard N. Reid and Karen W. King)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation investigates advertising agency practitioners' theories of advertising. The study asks three fundamental questions about practitioner knowledge in advertising: (1) what ad practitioners think about how advertising works, (2) what meta-theoretical presuppositions they have about the nature of this knowledge, and (3) how this knowledge is negotiated with advertiser clients. Qualitative in-depth interviews with senior level advertising executives (creative, planning and account directors) in the Atlanta market constitute the empirical data. Findings include the description of practitioners' Truncated Hierarchy model, ontological and epistemological meta-theories as well as pseudo-professionalization tactics. The study uses the sociological theory of professions as a theoretical framing and provides implications for the narrowing of the academician-practitioner gap in advertising.

INDEX WORDS: Advertising agencies, Advertising theory, Grounded theory, Marketing theory, Meta-theory, Philosophy of science, Practitioner theories, Sociology of occupations, Sociology of professions

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DEDICATION

To my family:

Peter, Ilona, and Zsofi.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
LIST OF FIGURES	x
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
The academic-practitioner gap.....	2
Purpose and significance.....	15
Research questions and delimitations	16
2. LITERATURE REVIEW	19
Direct literature	20
“Practitioner polls”	24
Naturalistic inquiries into advertising practice	26
The theory of professions – a general theory	32
The theory of professions – in the context of advertising.....	40
How advertising works – what do we know in academia?	48
Summary	60
3. METHODOLOGY	61
Basic assumptions	61
A grounded theory design – and the role of professionalization theory	63
Data collection	65

Data analysis and the emerging nature of the data	72
4. FINDINGS: CONTENT OF PRACTITIONER THEORIES	75
Layers of understanding.....	75
Advertising effects	77
Basic and mid-level practitioner theories	84
Moderator-focused theories	92
Domain-specificity.....	109
Summary and discussion.....	124
5. FINDINGS: PRACTITIONER META-THEORIES	131
The only rule: there are no rules	132
Ontological skepticism.....	138
Epistemological skepticism	146
Summary and discussion.....	161
6. FINDINGS: PRACTITIONER THEORIES AND ADVERTISER CLIENTS: PSEUDO- PROFESSIONALIZATION TACTICS	168
Need for certainty	169
Commercial market research as a professionalization agent	175
Pseudo-professionalization tactics	180
Summary and discussion.....	197
7. CONCLUSION.....	201
Summary of findings.....	201
Implications of the research	205
Research limitations and suggestions for future study	208

REFERENCES	211
APPENDICES	229
A INTERVIEW GUIDE	229
B CONSENT FORM	231
C EXHIBIT OF PRACTITIONER’S AESTHETIC THINKING (FROM PRICKEN 2002)	232

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 2.1: Types of advertising theories.	51
Figure 3.1: Sample characteristics.	71
Figure 4.1: Types of practitioner theories.	85
Figure 4.2: The Truncated Hierarchy Model.	86
Figure 4.3: The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “brand awareness objective” domain.	111
Figure 4.4: The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “brand image campaign” domain.	112
Figure 4.5: The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “direct advertising” domain.	113
Figure 4.6: The Truncated Hierarchy Model – emotional products domain.	115
Figure 4.7: The Truncated Hierarchy Model – rational products domain.	116
Figure 4.8: Planning tool for domain determination.	118

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Academic advertising researchers and advertising practitioners seem to live in different worlds. The separation between these two groups, commonly referred to as the academician-practitioner “gap” (Hunt 2002b), would not be too alarming if it only denoted the fact that there are always discrepancies between theoretical modeling in a field and its practical applications. The gap in the case of advertising, however, is much wider and is manifested on deeper levels than one would expect in the case of occupations such as medicine, engineering or law.

The objective of this dissertation is to dive into the academician-practitioner gap and explore some of the yet undiscovered crevices beneath. The study tries to bring back evidence that could explain the nature of the rift, how it came about, why it is still there and if it is possible to narrow it. Accomplishing this task, however, would be formidable: no single research project could completely explain all the possible causes of the academician-practitioner gap; it would be foolhardy even to try. This study will focus on a single aspect instead: advertising practitioners’ knowledge about how advertising works and what role this plays in the mismatch between academia and praxis. Before a more detailed explanation of the study’s objectives and more narrowly defined research questions, a brief review of the academician-practitioner gap is in order.

The academic-practitioner gap

The existence of the academician-practitioner gap is widely discussed in advertising and marketing. As Hunt (2002b) argues: “Throughout its 100-plus year history, one of the most recurring themes has been that there is a ‘gap’ or ‘divide’ between marketing academe and marketing practice” (p. 305). Indeed, over the years, a sizeable literature has developed focusing on this issue (e.g., AMA Task Force 1988; Baker and Holt 2004; Baldrige, Floyd and Markoczy 2004; Brennan 2004; Ehrenberg 1969; Holbrook 1985, 1987; Hunt 2002a; Kover 1976; Maiken et al. 1979; McKenzie et al. 2002; McQuarrie 1998; November 2004; Parasuraman 1982; Peters 1980; Preston 1985; Rossiter 2001; Tapp 2004a, 2004b; Wells 1993).

Most scholars define the gap as a communication problem between academia and marketing practice. According to this view, while academicians continually add to a body of abstract knowledge about advertising and marketing phenomena, practitioners do not seem connected to this information. Practitioners do not read journals, and they do not even consider academic knowledge very relevant (Hunt 2002b).

Although most articles dealing with the issue are philosophical/meta-theoretical and do not offer empirical evidence, some studies in fact prove that practitioners do not read academic journals. McKenzie et al. (2001), for example, finds that out of their sample population (n=47) not a single marketing manager reads academic journals: “It is clear from this survey that academic journals devoted to marketing are largely unknown and unread by marketing managers” (p. 12). Brennan and Ankers (2004) also finds that business-to-business marketers have very low levels of knowledge and awareness of academic research: “Our research suggests that business-to-business practitioners know little about the current state of marketing theory, and do not care” (p. 517).

While few commentators question the existence of the gap, they offer radically different explanations for its existence, and consequently, suggest different potential solutions. Most commonly, the cause of the problem is attributed to academicians themselves. There are a number of ways in which this introspective criticism is expressed.

Problems with dissemination. First, the divide is described as a “dissemination” problem. The gap exists because academicians are not successful in disseminating the knowledge they generate. “Marketing as a discipline does not communicate very well” with its constituencies, most importantly with practitioners (AMA Task Force 1988, p. 4). The AMA Task Force on the Development of Marketing Thought – specifically brought together for assessing and potentially ameliorating the gap – described the classic ideal of a direct communication flow from academia to praxis: “Primarily, marketing knowledge is developed somewhat formally by academic researchers and commercial marketing researchers or consultants and more experientially by ‘practitioners’ or users. Knowledge developed by academic researchers tends to be disseminated to the discipline through research journals or academically oriented conferences” (p. 17). It is the breakdown in academia’s knowledge production and distribution systems that causes the divide; to restore it, the recommendation suggests, academicians need to produce more relevant knowledge, publish more practitioner-oriented research results and build outlets for “bridging the gap.” There is also an assumption that if only academia’s knowledge production and dissemination systems improved, then the academician-practitioner problem would cease to exist.

Baker and Holt (2004), similarly, fault marketing education for the fact that despite long decades of research, marketing is perceived to be the least accountable organizational function in business. “One of the key findings is that marketers are perceived to be ‘unaccountable’ by the

rest of the organisation; they are seen as unable to demonstrate a return on investment in the activities they have control over” (p. 560). Baker and Holt argue that this is especially embarrassing as there are useful tools out there, which simply do not get to the practitioners.

Some commentators, however, highlight that it is unrealistic to assume a direct flow, and it is through the facilitation of indirect flows that the gap can be narrowed. Brennan (2004), for example, argues: “There is evidence that marketing practitioners do not read academic marketing journals (McKenzie et al. 2002). Perhaps the surprise here is not that practitioners eschew these journals, but that anyone would expect them to read such material at all.” Brennan argues that immediate and obvious applications of academic research are neither possible nor desirable. Ehrenberg, almost four decades ago (1969), very similarly stated that it took considerable amount of time and energy to apply theory to practice; technological application in every field was not an automatic or a direct process, rather it was a long and “painful” one. The gap in this sense is to some extent natural and careful nurturing of indirect channels that can effectively translate academic developments into technological applications (such as textbooks, association work, and consultant and research services) would ultimately resolve the issue.

In his rejoinder to the AMA Task Force report, Garda (1988) agrees with this assessment: “The Task Force report implies that marketing knowledge is solely original research at the concept/theory level. Original research is surely needed in each of the knowledge levels, but also needed are resynthesis, repackaging, and repetition of ‘old’ knowledge for the new generation of managers” (p. 35). Academic researchers (or others such as consulting or research firms) need to develop this secondary form of knowledge to make academic research palatable for practitioners. McKenzie et al. (2001) also acknowledge the importance of channels for indirect communication flows such as trade journals, textbooks, conferences, training and development courses.

Others, however, disagree with the assessment that no direct communication is necessary and express concern over the efficiency of indirect dissemination routes. Tapp (2004b), for example, suggests: “The argument that we don’t have to concern ourselves with how our work might be used, on the grounds that there is often a time lag between the development of underlying theory and its use in practice, is wearing increasingly thin” (pp. 497-98). He argues that if academicians do not concern themselves with the lack of direct flow, there will be no flow whatsoever, and academic research will quickly become obsolete.

Problems with academic knowledge and organizational factors. It is not only knowledge dissemination that is problematic in the reviewers’ opinion, but also the content of advertising/marketing knowledge itself. November (2004), for example, in his satirical article enumerates seven reasons why practitioners should continue to ignore academic research: (1) Academic research does not contain knowledge that is relevant or actionable for practitioners; (2) academic knowledge is inadequately structured: “The reality is that, while we do seem to have an agreed standard as to what a brick is, there is no agreement as to which bricks need to be made first, no foundations, no architect of the final wall, and no idea as to what the wall is expected to do when, if ever, it is built” (p. 41); (3) academics sometimes make false, misleading claims about the existence of causality where, in reality, it is not warranted; (4) academic research is often reductionistic: “While a narrowly focused study is manageable and likely to lead to a definitive result, the results, assuming they have statistical validity, cannot be applied outside the scope of the study. This means that we can never generate any generalisations from a single reductionist study” (p. 43); (5) measurement in marketing is imprecise: “Because our measurement systems lack precision in comparison with those used in classical sciences” (p. 44); (6) knowledge is too general and therefore does not help; (7) there is little replication in market

research. In essence, November's caustic satire implies: there is no useful knowledge in marketing academia and practitioners should not expect there to be.

In a similarly self-critical manner, the AMA Task Force (1988) pummels marketing researchers for producing research that is not good enough (and not good enough for practitioners). The Task Force suggests that there are no real innovative ideas in academic research, only short-payoff studies; only "knowledge creep" and not "knowledge spurt" (p. 6). At another point in the text, they formulate this criticism much more strongly; they suggest that there is, in fact, very little knowledge available at all in marketing: "Further, there is little generalizable, accumulated marketing knowledge to be disseminated to marketing's constituents" (p. 17).

Further criticisms include the suggestion that academic research is very difficult to read and uses a lot of jargon (Brennan 2004; Ottesen and Gronhaug 2004) – one study even provides empirical evidence for this claim (Crosier 2004). Another potential reason is that academic researchers are not familiar with the problems practitioners face and therefore are unable to develop research programs that are useful for this constituency (Easton 2000, cited by Brennan and Ankers 2004). Parasuraman (1982) suggests that this detachment is aggravated by the fact that little practitioner input is sought or allowed in academic projects: "Lack of managerial involvement or at least some managerial emphasis at the theory development stage can greatly reduce the chances of the theory ever being applied in practice" (p. 78). Finally, Katsikeas, Robson, and Hulbert (2004) argue that the problem may be simply topicality: if academic researchers are able to identify the relevant, "hot" topics for research, academia automatically ceases to be irrelevant: "Emphasis is placed on identifying a number of 'hot' topics worthy of future investigation [...] It is hoped that the identification and discussion of these topics will

spark greater research on fundamental marketing issues, and that the allied explication of research rigour will likewise enhance the efficacy of research in marketing” (p. 568).

Others point to organizational/institutional factors, instead of individual-level ones, and argue that academic reward systems in place are not conducive to practitioner-oriented research. As November (2004) suggests: “The relevance of this published material to practitioners has nothing to do with your promotional prospects or its chance of being published. At most universities, the critical factor is the number of publications and the type of journal in which they are published – not their relevance. The absence of relevance can readily be seen in the published products” (p. 41). Brennan and Ankers (2004) also claim that it is the organizational structure of research at universities, and not individual researchers, that are at fault: “It seems clear that although academics would like to get closer to practitioners, they are inhibited by institutional factors, such as academic reward systems and the ‘publish or perish’ culture” (p. 511).

Philosophy of science problems. Some commentators dig deeper and examine the fundamental philosophical presuppositions of academic research. The discussion has crystallized around the dichotomy of whether academic advertising/marketing research is a basic vs. applied or academic vs. professional discipline. Those who claim the field is an academic discipline argue that scholars are under no obligation to produce knowledge that is directly relevant for practitioners. For this group, the gap between practitioners and academicians is ultimately not a very serious issue. The other group, on the contrary, suggests that since advertising/marketing is by definition an applied field; if academicians are not relevant for practitioners, they are not producing any useful knowledge. As Webster (1988) asks the rhetorical question: “What kind of ‘knowledge’ in marketing is there that is not relevant for practice?” (p. 49)

Although the debate was very heated in the 1980s, it seems the ‘professional discipline’ side has won the dispute. Hunt’s (2002a) monumental summary of marketing theory concludes that “problem-oriented research” is what marketing academia should strive for. Similarly, Myers argues in a famous roundtable discussion on the issue: “Marketing academicians should recognize that the overall purpose of research and knowledge development in this field, over the short-run or the long-run, is to improve marketing practice, and decision-making, and in general, to advance the state of knowledge useful for the profession” (Maiken et al. 1979, p. 62).

There is still a group of thinkers that insist, quite forcefully, that advertising/marketing academia should have nothing to do with practice. Kassarian suggests, for example: “I see no reason why just because we are in marketing we want to force a kind of practitioner view, or a real-world view into other places. [...] I see absolutely no reason why I should have a value system imposed on me that says do something useful. I don’t want to do anything useful; I want to do what I want to do. [...] Those of us in academia want to push our value system onto the other side of the world and the other side of the world is trying to push their value system on us and maybe we just ought to part company.” (Maiken et al. 1979, p. 71). Holbrook (1985, 1987), another famous advocate of the academic discipline viewpoint, argues: “I believe that business does to consumer research approximately what the comedian Gallagher’s Sledge-O-Matic does to watermelon. It smashes, crushes, and pulverizes. If you want to sit in the front row at a Gallagher concert, you had better wear a raincoat” (1985, p. 145).

While the above described standpoint is in the minority in academia, it represents a very powerful dynamic: the need for autonomy in advertising (or any type of academic) research. Those criticizing the academic discipline orientation blame this – what they believe – misconstrued notion of scholarly autonomy and suggest that this deep-seated belief is responsible

for academia's inability to produce useful knowledge for the advertising practitioner. Preston (1985) suggests, for example, that academic freedom may be better understood within the boundaries of the mission of the academic unit the scholar is operating under. If freedom is understood this way, marketing/advertising academicians may not be free to be irrelevant: "There is, however, another relevant academic concept – that of the stated mission of an academic unit. Many university departments have written mission statements, and for advertising or marketing units they undoubtedly make reference to the study of problems faced by practitioners. If the faculty is studying the consumer in such ways as to be not explicitly studying practitioners' problems, then perhaps the mission is not being carried out" (p. 14).

Yet another way of characterizing the above dichotomy between academic and professional discipline orientation is the "rigor vs. relevance" debate: "Marketing, perhaps more than any other management functions, has had to struggle with a presumed conflict between rigor and relevance" (Webster 1988, p. 48). According to this formulation of the dichotomy, knowledge cannot be both rigorous and relevant in advertising/marketing research; you have to pick sides. Another way of stating this conflict is that researchers have to find a compromise between reliability and external validity. According to the critics of the academician-practitioner divide, however, the dichotomy is false and it should not be an excuse for the production of professionally irrelevant research. Some suggest that perhaps the focus has been too much on reliability and not enough on external validity in academic research (McQuarrie 1998). The consensus seems to be that responsible marketing scholarship should strive for *both* rigor and relevance: "the rigor and relevance dichotomy is not only false but counterproductive and misleading. [...] Research quality suffers if the only concern is analytical rigor because marketing problems are so easily misspecified, leading to results that are neither valid nor

credible. However, managers and practitioners certainly do not come to the academic world of marketing thought looking only for relevance. Nothing is more useful to a professional marketing manager than a good theory that can help to bring order out of chaos, insights out of data, meaning out of patterns” (Webster 1988, p. 61). A similar assessment is provided by Katsikeas, Robson, and Hulbert (2004): “Enhancing the relevance and rigour of our research in order to arrive at better explanations of contemporary and prospective marketing problems and issues is central to the continued development of the discipline” (p. 568).

Even if, theoretically, the professional discipline view represents the majority opinion in academic practice, the actual research often ends up less than useful for practitioners: “It seems to be the case that the type of research output that is viewed by academics as being of the highest quality, is the type of research that is viewed by managers as being of the least interest” (Brennan 2004). Some critics suggest that even stating the dichotomy of basic vs. applied is dangerous, because it allows for work that will never be useful for anyone. The danger to suggest that *there is* a basic orientation is that the academician-practitioner gap becomes trivialized and ignored. As Parasuraman (1982) argues: “Surely, marketing theory building as an end in itself is not worth pursuing. Nevertheless, there is a very real danger of this happening due to the insistence on labeling research projects as either scientist-oriented or technologist-oriented, and further claiming that only scientist-oriented research can contribute to theory construction” (p. 78).

Problems with practitioners. So far we have only discussed arguments placing the blame for the academic-practitioner divide on practitioners. Some reviewers, however, clearly charge practitioners as well for the existence of the gap. First, some critics point to the fact that practitioners often do not use academic information even if it is useful for them. According to this view, even if academia sometimes does have problems with communicating relevant

information to practitioners, many times there is relevant information available – practitioners simply do not use it. Brennan and Ankers (2004), for example, provide in-depth interview data with academicians pondering on this issue: “On the one hand the role of the academic was perceived to end once the knowledge was in the public domain. For example: ‘To provide leading edge knowledge to society but if that society chooses not to use it I don’t think it is our job to beat up on them and say ‘you’re idiots.’ You can put the water in the trough and bring the horse to the trough, but if they don’t want to drink then that’s not an academic’s problem’ (Interviewee 1)” (p. 515).

Related to the previous commentary, the gap may also be explained by negative attitudes held by practitioners (irrespective of the fact whether or not there is any justification for it). The AMA Task Force (1988), for instance, points to the possibility that the whole issue of irrelevance may be more of a practitioner perception than reality: “The work of a marketing academician may be dismissed as ‘ivory tower’ and having little relevance to the real world when, in fact, some marketing academicians do focus on translating theory into practice” (p. 8).

Holbrook (1985, 1987) suggests that there is a generalized negative attitude among practitioners (businesspeople) against academia: anti-intellectualism. In this view, the problem does not have to do with the *particulars* of academic advertising research or opinions held by practitioners about this academic advertising research *in particular*. The problem has to do with a general negative opinion among American businesspeople about the utility and value of academia as such. Holbrook argues – as cited above – that this is the main reason academia should *not* be concerned about practical relevance: business anti-intellectualism can only ruin academic marketing research.

Finally, some critics focus on individual cognitive capabilities rather than structural features. Ottesen and Gronhaug (2004) argue that part of the problem may be that professionals simply lack the necessary knowledge to be able to comprehend complex presentations of academic data. They might also have a limited attention capacity to process academic information. They suggest: “Also, the research information may not be understood, because the potential users lack the required knowledge (Cohen and Levinthal 1990). It is also possible that the relevant users are unaware of the information, because potential users – like other human beings – have limited attention capacity [...]” (p. 521). Myers, similarly, argues that part of the explanation for the gap lies in managers’ “lack of receptivity” to academic information (Maiken et al. 1979, p. 64).

Summary and outlines of a new direction. To summarize, the growing literature on the academician-practitioner gap has expressed serious concern about the status quo. Commentators emphasize that the current situation is unfortunate and detrimental to the future interests of both advertising/marketing academia and practice. Most of them defined the problem as a communication issue and attributed the cause of the gap to academic research itself: the inability of academia to produce and disseminate relevant research knowledge to practitioners. The consensus is that the discipline is by definition applied and not basic; therefore academicians should conduct ‘problem-oriented research’ (Hunt 2002a), or research that addresses general problems advertising/marketing practitioners may face. Some commentators also point to the possibility that – at least partly – practitioners should be blamed for their unwillingness or inability to process information that *is* practically useful and readily available.

It is striking that there is one voice that is altogether missing from these accounts: the voice of the practitioner. While making assumptions about the nature of the divide and what role

practitioners play in this divide, commentators fail to provide any empirical evidence about what practitioners think of the nature, causes and potential solutions of the problem. This is a pretty significant gap in the academician-practitioner gap literature, as at least half of the mismatch has to do with practitioners. Still, no research represents their voice.

A number of reviewers point to the need for the investigation of practitioners' perspectives. Ottesen and Gronhaug (2004), for instance, argue: "In order to enhance the usefulness of academic marketing knowledge to practitioners, we need to understand what types of information they perceive as useful as well as factors that might impair the transfer of research information from academia to practice" (p. 526). Similarly, Parasuraman (1982) suggests: "To the extent possible, attempting to incorporate some managerial focus in the process of marketing theory development is a useful goal to strive toward. However, this may be easier said than done. For, it would not only require that the theory builders be aware of the ultimate theory users' (i. e. practitioners') perspectives, but also require that the ultimate theory users be appreciative of the potential benefits of developing marketing theories" (p. 79). Rossiter (2001) also proposes that one potential way of overcoming the divide between academia and practice is back-engineering practitioner knowledge into academia: "What is circulating as 'practitioner marketing knowledge' must be codified and translated into the form of strategic principles, and this work will doubtless have to be done by academics" (p. 21).

Second, the above reviews, while considering alternative views about the standing of marketing/advertising research and the appropriate orientations that follow from this fundamental analysis (cf. "academic" versus "professional" discipline debate), do not take into account the possibility that there may be alternative views about the standing of advertising/marketing research *between academicians and practitioners*. The supposition that

practitioners may have an entirely different set of beliefs about what is true in marketing/advertising and what is possible at all to be true, is a link that is a very logical yet unrecognized corollary of the above described definition of the practitioner-academician gap. It is very possible that besides failures in communication, organizational or attitudinal barriers, *one of the causes of the divide is precisely that practitioners think differently about the nature of advertising and they may have different beliefs about how it works. The idea that the gap is in fact 'knowledge-based' and 'knowledge-like' may very well be the elephant in the room that nobody recognizes despite its magnitude and importance.*

Thirdly, the above reviews also fail to put their claims into a theoretical context. However, there is a theory in the sociology of occupations that might greatly help to understand, on a much deeper level, the nature of the academician-practitioner gap, as it specifically theorizes about this link between academia and praxis. As the theoretical literature will show in the next chapter, the theory of professionalization explains why occupations need to develop an academic knowledge-base to maintain and elevate their status. All occupations, even ones that are not considered “professions” in a sociology of occupations sense, strive for a professional status. If there is a breakdown in a process that seems to be rather universal among occupations, the analysis needs to focus on the characteristics of the knowledge base and how key constituencies think about it, to understand the discrepancy better. In other words, professionalization theory puts the academician-practitioner gap in a broader-scale theoretical context that may provide better explanations than an enumeration of ad hoc causes based on ad hoc opinions. Among other things, it sheds light on the fact that what is really at stake is not only a problem of communication disturbances, personally held attitudes or reading habits: what is at stake is the professional status of an occupation. If the divide between practitioners and

academicians is truly rooted in knowledge and if practitioners and academicians disagree what knowledge is or can be in advertising, this can seriously threaten, if not altogether undermine the (aspired) professional status of the advertising industry.

As this brief review of the literature on the divide showed, there are currently no empirical studies available to answer the question: if there are knowledge-type discrepancies between academicians and practitioners. We do not know if the gap exists partly because (a) ad practitioners believe advertising works differently from what academics claim, (b) if practitioners have the same presuppositions whether this knowledge is even possible, or (c) whether it is even relevant for them to have such a theoretical knowledge base when dealing with clients. Such an investigation is long overdue – and this is exactly the objective of this dissertation.

Purpose and significance

The purpose of this dissertation is thus to investigate the theories of advertising practitioners about how advertising works. This purpose grows out of the hypothesis that one of the reasons (perhaps one the most significant ones) the academician-practitioner gap exists in advertising and marketing is because there are discrepancies in the way in which practitioners and academicians think about how advertising works. The theory of professions from the sociology of occupations literature will serve as theoretical background to situate this objective.

The significance of this dissertation is threefold. First, the study is expected to make a significant contribution to an underdeveloped, yet very important area in advertising research. As the literature review will show and as the exposition suggested, there is very little knowledge available about the knowledge advertising practitioners possess about the workings of

advertising. Second, by uncovering a potentially relevant cause for the academician-practitioner gap, this dissertation will hopefully help to narrow the increasing divide between academicians and practitioners, which endangers both academic research as a discipline and advertising as a professionalizing occupation. Communication and exchange – which are impossible without the understanding of each others’ language – are necessary preconditions for long-term survival for both parties. Third, this study can also aid advertising education by uncovering the types of knowledge advertising practitioners possess, use, and expect from novices entering the profession. Advertising educators may benefit from this research by using these insights for the development of improved educational programs, ones that do a better job in anticipating the realities of advertising work and the needs of the industry.

Research questions and delimitations

The objective of the study will be met by answering three research questions:

RQ1: What do advertising practitioners think about how advertising works and what advertising works the best?

RQ2: What do advertising practitioners think about the possibility and nature of knowledge about advertising? In other words, what are their meta-theories of advertising?

RQ3: How do advertising practitioners use their theories of advertising with advertiser clients and how do they cope with clients’ knowledge needs?

By understanding what practitioners think about the workings of advertising allows us to compare and contrast these practitioner theories with academic ones. If discrepancies are found, this can be indicative of the knowledge-based nature of the academician-practitioner gap and relevant implications can be drawn to minimize it. The further deciphering what practitioners’

presuppositions are about the preconditions and fundamental nature of knowledge in advertising, the gap can be understood on an even deeper level. Finally, by investigating the social context in which practitioner knowledge is used can provide a rich description of a knowledge-based occupation's professionalization dynamics.

As in any research investigations, there are necessary delimitations; the sphere of investigation has to be intentionally limited so that the research project can be completed efficiently and with necessary precision. Too broad of a scope render both of these directives unobtainable. This dissertation is delimited in the following ways: (1) Advertising practitioners were defined as people working at advertising agencies and only their views on how advertising was sought. There are other practitioners in and around advertising (TV commercial production companies, research consultancies or practitioners at the advertiser client's advertising/marketing department), but advertising agencies represent the core of the occupations' activities and they are at the center of its professionalization efforts. (2) Within the agencies, respondents were recruited from three key functional groups: creative directors, account managers and account planners. No media professionals were included as media research is a somewhat separate area of investigation in advertising research. The main focus of this study is on how advertising works, not so much what the rules are for placing advertising in media vehicles. (3) Only advertising as a topic was discussed and other forms of marketing communication disciplines (such as public relations, sales promotions, event marketing, etc.) were omitted for the sake of parsimony. (4) Advertiser clients were not included in the sample either, because the main objective was to understand the advertising occupation in the context of professionalization, and simply by definition it is the agency side of the business (the provider of the service, not the user of it) where professionalization manifests itself.

Next the scarce but relevant empirical literature will be reviewed as well as the study's theoretical framing: professionalization and the academic theoretical knowledge base of advertising.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

As the introduction in the previous chapter stated, the purpose of this study is to investigate the practitioner-academician gap by understanding what practitioners think about how advertising works. While a review of the academician-practitioner divide literature showed that there were no empirical studies presently available that addressed exactly this issue, there might be other empirical studies out there, which – perhaps indirectly – could provide useful evidence.

There has been a significant effort made to try and locate literature(s) of potential use. As it is often the case with exploratory studies, where there is no trodden path of ‘normal science’ research (Kuhn 1962) available, very few directly relevant studies were found. Those that were located are reviewed in the next section. Next, a methodologically diverse group of studies will be discussed, including survey research conducted among advertising practitioners. While such research is very informative about the opinions of practitioners about particular topics, they may not be as relevant for the holistic nature of this dissertation’s qualitative investigation. Third, qualitative, ethnographic studies of advertising agencies were considered in the hope that they may turn up some evidence about practitioner knowledge. A review of these studies is provided in the section “Naturalistic inquiries.” Lastly, theoretical literature of two varieties is presented. First, the theory framing the current dissertation, the theory of professions is discussed both in general terms and as-applied-to-advertising. Second, a summary of academic theories is offered

as a reference point for later comparisons with the dissertation's findings about practitioner theories.

Direct literature

The closest precursor of the current dissertation is a study by Kover (1995) on copywriters' "implicit theories" of how advertising works. The study's data contained in-depth interviews with copywriters at NYC and Detroit advertising agencies and asked them about their beliefs about how advertising works. The findings support the hypothesis that there are in fact theory-like constructs in copywriters' minds about the workings of advertising. These theories include a two-step process of (1) the message breaking through the clutter created by other advertising and (2) then the message itself is being conveyed to the recipients chiefly through emotional means. Further, Kover finds that practitioners believe there is a level of resistance among consumers to advertising messages: "But viewers do *not* want to see advertising. They do not want that flow of relief broken; they resist television advertising" (p. 599).

Copywriters' implicit theories also include directives about how to break through. Two such circumstances, under which advertising is more effective have been identified: subverting and forcing. Kover (1995) gives the following explanation: " 'Subverting' means presenting something that is disconcerting and charming, something unexpected enough that it slips past the guard of indifference" (p. 599). Forcing, on the other hand, "means jolting the viewer into paying some initial attention" (p. 600). Beyond these two means, however, Kover argues that practitioners do not possess general "rules" for breaking through: "Undoubtedly, these examples do not catalog all the means to break through. It appeared to us that each breakthrough approach reflected the personality of the individual copywriter and his or her way of dealing with others in

everyday life” (p. 600). Kover also suggests that copywriters often express serious epistemological concerns about the validity of commercial copytesting methodologies. Further, the study describes what it calls copywriters’ “internal dialogue” with their imagined target: “To make this connection, copywriters work out the message with an internalized target person. The message is hammered out in a dialogue until that person, that other, can accept the message” (p. 601). Kover places this dialogue in the context of intersubjectivity and the humanistic theory of reader-response criticism.

Kover’s (1995) study is the only one found in the advertising literature that grounds the investigation thoroughly in the practitioners’ knowledge forms as distinct from academic advertising theories. Even this article, however, has some limitations. Kover seems to blur the lines between the enduring theories copywriters have about how advertising works and the *processes* by which they come to specific creative ideas. The internal dialogue described above is not so much a practitioner theory (or a mental schema describing how advertising influences consumers) but rather a work procedure that copywriters may follow as they conduct their daily work. This distinction is clearly overlooked in the study. Kover’s findings are also specific to a particular context, a single occupational group in advertising: copywriters. It is unclear if the findings are applicable to advertising practitioners in other positions at the agency or the client advertising department.

Despite these limitations, Kover’s remains the only study found in the literature that attempts to problematize and investigate practitioners’ knowledge about advertising as separate from academic advertising theory.

While Kover (1995) focuses on theories that individual practitioners hold (he calls these theories “implicit” because they are not expressed intersubjectively), West and Ford (2001)

conceptualize “agency philosophies” at the intersubjective and explicit level. Agency philosophies are belief systems that are shared intersubjectively within the organization, and are often explicitly stated in agency brochures, memos or credos. Agency philosophy categories in West and Ford’s study – such as “anomalous,” “argument,” “brand identity,” “brand image,” “positioning,” “preemptive strategy,” “problem-solution,” “resonance,” and “unique selling proposition” (p. 84) – however, are generated without empirical investigation. They are simply stated by the authors to represent agency thinking based on anecdotal sources. Indeed, the main focus of the research is not agency philosophies per se, but rather the dependent variable, employee risk taking. The idea, however, that advertising agencies possess distinct “philosophies” is an interesting theoretical supposition, even if the above article does not carry empirical evidence to support it.

There is another theoretical conceptualization of advertising practitioner theories that has not yet been complemented with empirical support. The Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994) states that consumers have mental constructs about how advertising works and this knowledge (consumers’ theories of advertising) in turn can prevent advertising messages from directly influencing them. The Persuasion Knowledge Model also argues that it is not only the “targets” that have such theory-like mental schemas, but the “agents” (i.e., advertising practitioners) as well. Friestad and Wright state, however, that even though theoretically plausible, empirical support was not yet available at the time of publishing their theory: “Theory or empirical research directly describing the beliefs that marketers and advertisers use as a basis for their own persuasion attempts, or how they use that knowledge, is virtually nonexistent” (p. 26). After a thorough search of the growing “meta-cognition” literature (Wright 2002) no studies were found that investigated this portion of the Persuasion Knowledge Model empirically.

Finally, there is another, competing theoretical position on practitioners' knowledge that is worth noting. Cornelissen (2002) theorizes that the main difference between academician and practitioner theories of marketing is that academicians are interested in general, nomothetic theories, while practitioners only have theories that pertain to individual cases, or idiographic ones: "Unfortunately, as the present article argues, such an account is science-centrist, where both (academic and practitioner) orientations to marketing research are to be considered by academics so that they coalesce the findings of a nomothetic and global (academic) with an idiographic and localized (practitioner) research approach with the overall objective of gaining a more comprehensive theoretical understanding of the subject in case" (p. 135). This position, again, is not supported by empirical data, simply by the rhetoric of what common sense holds about practitioners: they are atheoretical. Furthermore and somewhat confusingly, however, Cornelissen also argues that practitioners may eventually develop general theories, undermining his previous argument about the crucial nomothetic/idiographic distinction: "Such a theory-in-use is in the first instance local and conditional, descriptive of and relevant to the specifics of the marketing situation or problem, but may take on a more general dimension when its use is affirmed and reaffirmed through established or proven ways of working and dealing with situations and problems of a similar nature" (p. 136). The supposition that practitioners' only have idiographic theories describing specific cases does not have strong support in the literature.

In short, with the exception of Kover's (1995) pioneering study about copywriters' implicit theories, there is no direct empirical research evidence conducted in a holistic manner about the content and nature of ad practitioners' thinking about how advertising works. Smaller-scale, survey-method studies "polling" practitioners on diverse advertising-related subjects may contain relevant knowledge for this dissertation. These are discussed in the following section.

“Practitioner polls”

Surveys conducted among advertising practitioners, “polling” their “opinions” about various subjects, are a more distantly related line of research to this dissertation. Conceptually, these “opinion poll” type surveys are quite different from Kover’s (1995) “implicit theories” investigation, as they do not study practitioner theories *in their fullness*, as a complex system of interrelated statements, but only as opinions related to specific issues. Nor do they allow practitioners to express any theory-like constructs they may have on their own terms. Instead their opinions are sought within the researchers’ language and frames of reference as pre-set questionnaire items dictate. Third, such investigations are usually theory-free descriptive studies, not unlike many political or public opinion polling projects.

Ad practitioners’ have been surveyed on many issues including *ethics* (Akaah and Riordan 1989; Hunt and Chonko 1987; Hunt, Chonko and Wilcox 1984; Krugman and Ferrell 1981; Moon and Franke 2000; Parsons, Rotfeld, and Gray 1987; Sheehan and Gleason 2001), *advertising education* (Gifford and Maggard 1975; Scott and Frontczak 1996), and *work procedures and managerial issues* (Butkys and Herpel 1992; Fam and Waller 1999; Fleck 1973; Franke, Murphy, and Nadler 2001; Gagnard and Swartz 1989; Gilligan 1977; Katz 1991; LaBahn 1996; Lancaster and Stern 1983; Patti and Blasko 1981; Perkins and Rao 1990; Permut 1977; Punyapiroje, Morrison, and Hoy 2002; Reid, King, and DeLorme 1998; San Augustine and Foley 1975; Smith 1989; Synodinos, Keown, and Jacobs 1989; Webster 1981; West, Collins, and Miciak 2003; West, Sargeant, and Miciak 1999).

Many studies also address what practitioners know about how advertising works. However, as suggested above, all these studies are limited to one particular knowledge area,

rather than practitioners' general theories of how advertising works or what advertising works the best. Surveys have asked practitioners for their opinions on *humor* (Madden and Weinberger 1984); *spokesperson characteristics* (Erdogan, Baker, and Tagg 2001; Greco 1988); *comparative advertising* (Muehling, Stem, and Raven 1989; Rogers and Williams 1989); *newspaper-* (King, Reid, and Morrison 1997), *television-* (Muehling and Kolbe 1997) *and internet advertising* (Bush, Bush, and Harris 1998; Lace 2004; Shen 2002); *integrated marketing communications* (Duncan and Everett 1993; Gould, Lerman, and Grein 1999); *sponsorships* (Cornwell, Roy, and Steinard 2001); *product placements* (Karrh, McKee, and Pardun 2003); *infomercials* (Beltramini 1983; Chapman and Beltramini 2000) and *media issues* (Katz and Lancaster 1989; King, Reid, and Macias 2004; Kreshel, Lancaster, and Toomey 1985; Leckenby and Boyd 1984; Leckenby and Kim 1994; Leckenby and Kishi 1982; Schultz 1979).

Some studies have investigated what we will call practitioner 'meta-theories.' Meta-theoretical ideas reference the epistemological or ontological presuppositions, conditions and nature of some topic (Bartels 1970; Ritzer 1992). In the case of ad practitioner polls, the most commonly researched subject has been ad practitioners epistemological concerns, and even more closely, their views on commercial advertising research. Boyd and Ray (1971), for example, surveyed European agency research directors about their beliefs about copytesting and found that respondents were somewhat concerned about the validity of such studies: "Almost to a man the European directors stated that they were concerned in some way about the ability of present techniques to actually measure and predict advertising effectiveness, especially in sales" (p. 223). Similarly, Moore (1985) reports that practitioners believe concept tests have serious limitations in validly measuring the effectiveness of certain concepts, especially emotional ones. Szybillo and Berger (1979) provide data about ad practitioners' attitudes towards focus groups

and finds that there are serious “liabilities”: advertiser clients tend to overgeneralize the findings and potential problems with recruitment can threaten validity. Other surveys have found that ad practitioners have concerns about the practical significance of commercial market research and for this reason, they do not consider to be very useful for certain research services (Russell and Martin 1980) or forms of market research (Holbert 1971).

The main limitation of all the above studies is that they are very narrowly focused on singular issues in advertising practice and do not address the general state of practitioner knowledge about advertising. Surveys on practitioner meta-theories about commercial advertising research will have more direct relevance for the discussion of Chapter 5. The above research studies are also limited by their methodology. Quantitative survey research is best at providing knowledge on more narrowly-focused topics, while the strength of qualitative research is offering more holistic understanding. Next, some of the naturalistic qualitative work will be reviewed in the hope that some may contain relevant findings about practitioners’ views on advertising.

Naturalistic inquiries into advertising practice

Sociological and anthropological studies about the advertising industry are scarce. Extensive sleuthing for qualitative-naturalistic empirical research turned up only a handful of items. This material is fragmented and approaches advertising practice from diverse angles.

Sociology of occupations. There has been very little research conducted on advertising within the tradition of the sociology of occupations; the only proper sociology of occupations study available is Tuntsall’s (1964) work on London advertising agencies. Tunstall provides a basic description of the advertising industry based on participant observations, archival research

and interviews with advertising practitioners. He uncovers typical processes and functions, but the study remains largely descriptive. Tunstall addresses the issue of the theoretical knowledge base in the advertising industry, but does not prioritize it above other subjects, nor does he describe in detail what theories advertising practitioners may have. He does problematize advertising knowledge, however, by claiming that despite the fact that it fits in the framework of “new” knowledge-based occupations, it does not have a firm scientific base. Advertising is characterized by extreme uncertainty: “The basic fact to remember about advertising is that little is known about what effect it has; even to talk of advertising having an effect is misleading” (p. 16). The uncertainty in the underlying theory of what effects advertising has is the “advertising man’s unease” (p. 20), a phrase and idea later popularized by Schudson (1984). Advertising men also seem to be skeptical about whether advertising knowledge is even achievable on a case-by-case basis: “An agency which encourages its clients to believe in the tests makes a calculated decision; it may make the clients happier, but the kind of advertisements which are produced as a result may get high test scores without selling goods” (pp. 133-34). Tunstall suggests that a lot of what determines the dynamics of advertising is the fact that no such underlying theory exists in the industry: “Since advertising can show little firm evidence as to its effectiveness, business confidence in advertising must inevitably be largely a matter of faith; for the same reason, the advertising business is one in which personal relationships play a more than usually important part” (pp. 33-34).

While Tunstall’s (1964) study points to the above issues around the status of the theoretical knowledge-base in advertising, it does not describe this knowledge, nor does it get into the details of how the advertising industry may compensate for the lack of it. Directionally, however, through the problematization of knowledge, the findings of epistemological skepticism

and the hypothesis about ad practitioners' compensatory techniques for the lack of firm knowledge, Tunstall's work does inform this dissertation.

Cultural studies. Another qualitative research tradition, which has dealt with advertising more extensively, is cultural studies. While the main focus of cultural studies research in advertising is on advertising texts and not the producers of these texts, a few studies did look at the originators of advertising messages, promising to complement the predominance of inquiries into textual ideology. This ethnographic type of cultural studies investigation has been usually couched in the context of "new cultural intermediaries" (McFall 2002; Nixon and du Gay 2002; Soar 2002 – following the theorizing of Bourdieu 1984). As Nixon and du Gay summarize, new cultural intermediaries are relatively new occupations that appeared late in the history of capitalism and can be described as "groups of workers involved in the provision of symbolic goods and services" (p. 496). They are a relevant group for cultural studies to investigate because – as Bourdieu argues – these occupational groups are instrumental in the maintenance and continuing legitimation of ideology (by mixing the economical and the cultural) through the displacement of the original culture producers: traditional intellectuals. The ethnographic description of advertising agencies (one example of new cultural intermediaries) in this tradition is therefore always placed in a conflict theoretical and politically engaged framework.

Soar (2000) interviewed advertising agency creatives and concluded that while creatives at advertising agencies fulfilled their function as cultural intermediaries and they did act as influential producers in the circuit of culture (Johnson 1986/1987), there was a "short circuit" in the model. Ad creatives' first source of inspiration and reference is not consumers but themselves. Soar's paradigmatic interests are different from this dissertation, but it is notable that, in passim, he does disclose findings about practitioner knowledge. He finds, for example,

that creatives are extremely skeptical about measurement techniques of advertising effectiveness, that creativity is the most important determinant of an ad's goodness and that this goodness is never defined in the "realm of effectiveness" (p. 429), but rather a socially constituted (although permeable) set of norms. While Soar does not use the language of social constructivism, his findings about the autonomy of the "short circuit" imply that practitioners' understanding of advertising is a socially constructed reality.

Nixon (2003) has also investigated ad practitioners from a cultural intermediaries perspective. His account's focus is the idea of creativity in advertising, which takes up a "totemic" character: it permeates, redefines and suppresses any other values at the agency; it becomes ideological (p. 161). The irony is that the cult of creativity is an ideology of only minor aesthetic differences (p. 74). Nixon does not directly address the issue how more institutionalized forms of knowledge collide or interact with the ideology of creativity, but does claim that ad practitioners' knowledge is different from what a theoretical knowledge base would dictate. Indeed, as we will discuss this point in the section about professionalism, he argues that ad practitioners have been able to get by without the classic professionalization project. Ad practitioners' knowledge is best described as "informal knowledge" (p. 35). Nixon, however, does not offer detailed description of what practitioners' informal knowledge topically contains, nor does he explain how it interacts with the dynamics of professionalism.

Martin (1992) relabels cultural intermediaries (i.e., the qualitative market researchers he interviewed) as "hidden technocrats" whose "knowledge base tends to lie either wholly or partly in the social sciences, sometimes in combination with more traditionally 'technical' knowledge" (p. 129). Martin situates his argument in the context of the displacement of academic research not only by "Thatcherite higher education policies" (p. 132) but also by the study's findings that

in the case of market researchers, the otherwise natural link to academic knowledge base is very tenuous. The link between a very broadly understood academia and practice is accepted by the hidden technocrats, but in everyday work no such theoretical bases are used or referred to.

Others approach the new cultural intermediaries argument more polemically. Cronin (2004b), for example, argues that the mediating role implied by the “intermediary” concept only applies if it is launched on less grandiose of a theoretical level than that of Bourdieu, and only if multiple “regimes of mediation” (p. 349) are assumed. In a post-structuralist framing of the same argument and using the same in-depth interview field data, Cronin (2004a) argues that these micro-level exchanges between agency professionals and clients (and to some extent advertising researchers) circulate market research data in a tactical way. These exchanges therefore testify to the fact that in the epistemologically instable environment of advertising work, knowledge about advertising is never inherently valid or invalid, it is always linked to its use value. The main use of market research in this environment is lending an air of science to agency-client negotiations, rather than providing politics-neutral truth, an approach that aligns perfectly with the Foucaultian theoretical framing of Cronin’s study.

Organizational sociology. Uncertainty and ambiguity is in the focus of Alvesson’s (1994) organizational sociology study on advertising agencies. The ethnographic study of a Swedish advertising agency provides empirical support for the argument that in response to the uncertainties in advertising knowledge the role of identity management and various tactics used for convincing others are of heightened importance. The result of knowledge ambiguities is an increase in compensatory symbolic behaviors: “This means that the skills and qualities of advertising agencies, professionals, work and products do not talk for themselves, but the subjects must convince themselves, as well as customers, that they have something to offer” (p.

544). The “impression of professionalism” (p. 545) serves as an effective technique compensating for the lack of certainty in advertising knowledge. Alvesson further argues that socially defined taste regimes can also be interpreted as attempts to overcome the consequences of persistent uncertainty in the industry.

Atheoretical descriptions. Other qualitative empirical studies on advertising practitioners have less clear disciplinary-theoretical affiliations. Schudson’s (1984) critique of advertising’s impact on American society, which involved in-depth interviews among agency professionals, discusses practitioners’ knowledge claims. He concludes that besides the particularities of target market and product, agency professionals do not have formal theories about how advertising works: “The absence of a systematic sociology or social psychology of consumption in advertising enables agencies to freely adjust their advertising campaigns – and the rationales for those campaigns – to the particular tastes and biases of an individual client” (p. 65). Hirota (1995) conducted ethnographic fieldwork among New York advertising agency. Her findings, just as those of Schudson, remain largely atheoretical although anthropological sensitivities are discernable when she describes agency processes in terms of storytelling and symbolic meaning-creation. She does not problematize practitioner knowledge as a separate entity; however, she alludes to the possibility that the social construction of ad practitioners’ reality may have a role: “Perhaps more importantly, creatives keep alert to the quintessential popular cultural form, namely advertisements themselves. They avidly watch the work of their peers, both to gauge the shifting norms of their own world and to garner clues about how best to cast either central themes or detailed images of their audiences” (p. 341).

Finally, two autobiographical studies are worth mentioning. Lewis (1964) gives a vivid account of the uncertainties of agency life and its consequences on ad practitioners’ careers as

well as typical conflict situations. Lewis also concludes that despite large amounts of research available in the industry, the advertising knowledge base remains problematic because of common failures in predictions of outcomes: “Research, surveys, pretesting, test markets, controlled experiments – all are attempts to eliminate this ambiguity and irrationality. But the failure to anticipate, to prevent one’s ‘best laid plans’ from going astray, is part of the very structure of the market” (p. 129). Thornton’s (1999) autobiographical account of her initiation into advertising practice after an academic communication research career underlines the fact that there is nothing natural about the relationship between academia and practice in the advertising industry. Her story of “an academic Alice in Adland” highlights the sometimes surreal nature of the discrepancies between the cultures of academia and advertising practice.

Summary. To summarize, ethnographic work into advertising practice is rather limited and inconclusive. From the perspective of this study, very little information is available about what advertising practitioners know about advertising. While many academic researchers conclude that practical knowledge is very uncertain, ad practitioners themselves are skeptical about the research-based knowledge in the area and has to compensate for the lack of certainty in one way or another. However, very little is known about the particulars of this knowledge or the details about its problematic nature.

The theory of professions – a general theory

As the introductory chapter on the academician-practitioner divide suggested, the understanding of this divide has been largely atheoretical. The basic premise of this dissertation, however, is that there may be a theoretical explanation, one which has to do with practitioner knowledge. The most elaborate theory of occupational knowledge can be found in the sociology

of occupations; it is the *theory of professions*. The theory of professions and professionalization will serve as a theoretical background for this study, even though it is not necessarily a theory-to-be-validated, as explained in Chapter 3 about methodology. Because of the background role the theory serves for this study, an overview of both the general theory and its application to the advertising are needed.

History of a concept. The words ‘profession,’ and its derivatives (‘professional,’ ‘professionalism,’ etc.) has reached the level of a theoretical concept in the sociology of occupations. While the everyday use of the word allows for a variety of meanings, the sociological concept has a much more limited use. The *Merriam-Webster* (2001) dictionary, for instance, defines the word ‘profession’ as both (1) “a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation,” and (2) “a principal calling, vocation, or employment” (p. 928). Thus the everyday usage of the term, as can be seen from this definition, is overly broad. Indeed, the subjectivity of a ‘calling’ would allow the inclusion of practically any occupation. The sociological use of the term is much more focused; it references only a small group of occupations, ones that are distinguished from the rest by some special features. The specific features that are used to distinguish professions from other occupations, however, has been the subject of a long discussion in the sociology of occupations.

‘Profession’ as a concept first appears in Carr-Saunders and Wilson’s *The Professions* (1933). The concept is defined as “organized bodies of experts who applied esoteric knowledge to particular cases” (cited by Abbott 1988, p. 4). The authors lay down the framework of what has later been called the ‘traits approach.’ According to this perspective, the task of the sociological study of professions is the compilation of a list of features that would best describe an ideal-typical profession. Empirical work then could characterize all occupational groups as

more or less professional (MacDonald 1995, pp. 2-3). The common traits that have been identified are: theoretical knowledge base, altruism, ethical codes, authority in the relationships with clients, autonomy, licensing from the state, formal organization (e.g. associations), and education.

The sociological paradigm that affiliated itself the most strongly with the traits approach was functionalism. As MacDonald (1995) shows, professions had a special role in the functionalist theory of society. Professions were considered unique occupations in functionalist thinking because they were “eufunctional,” meaning that they served some key interests of society, such as physical and spiritual health, military and legal defense (cf. the four major professional groups according to this tradition are medicine, the ministry, the military and law).

In line with functionalists’ essentially benign view of society and primary concern with the maintenance of the social order (Collins 1994), they viewed the professions as one of the most important social institutions. It is their exceptional significance, according to this view, that guarantees them special treatment from the state and special prestige from the public. While the functionalists generally subscribed to the multi-trait approach described above, one trait was given special attention: altruism, or the idea that professionals place the public interest before their own. As Parsons (1954) puts it: “professions are marked by ‘disinterestedness.’ The professional man is not thought of as engaged in the pursuit of his personal profit, but in performing services to his patients or clients, or to impersonal values like the advancement of science” (p. 35).

By the end of the 1960s, the shortcomings of both the functionalist paradigm and the traits approach became clear. Just as sociologists found the consensus-based understanding of society insufficient for the explanations of inequality and stratification, similarly, less ‘benign’

aspects of the professions began to surface. The earlier central research question, “What part do the professions play in the established order of society?” was replaced by “How do such occupations manage to persuade society to grant them the privileges they have?” (MacDonald 1995, p. xii).

Altruism was no longer taken at face value; rather it was approached critically as simply one of the tools in the ideological bag of tricks of power-hungry occupational groups. Altruism and esoteric knowledge, according to the new theory, were used by the professions to gain economic monopoly. The new critics of the professions, the “monopolists” (Abbott 1988, p. 10) had a Weberian sensitivity to the questions of stratification, and were unwilling to acknowledge or legitimate uncritically the special prestige of the professions. While it is impractical here to review all the different variations of these postfunctionalist theories (Burrage, Jarausch, and Siegrist 1990; Freidson 1970; Halliday 1987; Larson 1977, 1990), it is safe to claim that the critical tone has stayed for the rest of the history of the sociology of professions, the original interactionist interest having gotten mixed with Marxian and Foucaultian ideas (MacDonald 1995, pp. 22-27).

In the 1960s the method of the “traits approach” also came under heavy attack. It became clear that defining a concept based on a list of traits – none of which were necessary, but all were sufficient – is an inadequate way of conceptualizing the phenomenon. Not only was this approach overly broad but, as Millerson (1964) noted, it often conveyed political biases (referenced by Abbott 1988, p. 4). The altruism trait of the professions, in particular, was viewed as more of a reflection of functionalists’ ideas about society than as an impartial assessment. A sufficiently neutral and distinguishing trait was needed for the definition of professions.

After thorough reviews of the literature, both Abbott (1988) and MacDonald (1995) conclude that this core trait of the professions should be (and implicitly has always been) a “theoretical knowledge base.” Abbott’s own theory of the “jurisdictional” struggles of the professions (inter-professions competition for the provision of similar services) is built on knowledge. He defines professions as “exclusive occupational groups applying somewhat *abstract knowledge* to particular cases” (p. 8, my italics), and suggests that it is the level of abstraction that determines the successfulness (or demise) of a profession in its “jurisdictional” struggles (p. 9). It is only through knowledge that professions can achieve and maintain their special status in society amidst the attacks of fellow professional or occupational groups encroaching on their jurisdictions.

Similarly, MacDonald cites Halliday (1987) that it is the theoretical knowledge base that represents the “core generating trait” (p. 29) of professions. Further, MacDonald (1995) argues that the character of this knowledge is abstract and formal in its roots, identical with the common understanding of scientific knowledge: “Sociologists generally take a model of rational, formalized scientific knowledge as their starting point in the study of the epistemological base of the professions, and then elaborate in relation to a number of other features of professions and their social context” (MacDonald 1995, p. 157). The theoretical knowledge base should also be sufficiently “esoterical,” complicated and extensive enough so that professional groups can support a claim of unique capabilities. The requirement for this level of complexity that allows professions to maintain the legitimacy of expertise is evident in MacDonald’s consensus definition: “The subject of this book is what the English-speaking world calls ‘professions,’ and which for the sake of sociological clarity we should refer to as ‘occupations based on advanced,

or complex, or esoteric, or arcane knowledge’; or better still [...] formally rational abstract utilitarian knowledge’ ” (p. 1).

Indeed, some of the traits of the ‘traits approach’ can easily be deduced from the theoretical knowledge base requirement, while others have been effectively discredited by interactionist critics, as shown above. *Formal education* conducted at universities, for instance, is very difficult to imagine without something substantial to teach and research. Knowledge is also the most important guarantee of *authority* in client-relations. All other attempts lacking such legitimization force as knowledge has to maintain the upper hand in a relationship between a service provider and client would eventually fade away. The connections between the professions and the state show a similar pattern. It is very unlikely that the state would support professional authority with *licenses and mandates*, if there were no objective bases upon which this authority could be built. Knowledge, at least seemingly, is sufficiently independent of the professionals themselves to make the granting of this authority “safe.” *Professional associations* often serve as collectors, containers, and disseminators of esoteric, profession-relevant knowledge. Their existence, however, in itself, is insufficient for the delineation of professions from other occupations – as practically all occupations have a (more or less organized) association. Finally, as was shown earlier, the *altruism* trait was seriously challenged by postfunctionalist theories of the professions.

For all these reasons, the author of this dissertation concurs with MacDonald (1995) and Abbott (1988), and accepts *esoteric and theoretical knowledge base* as the core generating trait of professionalism, separating professions from other occupations.

The professionalization process. The analysis of the professions so far has been synchronic, or time-independent. In reality, of course, professions have histories; they are born, they develop – and die in some cases. The diachronic or time-based aspect of the professions is referred to as ‘professionalization’ (Wilensky 1964). As professionalism, professionalization is a theoretical concept to be delineated from the everyday use of the word. Professionalization denotes the unique process occupations utilize to try and achieve professional status. Theories about professionalization therefore are applicable to a wider group of occupations, even to those that have not yet reached (or never will) the level of professionalism. Professionalism and professionalization, nevertheless, are closely interrelated concepts. Professions represent a time-free ideal, which is either reached or stay unrealized by occupational groups in the process of professionalization.

The key assumption behind the professionalization idea is that it is natural for occupational groups to try to achieve professional status; and all of them, in fact, seek this status. The motivations for striving for professional status are numerous and correspond to the professional traits described above. Most importantly, professionalism grants *authority* to occupations over their clients to negotiate their relationships in a more advantageous fashion, eventually translating authority into significant economic benefits. Professionalism also means protection from the attacks of neighboring occupations trying to encroach on the professions’ jurisdictions (Abbott 1988). The highest level of protection comes from the state in the form of licensing (Hughes 1958). Again, there are significant economic gains (and psychological ones on the level of the practicing individuals) from having a professional status. Finally, the overall prestige in society, often put in ethical terms, represents a strong gratification (Larson 1977).

As Abbott shows, these motivations are often left implicit in the theories of professionalization; nevertheless, it is difficult to imagine the workings of these theories without them. He further suggests that while sociologists assume a common professionalization story taking place, there are significant variations in the ways in which the story is depicted. Commonly, the story of professionalization is framed in external, organizational, or institutional terms. Wilensky (1964), for example, traces the origins of 18 occupational groups and finds a general sequential pattern consisting of ‘full time activity,’ ‘formal training,’ ‘professional association,’ ‘state licensing,’ and ‘code of ethics,’ in this order (pp. 142-46). In his assessment, these stages are sequential and necessarily ordered on the route to professionalism; he also asserts that there are significant barriers and not all occupations will ever attain professional status. Other scholars, however, challenge the sequential approach (see Millerson 1964). In Millerson’s variation of the professionalization story the steps (i.e., ethical code, first university classes, professional association, etc.) can occur in any order, or simultaneously, based on the particularities of the occupation in question.

Abbott (1988) suggests that even these conceptualizations miss the mark. The most important change in the history of a profession is not organizational or external; it has to do with the actual *content of work*, not organizational *form*. The analysis of professionalization should focus on the actual work that professionals do: “The central problem with the current concept of professionalization is its focus on structure rather than work. It is the content of the professions’ work that the case studies tell us is changing” (p. 19). It is important for Abbott to insist on the content on work, since he builds a theory that investigates the professions as interrelated rather than independent. The link is the content, the abstract knowledge base professions compete about among each other.

While institutional change is an important hallmark of professionalization, the author of this dissertation agrees with Abbott that it is the content-based, work-based approach that gives a fuller, more substantial picture of professional change. When applying the professionalization theory to advertising, it will be internal (work-based, knowledge-based) criteria that will be used to assess how the dynamics of the professionalization project influence practitioners' understanding of the knowledge about advertising and not institutional ones (such as associations, education, or state licensing).

In the advertising and marketing literatures, to the author's knowledge, the theory of professions hasn't been applied to advertising at a level of rigor that would match its original conceptualization in the sociology of professions. There has been some discussion, however, among academic advertising/marketing researchers about the professional status of the advertising occupation. The review of this literature is covered in the following section.

The theory of professions – in the context of advertising

Academic advertising research has not analyzed professionalism in advertising in great detail. Only a handful of articles have been found that investigate either the current professional status of advertising, or its historical professionalization project. Part of the reason is that advertising research, as a discipline, is mainly built on psychology and not sociology. Academic advertising research show relatively little interest in the organizational context in which the basic knowledge it generates – how advertising works – is used. Thus, the analysis of professionalism in advertising research does not reach the theoretical sophistication of that of the sociology of occupations.

Most of the sources reviewed here agree that (1) advertising has embarked on a professionalization project, but (2) somewhere along the way the project got grounded. As Hunt (2002a) concludes in his influential summary of the foundations of marketing theory, despite the professionalization efforts, “it is still safe to say that none of the various and remarkably heterogeneous occupations associated with marketing, that is, sales, advertising, brand/product management, marketing research, retail management, wholesale management, distribution management, and marketing management, has reached (or been accorded by society) the status of a ‘profession’ ” (p. 58). He fails to give specific reasons, nor does he give a detailed analysis of the professionalization project.

Diachronic approaches. The professionalization process in the advertising literature is often characterized by the external markers of advancement in the project. Walker and Child (1979), for instance, writing about the more inclusive category of marketing, analyze the steps defined by Wilensky (1964). They pay special attention to a key marketing association and its internal organizational struggles. They conclude that marketing in Britain is only a semi-profession, because it misses two key characteristics of Wilensky’s necessary steps: an enforceable code of ethics and state licensing. Marketing also lacks the theoretical knowledge base. The failure, according to the authors, is mainly due to organizational problems with the marketing association and its inability to coordinate successful education programs and communications with the marketing community.

Similarly, Gerhold (1971, 1974) attributes the failure of marketing research, an important advertising function, to reach a professional status to organizational problems. He claims that “there is still no market research profession. This failure could hardly have been expected, considering the sincerity and even the evangelism of research’s beginning” (1971, p. 47). The

suggested reason is that marketing researchers have not been able to distinguish between high quality practitioners and amateurs through accreditation procedures: “The situation is likely to continue as long as the users of research, and many researchers, are unable to distinguish, within the market research field, those individuals whose ability and integrity actually qualify them to practice market research professionally” (1974, p. 10). Gerhold, thus, conceptualizes professionalization as a struggle between the “elite” and general practitioners, and argues that the former should rigorously control the latter by association-directed accreditation procedures. This suggests that organizational control would solve all the problems with professional status. Similarly, Ramond (1974, 1980), editorializing on such events as the establishment of the ‘Committee on the Recognition of Professional Competence’ by the American Marketing Association and the first Master’s Degree offered by The University of Georgia in marketing research, proposes that these organizational changes are the real guarantees of professionalization (cf. editorial titles “Toward Professionalism”).

Other researchers construe the history of the advertising profession in the context of an individual trait. Schultze (1981) gives an account of the early (1900-17) attempts of the advertising industry to establish a code of ethics. While in this article he considers ethical issues, such as the altruism trait, as essential for professionalism, unlike the functionalists, he is very skeptical about its actual use: “Ethical codes, as the advertising business’s most characteristic expression of professionalism, derived historically from the business’s desire to create an ideology of public interest” (p. 64). While the monopolist theory of professions is not referenced, the analysis of the creation of the professional advertising “myth” (p. 70) through the realization of the “ideology” of ethics (p. 67), places Schultze within the postfunctionalist tradition. Schultze’s is a unique approach, since it is much more common in the advertising research

literature to accept “professional” ethical codes uncritically (see, for example, Murphy and Coney 1976).

The establishment of another institution serving the advertising profession forms the basis of another account by the same author (Schultze 1982). Schultze analyzes the early history of advertising education in relation to the professionalization attempts of practitioners. The story is similar to a failed love affair. The first advertising courses and programs were set up by professionals in the hope that the cooperation between academia and advertising practitioners would be able to generate an abstract knowledge base, which was considered essential for the professionalization project. Academicians and practitioners alike believed that “formal advertising instruction would provide a forum for establishing a corpus of ‘scientific’ principles that would [...] eliminate the advertiser’s dependence upon intuition and subjectivity” (p. 22). The marriage between academia and professionals had gone sour quite quickly, as Schultze testifies, mainly because each group had their own agendas that became increasingly contradictory over time. Advertising agencies, for example, refused to release proprietary research to academicians, fearing that they would lose their competitive advantage. Some practitioners became skeptical of the utility of psychology-based advertising research, and outright questioned if advertising could ever become a “science.” Finally, educational institutions “had their own priorities and status interests” (p. 31) that contradicted those of the advertising practitioners. As a consequence, the professional project failed: “Although advertisers wished to create a profession, that was a dream that would not become real even with university instruction” (p. 32). While knowledge is considered to be a key element of advertising in Schultze’s account, it is only assessed in an organizational context, within the frame of educational institutions, and not by itself, as a basis of jurisdictional struggles.

Synchronic analyses. Synchronic approaches are also present in advertising professions literature. The traditional traits approach is advocated by Keane (1974), for instance. He identifies 15 traits as necessary for the professional status (including “unique theory,” “organization,” “entry qualifications,” “legal recognition,” “code of ethics,” etc.) and concludes that since advertising misses some of these, it cannot be considered a profession: “Assuredly, advertising contains many elements of professionalism, (status of a profession). However, strictly speaking, it is not a profession” (p. 11). Similarly, Coe and Coe (1976) isolate four hallmarks of professionalism for marketing research (“service to society,” “admission regulated by law,” “code of ethics,” and “specialized body of knowledge”), and conclude that since market research does not have *all* of these traits, it is not a profession. The common characteristic in these writings is the following of the “traits approach” logic. None of the traits have a special status within the theory, all count equally. The authors cited above, however, are more ‘rigorous’ than the original “traits” advocates, since they require *all* the features to be present.

Other researchers, similar to the emerging consensus in the sociology of professions literature, attribute a special importance to the theoretical knowledge base. Brown (1948), for example, lays out the often cited agenda for scientific marketing and corresponding marketing professionalism:

In any developing field of human endeavor, progress to a professional level is earmarked in large measure by the extent to which critical thought has shifted from a descriptive basis to one which is primary analytical. [...] The idea that sales-management, advertising management or any other form of management in the marketing field can be based solely on a record of personal performance, personality characteristics, hunch, guesswork or enthusiasm must disappear before marketing can have real professional status (pp. 27-28).

Similarly, Takai (1973) claims that theoretical knowledge is the essential feature of professionalism: “The fundamental requisite of a profession, as any decent dictionary would

divulge, is the possession of a substantial organized body of knowledge” (p. 47). Accordingly, he concludes that since advertising does not have an abstract theoretical knowledge base, it is not a profession. Stewart (1974) concurs and suggests that the existing knowledge about advertising is not abstract or theoretical enough, it is only on the practical, vocational, technological level: “Current explanations of advertising are mostly at the vocational-technological level. And we note that explanations at this level have failed to coherently explain when a specific advertisement has succeeded in the purpose for which time and money has been spent for its construction” (p. 48).

While for different reasons, all the above observers reached a negative conclusion about advertising’s professional status, they phrased their verdict in conditional terms. According to them, advertising is capable of becoming a profession; it has only been stalled as a result of the presence of some barriers, which can potentially be removed in the future. There are other researchers, however, who claim that advertising cannot and *will not* ever become a profession. To these “skeptics,” we turn now.

In the same *Journal of Advertising* symposium about professionalism where Keane (1974) applied the “traits approach,” Lynn (1974) expressed a much more skeptical view. In his assessment, professionalism is simply a “state of mind,” a subjective commitment to good work, and a subjective feeling of being a professional. He seems to acknowledge the importance of advertising theory – “nothing is more practical than theory” (p. 16) – but he points to the fact that advertising practitioners seldom feel this need. He reaches the negative conclusion that “No, advertising is not a profession. That status, however, is neither possible nor necessary” (p. 15). The argument is ambiguous, and does not specify any inherent reason why advertising cannot ever become a profession. In the same symposium, Allport (1974) also attacks the knowledge-

based definition of professions and suggests instead that it should be replaced with the image of the ‘old pro’: “Perhaps the vernacular will help. The term ‘old pro’ comes to mind. It implies competence, reliability, and resourcefulness particularly in adversity. An ‘old pro’ gets the job done, reasonably well – every time” (p. 18). Thus professionalism seems to be equated with endurance and in a later section, skill: “The advertising professional is competent in his craft or discipline” (p. 20). It is not discussed, however, how personality characteristics or personal skills can be used as a basis for negotiation with clients or on a macro-level, such as the advertising industry’s overall status in society or its relation to the state. For Allport (as for Lynn), the rhetoric of the argument and personal feelings seem to be more important than a detailed and impartial assessment.

Baur (1949) suggests that in the case of advertising the ceremonial character of associations and the development of a secondary knowledge base, advertising trade press are effective replacements of a truly successful professionalization project: “Through their own trade press and voluntary associations advertising men developed and diffused a body of ceremonial behavior consisting of pseudo-science, myths and rituals. [...] They had attained a semiprofessional estate” (p. 359).

Finally, current sociological studies of British advertising agency culture (Nixon 2000, 2003) point to some interesting characteristics inherent in the agency business, which might make us skeptical whether it will ever reach the status of professionalism. Nixon agrees that while the advertising industry (in particular, its main trade association in Britain, the Institute of Practitioners of Advertising) had “historically pursued a professionalising project” (2003, p. 58), a lot of practitioners gave it up along the way. He notes that “[By the 1960s] agencies were able to consolidate their position as the preeminent suppliers of advertising services in this period

without recourse to the assurances of professional qualifications that the IPA had felt necessary” (p. 68). The current situation might be different, however, and Nixon does not take a strong position for either side. He acknowledges that professionalism is still an important issue for the IPA, but he also cites some evidence from his in-depth interviews with advertising practitioners, that they do not see professionalism as necessary for survival. The creative area, in particular, is a problematic one. Nixon cites a creative director in his sample as saying “the trouble with the creative area is that it is more of an art than science” (p. 69), and point to the fact that the IPA conspicuously left out creatives and creativity from its professionalization efforts. However, Nixon does not spell out all the possible implications of these findings. His account remains incomplete.

Summary. In conclusion, the discourse of professionalism and the professions in the advertising and marketing literatures are rather fragmentary and atheoretical. With some exceptions (e.g., Hunt 2002a; Nixon 2000, 2003; Walker and Child 1979) writers about professionalism are not aware of the developments in the sociology of professions literature. Professionalism does not seem to be high on the academic advertising research agenda. The writings are isolated and do not share a common definition of professionalism (cf. “traits approach,” ethics and knowledge-based definitions). Further, the discussion of the historical aspects concentrates on organizational characteristics and not actual advertising work. These external markers of professionalization, however, are only the “side-effects” of a successful profession. As Abbott (1988) suggests, what is needed is an analysis of the content, the actual work of the profession under investigation, not only the organizational-institutional frameworks and contexts within which the work is conducted.

How advertising works – what do we know in academia?

Since practitioner theories will be the main topic this dissertation investigates it is important to establish what academic advertising research believes in as a point of comparison. As a final section in this literature review, such a summary will be given.

Despite the fact that the books, articles, research reports, essays and speeches written about advertising could fill a medium-sized library, advertising still remains somewhat of a mystery (McDonald 1992). Academic researchers, advertising practitioners, and critics often disagree about how advertising influences individuals, the economy or society. Arguments often surface not only between “critics” and “supporters,” but also within groups of thinkers of similar paradigmatic orientation. The development of the academic study of advertising has not resolved all the conflicted ideas about how advertising exerts its influence. Before assessing some of the available reviews, it is beneficial to first provide a snapshot of the academic theories of advertising.

Delimitations. To be able to talk about the complex effects of advertising, some preliminary distinctions have to be made. First, the meaning of ‘effects’ or ‘influence’ needs clarification. Advertising expresses its influence on multiple levels (McQuail 2000): on the individual, society, and the economy. This threefold interest is reflected in the three main disciplines from which the interdisciplinary study of advertising has borrowed: psychology, sociology and economics, each investigating distinct units of analysis. ‘Academic advertising research,’ a subfield within the mass communication and marketing disciplines, psychology gained predominance. Accordingly, when one talks about ‘effects’ or ‘influence’ in advertising research, one usually means the effect of an advertising stimulus on the individual; effects are

expressed in cognitive-attitudinal or behavioral psychological terms. Alternatively, the behavioral effect of ‘sales’ is sometimes conceptualized in microeconomic terms.

As Buttle (1991) concludes in a content analysis of the advertising effects literature between 1975 and 1989, these individual psychological and micro-economic effects dominate the scholarly output. Much less attention is paid to macro-levels of influence, the effects of advertising on society and the economy. Out of the 619 items reviewed in *Communication Abstracts* within the population time-frame, Buttle finds only 29 dealing with macroeconomic issues and 5 of cultural effects. While the above numbers seem unreasonably low (a bias that may be due to unknown criteria utilized by the editors of *Communication Abstracts*), the psychological orientation of the “dominant paradigm” of communication and advertising research is hardly in question (Harms and Kellner 1991).

In fact, the distinction between the micro- and macro-level study of advertising effects largely corresponds to the divide between the dominant or “administrative” (Lazarsfeld 1941) and the critical-cultural paradigms. Mainstream advertising research investigates individual or social psychological effects (sometimes complemented with microeconomic concepts), while critical-cultural studies focus on long term and macro-level (societal, political, and macroeconomic) effects of advertising.

A framework for theories. Since the study investigates “practitioner theories” and contrasts them with social scientific theories about how advertising works, it is worthwhile to briefly summarize what is commonly understood as theory in social science. Most thinkers on social scientific theory underscore the notion that theories are composed of interrelated statements and their purpose is explanation and prediction of empirical social scientific phenomena. Babbie (2001), for example, defines theory as the following: “Theories, by contrast,

are systematic sets of interrelated statements intended to explain some aspect of social life” (p. 51). Theories are not simply hypothesized and corroborated relationships between variables, they are interrelated sets of these, whose purpose is to provide explanation: “As I just indicated, laws should not be confused with theories. Whereas a law is an observed regularity, a *theory* is a systematic explanation for observations that relate to a particular aspect of life” (p. 52).

Hunt (2002a) applies this basic conception of social scientific theory to marketing and defines theory as: “a systematically related set of statements, including some lawlike generalizations, that is empirically testable” (p. 193). Hunt concludes that these three criteria, a) “systematically related,” b) “lawlike generalizations,” c) “empirically testable” constitute the essence of theory.

Interestingly, meta-theoreticians also point out that the basic morphology of theory is applicable to a wider area than science. McQuail (2000), writing about mass communication theory, argues that normative, practitioner and everyday/lay theories have similar inner structures and ambitions of explanatory value: “If theory is understood not only as a system of law-like generalizations, but as any systematic set of ideas that can help make sense of a phenomenon, guide action or predict a consequence, then one can distinguish at least four kinds of theory which are relevant to mass communication. These can be described as: social scientific, normative, operational and everyday theory” (p. 7). This observation is an especially relevant addition to our understanding of theory as it points to the direction of this dissertation uncovering one of these theory forms: ad practitioners’ theories about how advertising works.

Academic, social scientific theories on advertising are manifold, thus for the sake of simplicity, only micro-level, psychologically or microeconomically based theories will be reviewed here. How advertising works – here and now, right after the advertising exposure, on

the psyche of the target group, or the sales curve of the brand – is the question most advertising decision makers want to answer. Advertising research, as an applied field has attempted to offer theoretically based and empirically corroborated answers. Unfortunately, most of these answers remain rather scattered and loosely integrated. A rudimentary framework is offered here to structure the extensive and complex literature (see **Figure 2.1**).

	<i>Universal</i>	<i>Domain-specific</i>
<i>Basic</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Market response 2. Pure cognition (market power theory, economics of information theory) 3. Pure affect (familiarity and emotion-based theories) 4. Hierarchy-of-effects (AIDA, DAGMAR) 5. Low-involvement hierarchy 6. Integrative (e.g., FCB-grid) 7. Hierarchy free (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999)	Basic/universal theories limited by product category, industry type, medium, space, time
<i>Moderator-focused</i>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Source effects 2. Message effects 3. Channel effects 4. Audience effects 5. Communication environment effects (Atkin 1984)	Moderator-focused/universal theories limited by product category, industry type, medium, space, time

Figure 2.1 Types of advertising theories.

The two basic distinctions are (1) between “basic” and “moderator-focused” theories of advertising and (2) that of “universal” applicability versus “domain-specificity.” Basic theories, as the term is used here, try to answer the fundamental question: “how does advertising work?” Different explanations for this key question (indeed, the core question of the discipline) have been recently summarized by Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) into seven categories and will be reviewed later.

The second typical question asked by advertising researchers aims at possible factors that can moderate (Baron and Kenny 1986) a fundamental advertising effects model: “what type of advertising works the best” or “under what conditions the dependent variables (sales or otherwise) will be the highest.” This line of research is a quest for moderator variables, preferably those that can be managed. If the moderators in the theory are manageable by advertising practitioners, they can be called “problem-oriented” by using Hunt’s term (2002a, p. 55).

The second distinction in the typology has to do with the level of abstraction or the extensiveness of the theory’s claimed sphere of validity. Is the theory describing all types of advertising – “universal theories,” or “general theories” in Hunt’s (2002a, p. 244) terminology – or is it specifically designed to give explanations for a particular type of advertising “domains” (i.e., based on industry-, product-, channel-type, or time and space, etc.)? The goal of these latter theories is to explain a well-defined subset of advertising phenomena in the most precise manner.

It might seem that *domain-specificity* and *moderator-focus* are the same thing; they are conditions that modify a hypothesized relationship or set of relationships (a basic effects model). However, there is a key difference *in the ways in which* these conditions (moderators versus what are called “domains” here) “interfere” with the core relationships hypothesized by the theory.

Moderators – that is source, message, channel, audience, and context effects (Atkin 1984 following the seminal work of Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield 1949) – only change the *levels* of the outcome variables (i.e., communication or sales effects), while different domains might dictate a fundamental restructuring of variables in the hypothesized theoretical models, not simply changes in the levels of these variables. Thus, when a researcher suggests that “services marketing” (Murray 1991) or television advertising (Krugman 1965) necessitate a whole different theoretical treatment (“domain-specific theories”), he or she means that the structure of the causal relationships will be different. Conversely, if one only wants to answer the question, under what conditions (levels of a moderator variable e.g. a type of spokesperson versus another) a marketer will get higher levels of a dependent variable (e.g. more brand awareness), then we can call this a “moderator-focused” theory.

This distinction is useful even if the same variable can serve as a moderator in a moderator-focused theory and a domain in a domain-specific theory. One may suggest, for instance, that the same message transmitted through advertising has a stronger effect in television than in print (Grass, Bartges, and Piech 1972; cited by Atkin 1984); or conversely one can hypothesize that television advertising requires a whole separate theory (Krugman 1965). The spheres of applicability and conclusions that can be drawn from theories based on these two scenarios are quite different. A synthetic approach called “integrative theories” (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999, p. 34) claims that the only way one can construct a “universal” theory of advertising is by organizing domain-specific theories in a structured and meaningful framework, while trying to cover as many domains as possible. According to this view, no universal answer is possible for the question how advertising works, at least if the theory aims to be more than trivial.

Basic/universal theories. Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) identified six other types of “universal” advertising theories based on a review of 250 articles and books in the academic literature (categories are cited in **Figure 2.1**). Batra, Myers, and Aaker (1996) offer a similar taxonomy (pp. 130-39, 151-72). The simplest models are the “market response” ones; they do not hypothesize any intermediate effects between ad stimulus and sales effect. In a strict sense, thus, they do not explain “how advertising works,” they simply suggest that advertising works. Theories in this category are predominantly microeconomic in nature and investigate “sales” as a dependent variable. Some models look at aggregate levels of response and long-term timespans. The second group, “cognitive information models” assumes that consumers attend to advertising because it aids them in their information search about products. Thus the key psychological response to advertising is rational information processing.

Microeconomically focused studies also investigate advertising’s effect on price. The two competing theories are “market power theory,” which predicts that advertising decreases price sensitivity and thus allows higher prices, while “economics of information theory” suggests that advertising causes lower prices by aiding consumer information search and price comparisons (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999, p. 29). Affect is ignored in both of these groups of theories.

Conversely, “pure affect models” explain the workings of advertising by affective responses only. Two main groups belong here: familiarity and emotion-based theories. Theories in the first group state that advertising works through familiarizing the brand with the audience. The common thread in mere exposure, salience and pre-attention theories is that the only response needed for advertising to be effective is a very low level of awareness – so low that they cannot be considered fully “cognitive,” or rational responses (Batra, Myers, and Aaker 1996). Emotions and feelings are the domain of the second group of theories. They state that the

most important mediator of ad effectiveness is “affectively based attitudes” (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2002) either toward the brand or the ad. The importance of rationality is minimized in these models.

The next model, called the ‘hierarchy-of-effects’ has the longest history and the most face validity in advertising theory; it has been so commonly accepted that Joyce (1967) calls it the “common-sense theory” of advertising (cited by Shankar 1999, p. 2). Hierarchy-of-effects models combine cognitive and affective responses, and organize them in a “hierarchy,” or time sequence. AIDA (Strong 1925), DAGMAR (Colley 1961), and similar models state that cognitive responses precede (and are the necessary conditions of) change in affectively-based attitudes. Affective attitude change, conversely, is a necessary precondition for the eventual sales effect. Because of the requirement for both cognitive and affective attitude change (a difficult task for any stimulus), in the British academic and professional advertising discourse, the hierarchy-of-effects model is often referred to as the “strong theory” of advertising (Jones 1990; Wicks 1989).

Common criticisms of the hierarchy-of-effects models include that time order does not have any practical significance, that the distinction between cognition and affect are not conceptually clear, and that the hierarchy-of-effects model simply lack empirical support and do not apply to most advertising situations (Barry and Howard 1990). Hierarchy-free (see Vakratsas and Ambler’s (1999) own model) and emerging theories incorporating a number of unconventional (humanistic, postmodernist, constructivist) approaches try to overcome these shortcomings. A lively discussion that took place recently on the main mailing list of the American Marketing Association suggests that the academic marketing community is becoming

increasingly frustrated with the shortcomings of the model. The hierarchy-of-effects model may have much less empirical support than its commonly accepted status would suggest.

“Low-involvement” theory is the most important rival of the hierarchy-of-effects model. Low-involvement theories claim that in most advertising reception situations consumers are not motivated to scrutinize the advertising message to the extent hierarchy-of-effects models would require them to do (Krugman 1965). Instead, consumers pay only cursory attention to advertising and are willing to try the brand based on this low level of awareness, without significant attitude change (Ehrenberg 1974). Attitude change can only happen after the trial purchase (i.e., learn→do→feel hierarchy). Thus in the low-involvement model attitude change is a post-purchase effect of advertising (i.e., “reminder mechanism,” Sheth 1974, p. 10).

While low-involvement theory is the key alternative to traditional hierarchy-of-effects models, and has some empirical support (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999), it is not clear to what extent it is a model of *advertising* effects, and not *consumer behavior* in general. If trial purchase (and resulting satisfaction) is the key independent variable driving attitude change, how is this describing the effects of *advertising*? Further, it is questionable that advertising can only reinforce but cannot change or create attitudes. While the low-involvement model might have support in certain scenarios, it fails to explain others.

Finally, integrative models, such as the FCB-grid (Vaughn 1986) attempt to be the best of all worlds by combining hierarchy-of-effects, low-involvement, and other possible combinations of the “learn,” “do,” and “feel” response-components within a framework of organized domain-specific situations. The FCB grid is far from perfect, however. Despite the suggested amendments (see for example, Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan 1991), there remain a number of conceptual problems with the grid (and a lot of hierarchy-of-effects models for that matter). The

casually used categories of “learn,” “feel,” and “do” do not meet the specificity of academic scholarship and need more conceptual clarification.

“Learn,” for instance, can mean attention to the ad, brand awareness (different levels of both, at that), cognitive processing, cognitively-based attitude, or recall of copy points. “Feel” can refer to feelings and emotions of various sorts, or even pre-attention in some conceptualizations. “Do” can mean both initial trial and repeat purchase, or alternatively purchase intent. It is not clear which meanings of the terms are referred to by the combinations presented in the FCB grid. The use of “learn,” “feel,” “do” in this integrative theory and other hierarchy-of-effects or low-involvement models is overly simplistic and needs more precise specification.

Domain-specific theories. “Basic and universal” theories (**Figure 2.1**) are not the only types in advertising research. As suggested above, some theories only have a narrowly circumscribed area of applicability; they only apply to a *domain*. While, ideally, all theories should specify their sphere of validity, this is not always the case. Krugman’s (1965) original low-involvement theory, for instance, can be interpreted both as a universal theory (i.e., all advertising phenomena can be explained by it), and as a theory specific to television advertising, which the model fits especially well.

Different product categories, for instance, may necessitate the development of unique theories. The services marketing hypothesis suggests, for instance, that services need separate marketing and advertising theories because they are “consumed” in radically different ways than consumer goods (Murray 1991). Similarly, industrial products might also require special understanding. Product categories can also form the basis for domain-specific theories. The

quadrants of the FCB-grid, for instance, are best understood as a collection of “domain-specific theories,” organized by a taxonomy of product categories.

Further, some researchers point to the fact that advertising theory has geographical and historical contingencies (Friestad and Wright 1994). Indeed, it seems plausible that domain-specific theories are better suited to the complex phenomena of advertising than universalistic theories. In fact, “integrative theories” such as the FCB-grid assert that it is impossible to construct a universal theory of advertising.

Moderator-focused theories. Some academic research does not test basic theories. Instead, a basic model of how advertising works is implicitly or explicitly “postulated,” and then the effects of *moderator* variables are investigated (“moderator-focused” theories in **Figure 2.1**). This line of inquiry fits into the original program of early mass communication research in the US, in that these theories strive to discover “who says what to whom with what effect” (Lasswell 1927; Hovland, Lumsdaine, and Sheffield 1949).

It is impossible to summarize this diverse literature here; it can only be stated that the areas corresponding to the Lasswellian program are: source, message, channel, audience, and communication environment factors (see Atkin 1984 for a brief overview). Practitioners may be especially interested in these factors because of the practical relevance of being able to answer the question: “What do I need to do to have increased levels of advertising results (advertising outcome variables)?”

Indirect effects. Finally, it has to be noted that advertising has *indirect* effects, as well. One of the most well-known indirect effects is word-of-mouth communication. According to the two-step flow theory, a classic model of mass communication, advertising has only weak direct effects contrary to what earlier theories, such as the hypodermic needle and propaganda theories,

had suggested. The effects of advertising are mediated by opinion leaders who exercise a much stronger effect – termed word-of-mouth advertising (WOM) – on the final recipients of the message than mass media advertising. A recent review of the 50-year history of WOM (Nyilasy 2005) found that the concept had been quite stable throughout its career in advertising and communication research. Arndt's (1967) definition still holds; word-of-mouth is: "Oral, person-to-person communication between a receiver and a communicator whom the receiver perceives as non-commercial, concerning a brand, a product or a service" (p. 3). 'Diffusion of innovations' theory supports the two-step flow theory in the case of new products, and suggests that the prominence of WOM is more expressed on attitude change and purchase intent, while advertising has stronger effects on awareness (Rogers 1965, 1995).

Another type of indirect effect of advertising is the effect on "internal audiences," employees and other stakeholders of the marketing company (Gilly and Wolfinbarger 1998). Gunther and Storey's (2003) "presumed influence" in the context of Nepalese health workers is an unplanned effect of this type. The clients in the study were clearly not an intended audience for the health promotion efforts, yet the campaign caused some effects among this second group.

In short, there has been a lot of theorizing and empirical research into how advertising works, but despite these efforts, advertising remains somewhat of a mystery. The hierarchy-of-effects model remains the core universal theory of the discipline despite the fact that numerous new approaches challenge its legitimacy.

Summary

As a conclusion to this literature review, it is apparent that very little is known about advertising practitioners' theories about how advertising works. With the exception of Kover's (1995) study on copywriters' implicit theories, no direct literature was found after an extensive search. Some poll-type practitioner surveys do contain knowledge on practitioners' issue-specific opinions, however these are not holistic accounts of their general theories of advertising. A few of these practitioner polls suggest that ad practitioners are skeptical about the epistemological value of commercial market research, a topic which will be of importance in the discussion of the findings. Naturalistic inquiries into agency cultures are also scarce, let alone a focus on knowledge in this studies. Some researchers do suggest that ad practitioners possess "informal knowledge" (Nixon 2003) about the workings of advertising, the topic however is rather undeveloped in these inquiries. Most ethnographic studies describe the high level of uncertainty evident in the advertising industry as well as practitioners' skepticism about the possibility of knowledge as well. Details and the precise reasons for this uncertainty, however, remain uncovered. Therefore, it is up to this dissertation to explore the largely uncharted territory of advertising practitioners' theories – grounded in qualitative data but guided by the theory of professions as well as the academic advertising knowledge base. The study's methodology is discussed in the following section.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Basic assumptions

This dissertation uses a qualitative approach. There are five characteristics of the investigation that necessitate a qualitative study: the exploratory orientation of the study, the complexity of the subject matter, the holistic, naturalistic and emic nature of the insights sought.

The orientation of this study, therefore, is exploratory: it makes initial strides in a yet unexplored territory, attempting to formulate initial theoretical suppositions as well as empirical data for the development of the field. As the previous chapter showed, we know very little about what advertising practitioners know about how advertising works. While there has been survey research conducted about particular issues advertising practitioners may have an opinion about, and there is some (although extremely limited) qualitative ethnographic description of the agency world available, none of these studies investigate advertising practitioner knowledge from the perspective of this current dissertation. Further, this scattered literature, including the advertising academicians' writings on the academician-practitioner gap, are largely atheoretical endeavors. In cases when a field of inquiry is underdeveloped both empirically and theoretically, the appropriate purpose for research in the area is exploration. As Babbie (2000) argues: "Much of social research is conducted to explore a topic, or to start to familiarize the researcher with that topic. This approach typically occurs when the subject of study itself is relatively new" (p. 91). A

natural fit for this stage in development of a new line of research inquiry is a qualitative approach.

A qualitative route is taken because of the complex nature of the phenomena to be investigated. Practitioners' beliefs about how advertising works are complex cognitive constructs that do not allow for an easy translation into quantitative variables. It is very unlikely that there is a simple answer to the research questions. The inquiry deals with questions of knowledge where complex ontological and epistemological assumptions are expected to surface. Clearly, to address such complexities a qualitative study is the appropriate tool for investigation. The objective is also to find a rich understanding of practitioners' thinking about advertising. The emphasis is more on depth than breadth.

The author of this dissertation is also more interested in the entirety of practitioners' views on the workings of advertising rather than any one particular issue this knowledge may reference. The nature of the research is therefore holistic and not easily dividable into subsets of issue-specific topics, which can be more easily operationalized by quantitative survey research. The dissertation is also naturalistic in the sense that it wishes to investigate practitioners' beliefs as they occur in the agency setting. This again necessitates a qualitative approach. As Creswell (1998) suggests, "Qualitative research is an inquiry process of understanding based on distinct methodological traditions of inquiry that explore a social or human problem. The researcher builds a complex, holistic picture, analyzes words, reports detailed views of informants, and conducts the study in a natural setting" (p. 15). Finally, this study seeks to understand practitioner thinking on their own, emic terms (Pike 1954). As the introduction showed, part of the problem with the lack of development in the academic-practitioner gap literature is that academicians have not taken into consideration the perspective of the practitioner, what

practitioners accept as valid knowledge about advertising. Instead of deductively presupposing potential subject practitioners may know of, this study builds inductively, in an exploratory fashion, to understand practitioner beliefs on their own terms.

A grounded theory design – and the role of professionalization theory

Qualitative research in itself is a multifaceted methodological tradition with multiple basic approaches and disciplinary origins. As Denzin and Lincoln (2000) argue: “Qualitative research is a field of inquiry in its own right. It crosscuts disciplines, fields, and subject matters. A complex, interconnected family of terms, concepts, and assumptions surround the term *qualitative research*. These include the traditions associated with foundationalism, positivism, postfoundationalism, postpositivism, poststructuralism, and the many qualitative research perspectives, and/or methods, connected to cultural and interpretive studies” (p. 2).

Out of this staggeringly complex mixture of methodologies and underlying epistemological/ontological assumptions about the nature of research and knowledge, this dissertation associates itself with a tradition referred to as the “grounded theory” approach to qualitative research (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1988). According to this tradition of qualitative inquiry, the goal of qualitative research is to explore the empirical phenomena at hand (usually through in-depth interviews) and from this exploration develop tentative theories that further research can later test. Such theories are “grounded” because they are very close to the empirical phenomena they grow out from. Thus the “fit” between theory and empirical phenomena is always tight (Glaser and Strauss 1967).

This approach was chosen because the orientation of this study is exploratory. Its objective is to investigate phenomena that are not well understood and lack theoretical

explanation. Under such conditions, it is impossible to test or validate prior theories. The purpose is to lay the groundwork for the development of theoretical frameworks for the patterns that emerge from the empirical data collected.

The previous chapter stated that the study was also informed by professionalization theory. This is seemingly contradictory to the claim here that the goal is theory development and not theory validation. In reality, this dissertation is a mixture of deductive and inductive components, but is much closer to grounded theory than any form of theory validation. Professionalization theory is not used in a validation/rebuttal context; empirical data collected here do not serve the purpose of proving or disproving the professionalization idea. Instead, professionalization is used as a theoretical backdrop that helps formulate questions and directs attention to dynamics that otherwise might have been overlooked.

Further, professionalization theory is a general theory of the occupations and not a theory of advertising/marketing practitioners' knowledge in particular – no such theory exists today. Even if it predicted phenomena in this particular subset of occupational phenomena in a general way, it would never be sufficient to predict the *particularities* of advertising. Indeed, one possible outcome that the author expected was that the empirical data would tell a story that was very different from what professionalization would predict and that one of the findings might be that professionalization worked differently in the case of advertising. The results in the next chapter show that this in fact turned out to be the case. It does not mean, however, that this dissertation study was completely deduction free: as professionalization ideas did inform the design and analysis.

In short, the design of this study uses both deductive and inductive (grounded theory) elements, but the inductive force is much stronger, as the objective is exploration and there is no

theory available about the ad practitioners' occupational knowledge in particular.

Professionalization theory is used as background that informs the study by underlining the importance of knowledge and predicting certain general dynamics of practitioner knowledge – but the outcomes are firmly grounded in the particularities of the advertising occupation.

Data collection

In-depth interviews. This dissertation, similarly to sociology of occupations studies and research using the grounded theory approach, uses semi-structured, in-depth interviews for data collection. In-depth interviewing is a useful tool for collecting rich and complex qualitative data in an efficient manner. It is also one of the most common research methods in qualitative research projects, particularly in sociologically oriented ones (Creswell 1998). In-depth interviewing is also an excellent way to gain access to occupational groups as they are perceived as natural and unobtrusive ways of data collection by respondents who may be initially suspicious of academic researchers or academic research. As Kvale (1996) argues: “The use of the interview as a research method is nothing mysterious. An interview is a conversation that has a structure and a purpose” (p. 6). The conversational nature of in-depth interviews makes it a natural data collection tool.

In-depth interviewing is a natural methodological choice for this study for a number of other reasons. In-depth interviews are the best tools to interrogate a point-of-view that may be radically different from our own. As the literature review showed, part of the problem with our (academician's) understanding of the practitioner-academician gap is the lack of true representation of a group *outside* academia, i.e., the perspective of practitioners. Kvale (1996) argues that uncovering such dissimilar perspectives is one of the greatest strengths of interview-

based social research: “The qualitative research interview attempts to understand the world from the subjects’ point of view, to unfold the meaning of people’s experiences, to uncover their lived world prior to scientific explanations” (p. 1).

Next, the topic of this dissertation is knowledge and complex mental constructs. No other method (with the exception of archival analysis) can get to the complexities of such mental schemas. Indeed, there seems to be no better method to uncover someone’s knowledge (that is complex array of mental schemas) about a subject matter than simply asking them. Kover’s (1995) study, this dissertation’s most direct pre-cursor, suggests that archival analysis may be a good method to uncover ad practitioners implicit theories of advertising: “Interviews were selected despite the plethora of material about the ‘creative process’: advertising agency handbooks, biographical material by past and current ‘greats,’ instructional books for hopefuls, and even advertising texts. As interesting as these materials are, they skirt our issue” (p. 597). The idea of archival analysis was considered for this study, but was dismissed because of the relatively underdeveloped stage of the inquiry in this area. Interviews give much more control to the researcher to ask respondents about the research questions of interest. Practitioner writings, readily available as they are, are much more difficult to “question” for basic theoretical assumptions about the workings of advertising. Such an analysis, however, may be a useful future tool, once basic wisdom is developed about practitioner thinking by using more direct methods, such as semi-structured in-depth interviews.

Finally, in-depth interviews were selected for some practical considerations, as well. While a full-scale ethnography of advertising agency knowledge might have provided broader-scale insights, this option was not practically possible. Neither budgetary, nor organizational constraints allowed for a (multi-)year-long immersion in the world of advertising agencies. The

author attempted to gain permission of conducting smaller scale observations within the agencies, such attempts, however, were resisted by interviewees. The most common concern was confidentiality. In the case of observations, the identity of clients and the content of sensitive business information is much more difficult to mask than in the case of in-depth interviews, where the interviewee has a lot of control over such sensi. While observations or a full-scale ethnography would have given access to much more data, the author is confident that the pointed, direct and focused nature of the in-depth interviews give the most efficient method to access ad practitioners' mental constructs about the workings of advertising.

Data collection procedures. Preliminary preparations for data collection started well before the interviews took place. After the conceptualization of the study's objectives and research questions, a number of informal interviews were conducted among researchers who had done qualitative-ethnographic work involving agency practitioners. Email and phone conversations were exchanged about the feasibility of the project, opinions about method, tips for effective interviewing. A particularly useful series of conversation took place between the author and Dr. Arthur J. Kover, author of a study that is the closest in both conceptualization and methodology to this dissertation. Discussions with Dr. Kover helped the author with study design and methodological issues, particularly the notion that practitioners' theoretical beliefs are to a large extent "implicit," rather than directly available in explicit manifestations.

Based on these insights and the review of the literature, an initial interview guide was developed. Kover's (1995) original interview guide was of great help to write the author's own. This initial interview guide was built around three questions: what the content of practitioner knowledge is, how practitioners know what they know, and how they use this knowledge in everyday practice. The interview guide used both opening "grand tour" questions, as well as,

more specific probes. The study used semi-structured interviews (Kvale 1996) to allow for both some interviewer control over the topics discussed, as well as interviewee control to express unique viewpoints.

The interview guide was used in a series of practice interviews and a smaller-scale pilot study. Three 45-minute practice interviews were conducted among advertising doctoral students with prior advertising agency experience to allow the researcher to hone his interviewing skills. Two of these interviews were observed by members of the dissertation committee to provide feedback and recommendations both in terms of interviewing technique as well as substantive matters.

A pilot study was also conducted with three faculty members with significant advertising agency experience. The purpose of these pilot interviews was to refine the interview guide. Transcripts of these interviews (as well as the first few actual research interviews) were circulated among various members of the dissertation committee to provide further feedback. This feedback was used to further refine the interview guide. (Please see the final interview guide used for most of the research interviews in **Appendix A**).

Sampling. The sample for the study was selected by using snowball sampling. Faculty and personal contacts were asked for interviews initially; subsequently these contacts were asked for other names the interviewer could invite to participate in the study. This way of sampling was a necessary and efficient form of recruitment. Gaining entry to an occupational group that handles much confidential business information would have been a challenging task, if the interviewer could not use the trust associated with personal referral. Snowballing allows for this element of trust, which is necessary for effective recruitment. The sampling procedure also

proved practically efficient as the interviewer gained entry to most targeted agencies (major, midsize and smaller) in the Atlanta area.

This way of sampling is also appropriate for the study's design. Grounded theory studies do not strive for statistical representativeness as the objective of such studies is not theory validation rather theory discovery. Therefore, sampling procedures are best described as "theoretical sampling" (Glaser and Strauss 1967), where the objective is high enough saturation for theory development, not statistical representation.

Twenty-eight respondents were interviewed until theoretical saturation (Glaser and Strauss 1967, p. 61) was achieved. Creswell (1998) recommends 20-30 interviews for grounded theory studies (p. 122), while Kvale (1996) suggests 15 ± 10 (p. 102). The sample used for this dissertation is within both ranges. The limitation of the study's qualitative grounded theory design, as is always the case with qualitative studies, is that it cannot offer statistical representativeness and it is limited to one geographical area, the Atlanta, Georgia advertising market. Statistical representativeness, however, was not the objective. Typical for exploratory qualitative studies, the goal is to develop theoretical hypotheses firmly grounded in empirical phenomena, which theories can later be used for further development and validation procedures. As McCracken (1988) suggests, the objective is not to uncover "how many and what kinds of, people share a certain characteristic. It is to gain access to the cultural categories and assumptions according to which one culture construes the world" (p. 17).

As the sample snowballed, a purposeful selection (Creswell 1998, p. 118) was made so that many different viewpoints would be represented. Three occupational groups were interviewed within the agency setting: account managers (i.e., managerial personnel responsible for client relationships, account workflow and strategic development on the accounts), account

planners (i.e., those responsible for both in-house and commissioned research and strategic development) and creative directors (i.e., those responsible for creative concepts and the execution of advertising messages). Only people at senior levels were asked for participation in the interviews. At smaller agencies, this meant the owner, CEO or general manager of the company. At larger organizations, respondents were heads of their functional units: directors of account management, planning and creative development.

An attempt was made to represent various sized agencies in the Atlanta market: larger (more than 130MM in annual billings according to *The Advertising Red Books: Agencies January 2005*), mid-sized (30-130MM), and smaller (less than 30MM). This way of looking at different agency sizes and functional units served as a way of triangulation that allowed multiple viewpoints represented. A relatively equal balance was achieved across these groups. Table 3.1 describes the sample's characteristics.

Pseudonym	Functional role	Gender	College advertising/marketing education	Years of experience	Pseudonym for agency	Agency size	Agency affiliation
AM1	account management	female	yes	14	Agency1	mid	independent
AM2	account management	male	no	20	Agency2	small	independent
AM3	account management	male	no	20	Agency3	small	independent
AM4	account management	male	yes	22	Agency4	large	network
AM5	account management	male	yes	22	Agency4	large	network
AM6	account management	male	no	27	Agency5	large	independent
AM7	account management	male	no	11	Agency6	mid	independent
AM8	account management	male	yes	23	Agency7	large	network
AM9	account management	male	N/A	N/A	Agency8	mid	independent
AM10	account management	male	N/A	N/A	Agency8	mid	independent
AM11	account management	male	no	N/A	Agency8	mid	independent
AM12	account management	male	yes	37	Agency9	large	network
AP1	planning	male	yes	24	Agency10	small	independent
AP2	planning	male	yes	26	Agency11	small	independent
AP3	planning	female	no	N/A	Agency4	large	network
AP4	planning	male	yes	28	Agency7	large	network
AP5	planning	male	yes	20	Agency5	large	independent
AP6	planning	male	no	15	Agency4	large	network
AP7	planning	male	N/A	22	Agency12	large	independent
CD1	creative	male	no	20	Agency1	mid	independent
CD2	creative	male	no	N/A	Agency7	large	network
CD3	creative	male	yes	35	Agency6	mid	independent
CD4	creative	female	no	20	Agency13	small	independent
CD5	creative	male	N/A	10	Agency6	mid	independent
CD6	creative	male	yes	30	Agency4	large	network
CD7	creative	male	no	10	Agency7	large	network
CD8	creative	male	N/A	44	Agency14	mid	independent
CD9	creative	male	no	16	Agency7	large	network

Table 3.1 Sample characteristics.

Field issues. Consent was handled in full compliance with university policy.

Interviewees were granted confidentiality (see consent form in **Appendix B**). Audio tapes were destroyed after transcription. In the transcriptions, proper names of the interviewees were removed as well as information that would link them to any particular agency or client businesses. Account brand names that interviewees mentioned the agency had at the time of the

interviews were given pseudonyms. Interviewees were also assigned pseudonyms describing their functional units only.

Interviews lasted 45-90 minutes in duration and took place between October 2004 and May 2005. Most interviews took place in the respondents' offices at their respective agencies in Atlanta, GA. Some interviews were conducted off-site at the respondents' request. Good rapport was achieved through introductory warm up questions, close attention to reviewers concerns, and as a result of feedback and practice gained in pilot interviews.

Extensive fieldnotes were taken immediately after the interviews took place. Methodological reflections helped refine ways of asking questions; theoretical notes helped with the development of emerging topics in the interviews. Fieldnotes were either directly typed into a word processing software or later transcribed. Fieldnotes were entered into the NVIVO database used for data analysis.

One of the greatest concerns during data collection was eliciting what Kover (1995) called "implicit" theories of advertising from respondents. The implicitness problem was overcome by indirect and multiple ways of questioning aiming at respondents' beliefs about how advertising works. A satisfactory balance was achieved in avoiding respondent fatigue after repeated probes and still being able to obtain responses that otherwise would not have been made explicit.

Data analysis and the emerging nature of the data

Interviews were first transcribed into word processing software and tapes were destroyed in compliance with university human subjects directives. Transcribed interviews were then

assessed by an initial reading to get a preliminary grasp of their contents. Interview transcripts were uploaded into NVIVO qualitative data analysis software.

Data were analyzed according to the constant-comparative method of grounded theory (Glaser and Strauss 1967; Strauss and Corbin 1988). The four steps of open coding, axial coding, selective coding and theoretical propositions were followed (Creswell 1998).

First, initial codes were developed by open coding looking for salient categories. These categories were then compared to each individual case to which they may have applied. Through constant comparisons, the codes were further refined and specified. In many instances codes were “coded on” to create more precise and better fitting categories. Second, open codes were examined in their relationships to each other (axial coding) and were arranged in hierarchical structures as well as explanatory relationships. It was discovered, for instance that there are important interrelationships between practitioner theories about how advertising works (Chapter 4) and practitioner meta-theories (Chapter 5) that prescribe presuppositions and preconditions under which these theories are possible. Both theories and meta-theories relate to ad practitioners’ professionalization project and result in pseudo-professionalization tactics (Chapter 6). The development of this basic story that emerged from the data represents step three (selective coding), while the final account including theoretical propositions is step four (theoretical propositions) (Creswell 1998).

This process underlined the emerging nature of the data. Meta-theories, for instance, were not initially conceptualized as topics for discussion. Instead a broader area (“how do practitioners know what they know?”) was proposed. Throughout the interviews and then the above described data analysis procedure it became apparent that meta-theories (epistemological and ontological assumptions of whether and how general knowledge is possible about advertising) were of

pivotal importance for respondents when thinking about the effects of advertising. Similarly, it was the researcher's original intention to place practitioner knowledge in the context of its use with advertiser clients, but the richness of pseudo-professionalization tactics practitioners use to overcome problems with their own theories about advertising was not anticipated.

This concludes our discussion of the study's methodology. It testified to the complexities of researching implicit mental constructs of an occupational group. The following chapters will highlight the complexities of these mental constructs themselves. What the author very early on realized during this project was that practitioner theories in advertising were anything but simple. Not only are these mental schemas implicit and therefore difficult to piece together from fragmented and half-expressed puzzle pieces but they also manifest themselves in different forms, layers, and levels of generality. The common thread among them (the focus of this dissertation) is that they all have to do with knowledge about how advertising works.

The presentation of the findings of this study will be divided up into three chapters. First, the actual content of the practitioner theories of advertising are discussed (Chapter 4). In this chapter, a descriptive analysis is provided about the various beliefs advertising agency professionals have about the workings of advertising. Next, in Chapter 5, practitioner meta-theories are investigated. Meta-theories – mental constructs reflecting on the epistemological standing and possibility/impossibility of organized knowledge about advertising – arose as a very significant topic during the interviews, directly related to the theory of professions. Finally, in Chapter 6, client relations are investigated from the perspective of practitioner theories. The concept of 'pseudo-professionalization tactics' is introduced and explained in the context of professionalization theory.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS: CONTENT OF PRACTITIONER THEORIES

Layers of understanding

Despite the common conception that practitioners have an ‘atheoretical,’ ‘naïve’ and simplistic view on the subject matter of whatever they are practicing, advertising practitioners do have theories about how advertising works and what advertising works the best. Moreover, these theories are anything but simple. They are nuanced mental constructs that are expressed in a multiple forms, on multiple layers and levels of generality.

Practitioner theories seem to have multiple epistemological origins. They can be conceived as lay variants of scientific thoughts resembling a number of different disciplines. Aesthetic dispositions, for instance, clearly have a strong similarity to humanistic knowledge forms (aesthetics, in particular), while practitioner beliefs of psychological or societal effects mirror psychological or sociological scholarship. Since the academic study of advertising is most strongly influenced by psychology, the focus of this study is on the psychological realm. Throughout the text, however, notes are made about the diverse forms of practitioner theories if the argument necessitates such discussion. Practitioners also express their beliefs about how advertising works at different levels of theoretical scope. Conditional statements, proper theories, moderators, domains, underlying assumptions are to be distinguished. Finally, thoughts are expressed on different levels of generality ranging from basic through mid-level to domain-specific ones.

The presentation of the results intends to stay true to this inherent complexity. First, simple conditional statements about the effects of advertising are discussed. While the effects of advertising are numerous and diverse, a parsimonious framework is applied to summarize the results. Second, general practitioner theories of advertising are analyzed. These mental schemas are different from simple conditional statements as they form a “systematically related set of statements” (Hunt 2002a, p. 193). In other words, they give explanation and prediction about how advertising works on a general level. Practitioners have both broader scope (‘basic’), as well as narrower scope (‘mid-level’) theories.’ Third, moderator-focused theories are discussed. Just as in the case of academic theories, moderator-focused theories concentrate on the conditions under which certain general relationships or theories result in higher (or lower) levels of outcome variables. The question these theories answer is not “how does advertising work?” but “under what circumstances does it work better?” Fourth, the issue of domain-specificity is taken up. As defined earlier in Chapter 2, in the section on academic theories on advertising, domains are circumstances under which the structure of relationships between the variables of the basic model should be completely reorganized. Domain-specificity is thus in contrast with moderator-focus, as moderators only cause a change in the level of an outcome variable in a basic relationship and not a complete reorganization of the causal structure of all variables in the model.

First, simple causal statements, the fundamental building blocks of advertising practitioner theories are discussed.

Advertising effects

Advertising works. Advertising practitioners strongly believe that the exposure to advertising stimulus causes changes in human cognition, emotions and behavior. The simplest and most primary way practitioners express this belief is that “it works.” As respondents reassured the interviewer, this basic belief permeates the industry: “I think it’s kind of understood that you wouldn’t be in the advertising business if you didn’t believe that it worked. [...] So in general, I don’t think you’re going to find anybody who is in an advertising agency questioning whether or not advertising works” (*Account Manager 4*). This is believed to be the case even if finding and offering empirical support would be difficult, or indeed, impossible: “Proving it is very difficult. I believe it influences behavior. I definitely believe it influences behavior. And I worked on enough different products and services that we’ve seen that when we... There seems to be a direct correlation” (*Account Manager 8*). The level of certainty that this simple relationship holds is not unlike a religious belief:

It’s sort of like being a clergyman, you start everyday with the assumption that there is a god. And that my way to god is the best way and I’m going to work, and so, you know, to use that analogy, if I’m spending my time writing the next sermon, and visiting my sick parishioners and so on. I’m not worrying about proving the existence of god or not. That’s somebody else’s job (*Account Manager 12*).

Limited effects. Even though practitioners are certain that advertising stimulus has an impact, the power of advertising is not limitless. As one of the respondents put it: “I think that... There’s a real danger in giving advertising too much credit. That it’s... It certainly does certain things, but it doesn’t do everything” (*Account Manager 5*). Advertising cannot force people to act against their own will: “Well, the first thing you have to understand is: we as an industry don’t force anyone to do anything that they do not want to do” (*Account Manager 12*).

The reason why advertising's effects are limited is because they believed to be often screened out by consumers, whether consciously or unconsciously:

So the person, basically... most people are... advertising is not the most important thing, advertising to a lot of people is an intrusion, and an annoyance, or something that they just ignore like a... you know, like a bad housefly. A lot of them wish it would go away, a lot of them just ignore it (*Account Manager 2*).

Well, I think it goes in... a lot of times it goes in one eye, out the other (*Creative Director 7*).

The screening can be spontaneous: "Most ads, as I say, go over people's heads, they don't, they don't... they don't consciously even know that they've been exposed to those ads, whether it'd be television, radio, outdoor, whatever" (*Account Manager 2*); or accelerated by technological innovations such as DVRs: "You know, you've got TiVo now that zaps commercials... You're taking a gamble putting your money into it versus putting all that money in some other form of alternative media" (*Creative Director 5*).

To summarize, in the practitioner view, advertising, if done correctly, can have a definite effect on consumers. These effects, however, are not limitless, a thought resembling the prevailing theory of 'limited effects' in mass communication research (Katz and Lazarsfeld 1955; Lazarsfeld, Berelson, and Gaudet 1948). Now that their existence is established, let us discuss what kinds of advertising effects practitioners believe in.

Attention to advertising. Advertising, first of all, generates "attention," to use respondents' emic phraseology. 'Attention,' as defined by respondents, is a memory-type cognitive psychological construct and signifies the input of advertising stimulus into short-term or long-term memory. The first effect of advertising is making consumers stop and look at the advertising stimulus itself: "So if somebody is looking in the magazine, and they just keep going, that's not good. I mean, it's got to draw attention [...]" (*Account Manager 1*). Or as another

respondent put it: “And the second thing is that the message itself has to engage the individual [...] It is so easy to just blank out stuff, you don’t even have to hit the zap machine. [...] You can just, you know, be watching something and not paying any attention to it” (*Account Planner 7*). Acquiring necessary attention is often phrased as the “break-through”: “Well, I believe that you, number one, you have to break through what somebody would call the boredom barrier. I mean, because unless you get the consumer’s attention, then of course, nothing’s going to happen” (*Creative Director 8*).

Brand awareness. As the above quotes show, “attention” is drawn to the advertising stimulus itself (advertising awareness) and should be differentiated from the similarly memory-based construct of “brand awareness,” which stands for remembering the advertised brand. Ultimately, the ad does not only want to call attention to itself, but rather serve as a vehicle to increase the presence of the advertised brand in consumer memory. Indeed, increasing brand awareness is often perceived as one of the most important objectives of advertising: “Well, probably, the historic model that I think has become the model that much of the industry has so long depended upon, and they rallied behind, is a model that says, when you advertise, you build awareness levels” (*Account Planner 1*). Or as a creative director offered the example:

The advertising helps build that brand so that when the consumer is in shopping he or she sees the brand, and they recognize it, and they’re already going to buy toothpaste, and so they recognize, they got it on their list, and they know that, you know, I saw where Crest has got out a new toothpaste that does X, and so therefore we’re going to give it a try (*Creative Director 3*).

Brand awareness is consequently a key measure of advertising effectiveness: “[the most important measure is] awareness, if you’re introducing a new product, a new service, a new brand, and all like that. Early on just the awareness of the product, making sure that people know that it’s out there” (*Creative Director 1*).

Cognitively/affectively based attitudes. Another important effect has to do less with memory than attitudes; advertising stimulus causes change in attitudes towards a brand. Practitioners refer to this concept by using different labels such as ‘opinions,’ ‘judgments,’ ‘perceptions,’ ‘persuasion,’ ‘brand image,’ ‘interest in the brand,’ however, these labels all share the characteristics of the psychological construct of ‘attitude’ (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2002). For example, *Account Manager 8* said: “At another level, I do believe people make judgments, or judgments reside in people’s minds on, ‘That’s good... That’s acceptable, that’s not acceptable.’ ” Similarly, *Account Manager 12* expressed the view that one of the main goals of advertising was to ‘persuade’ that is to change deep-seated beliefs or feelings toward a brand: “Well, I think in the broadest sense, there is some element of persuasion in the messages that are created for advertising.” As *Creative Director 8* put it: “You want the consumer to form a desired perception of your brand. And you want them to relate to your brand in a personal way, feel a certain way about it. Like it, like to try it, that’s cool, that’s smart, that’s cutting edge.”

Commonly, attitudes are understood as either emotively or cognitively-based (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2002). In practitioners’ view, advertising can change or create both emotively-based and cognitively-based attitudes. As *Account Planner 6* summed up: “The way that I look at is, there’s two components to good advertising. One is a rational sell, and one is an emotional sell. I think the way that advertising works is that it hits on both of those successfully.”

While seemingly emotion and cognition are equally important in the formation and change of attitudes, all respondents unanimously declared that emotion has priority in advertising. A few examples to illustrate: “Because I think what works in advertising is an emotional connection of some sort” (*Creative Director 1*); “How does it relate is more, instead of

this is a better product, everyone has it, how does it relate to me, and how does it relate to me as a consumer, and me in my values and ideas. And that's more important" (*Account Manager 3*); "I think it can be more effective if it's emotional. There's an emotional connection, then it's probably better. I'm not talking about weeping women, but you know, emotional just in touching an emotional chord" (*Account Planner 7*). Correspondingly, one of the problems with measurement systems, practitioners believe, is that there is a cognitive bias, which contradicts the emotive nature of advertising: "That's the biggest problem with our evaluative systems for measuring effectiveness, because they are all rationally based systems" (*Account Planner 7*).

What is the role for informationally based attitude effects if there is such a clear preference in practitioners' mind for emotions? In practitioners' view, cognitive attitudes play the role of 'rationalization' or 'justification' for attitudes that are formed emotionally: "There's an intellectual, justification part of our brain that wants to give a justification, a reason that people can... after the fact justify why do I like this particular brand. So sometimes we appeal to those intellectual concerns" (*Account Planner 3*). The role of the "rational sell" (*Account Planner 6*) therefore is to rationalize what is (although unacknowledged by consumers) an emotionally driven conviction. The underlying assumption that corresponds to the belief about the emotional effect of advertising resides in practitioners' theory of consumer behavior. Brand choice itself (irrespective of any advertising stimulus) is viewed as emotively based: "What's also happening is that people are, if you go and ask them in research, they would rationalize the decision, when to all intended purposes, it's an emotional decision that's being made, in many-many categories" (*Account Planner 5*).

Practitioners seems to think that the predominance of emotively based attitudes apply domain-neutrally. Problems related to domain-specificity will be discussed later in this chapter

as well as in Chapter 5 on meta-theories, however, the following example should illustrate practitioners' conviction about the primacy of emotions:

I think about, again, I'll go back to the focus groups, we had business-to-business situations, where these are supposed to be very tough-minded people, you know, practical, no frills businesspeople or farmers who, you know, shouldn't let emotion enter into it, because you've got enough to contain with, with the uncertainty of world markets, and the weather, and all like that. But they do, they still do, we all do (*Creative Director 1*).

Behavioral response. While memory-based or attitudinal effects of advertising are important, agency practitioners also testify for a direct advertising stimulus → behavioral response route. To put it in practitioner-speak: advertising has to sell: "And from a client perspective. I mean, the clients, they don't want just pretty pictures, they want sales, you know, they want the needle to move" (*Account Manager 4*). Most respondents insisted that buying behavior was the ultimate goal of any advertising effort: "I am absolutely emphatic that if it doesn't lead to sales, it's not doing what it's supposed to be doing" (*Account Planner 7*). The interviewees also invoked vivid examples, where the stimulus → purchase behavior type relationship worked quite well:

But ultimately, it's still going to come back to sales. I started off [as a copywriter] at [department store], and they had one rule there, and that was, 'Move the merchandise.' It didn't matter how many people walked in and out of the store, or how crowded the floors were, if the cash registers were not ringing, advertising wasn't doing its job, and heads were going to roll, you know (*Creative Director 1*).

There were literally people who received a postcard in the mail from a friend and they looked at that model, at that car, they looked at the style of presentation and they said, 'I've got to have it. Now!' (*Account Planner 1*)

While practitioners believe that the ultimate goal of advertising is sales, there is one domain, direct response advertising, where such an effect is especially explicit: "I mean direct response advertising is specifically created to get the phone to ring right now, you know, or get

somebody to call right now to buy” (*Account Manager 1*). The issues about domain-specificity will be discussed later; it is enough to note here that the objective/intention of “direct response” constitutes one of the domains that greatly influences basic relationships and theories as perceived by advertising practitioners.

Indirect effects. So far only direct and immediate effects of advertising have been discussed. Practitioners, however, also believe in indirect effects of advertising. Next, these effects will be discussed briefly.

Ad professionals claimed that one of the best measures of overall effectiveness of advertising is word-of-mouth communications by the recipients of advertising. Advertising in this case works indirectly, because word-of-mouth acts as an intermediary to the final effect. As *Account Planner 2* argued: “I will tell you I think the best measure of any marketing effectiveness is, how enthusiastic are people about your brand, how many people are recommending your brand to others.” Word-of-mouth is valued highly because it multiplies the effect of advertising through a channel (usually close-tie friend, relative, acquaintance) that is perceived as unbiased. Advertising messages capable of insinuating such a secondary, albeit highly-valued response are much coveted. *Creative Director 2* explained that it was an often stated objective that recipients of the ad would pass it along: “You know, they see your commercial, they like it. ‘Wow.’ They tell their friends, ‘Have you seen that commercial, that crazy commercial with the monkey and the chainsaw? It was awesome.’ ”

Another indirect effect is when the advertising does not only reach its intended audience, but the employees of the advertiser. This effect is often referred to as ‘internal marketing.’ Advertising can boost employee morale: “And as a result they’ve got a sales force that talks about the advertising all the time, it’s a motivating thing, you know, that’s the other function of

it, it motivates people internally, too” (*Creative Director 6*). For this reason internal marketing effects are intentionally planned for: “And I’ve actually had clients where it was pretty openly acknowledged by us and by the client that the target on this is the employee. That we’re going to talk about how the bank behaves to consumers and doing that it will help the bank to behave that way” (*Account Manager 5*).

Finally, advertising stimulus can serve as a moderator in a relationship that is normally independent of advertising: the persuasive effect of sales work. Advertising can, indirectly, function as a ‘door warmer’: “But the sales stuff is more limited, they need support materials, they need somebody to warm up a cold call, because somebody has to knock on the door, make a phone call” (*Creative Director 1*). The “Aflac duck phenomenon” – a very salient advertising campaign for a national insurer at the time of the interviews – was brought up as an example by a number of respondents:

Well, again, from what I understand from people working in the business, and... at Aflac, it’s worked tremendously well for them, because before that if you called up... if an agent from Aflac called people up, and said, “Hi. I’m Joe Jones from Aflac.” They’d say, “Who?” you know. And they were not interested in talking to them. Now they call up and say, “Hi. I’m Joe Jones from the Aflac.” And the guy goes, get something like the Aflac duck’s calling, “Oh yeah, Aflac, you know, yeah.” You know, “Let’s talk,” type of thing. It opens doors for them (*Account Manager 2*).

Basic and mid-level practitioner theories

Practitioners’ thinking about how advertising works, however, is not limited to simple relationships between the advertising stimulus and outcome. Practitioner thinking involves mental constructs that are not dissimilar to proper academic theories: “systematically related set[s] of statements” (Hunt 2002a, p. 193). In fact, practitioners have different types of theories,

very similar in structure to the typology we provided in Chapter 2. A summary of practitioner theories is offered in **Figure 4.1**.

	<i>Universal</i>	<i>Domain-specific</i>
<i>Basic</i>	Truncated Hierarchy Model	Different variations of the Truncated Hierarchy Model, based on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - strategic objective - product category - medium used - historical time period
<i>Mid-level</i>	Persuasion Knowledge Model	Persuasion Knowledge Model – diachronic/genetic variant
<i>Moderator-focused</i>	Creativity Entertainment Humor Ad likeability ($Attitude_{Ad}$) Relevance Differentiation (USP, brand image) Consistency Simplicity Resisted moderators (mnemonics, spokesperson characteristics) Aesthetic rules Contextual moderators (selective perception, ad clutter)	Category rules (e. g. “moving food rule”)

Figure 4.1 Types of practitioner theories.

First, in this current section, ad practitioners' universal theories will be presented on both the basic and the mid-level. On the basic level advertising practitioners have a theory-like construct, which we will call the 'Truncated Hierarchy Model.' **Figure 4.2** depicts this basic theory.

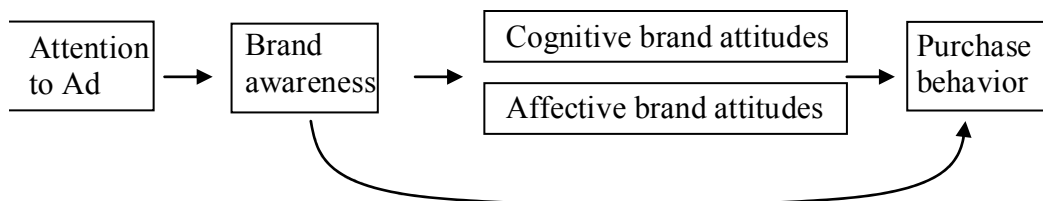


Figure 4.2 The Truncated Hierarchy Model.

Truncated Hierarchy Model. While the Truncated Hierarchy Model looks very similar to the Hierarchy-of-Effects model commonly accepted by academia, there is an important difference. Aside from the claim that the advertising stimulus has to be noticed by the recipient of the ad message ('attention to ad') and that the recipient has to be aware of the brand, it does not presuppose any strict sequentiality for emotional/informational/behavioral effects. The 'truncated' hierarchy model "cuts out" the assumption that cognitively-based attitudes precede emotively-based attitudes, which in turn precede behavioral response (sales). These effects can occur in any order or simultaneously including a potential direct effect to purchase behavior (mediated by some level of brand awareness). Practitioners' theory of advertising therefore is not a learn-feel-do model ("learn-feel-do" is a common simplified rendering of the Hierarchy-of-Effects idea, where *learn* stands for cognitive attitudes, *feel* means affective attitudes, and *do*

represents sales). In fact, the Truncated Hierarchy Model is more reminiscent of integrative or hierarchy-free theories in Vakratsas and Ambler's (1999) typology.

The vast majority of respondents claimed the above model as their basic theory of advertising. For example, *Account Manager 2* stated: "I think that if, again, advertising is... if it gets through that barrier of somebody's not paying attention to it, if it's through there, and is actually considered by somebody, it's going to be considered by them in different ways at different times." In different situations possible brand effects (cognitive, affective or behavioral) may occur in different sequential and causal order. According to practitioners, the biggest problem with the Hierarchy-of-Effects idea is that it places too much emphasis on the time (or causal) order of the variables in the model. This is of little importance in practitioner thinking: "You know, I don't think that there is a timeframe, it can happen instantaneously, all these things can happen at once. You know, it's not the kind of situation where, you know, I'm going to go along, and for a month I'm going to be in the learning phase, and another month I'm going to be, you know, in the liking phase, and in this month I'm going to be in the doing phase" (*Account Planner 7*).

Account Planner 4, in a more detailed fashion, summed up his skepticism for any rigorously hierarchical model of advertising effects, a view shared by most respondents:

I think it can also happen instantaneously. I mean, the danger of that kind of decision-tree is that it implies that there is a manageable length of time. And the truth is: the marketplace does not behave according to our model. [Laughs.] You know, its... It behaves according to its own desires. [...] For example, you may have an airline that's branded... nobody has any awareness of it, and you have [airline2] over here or [airline3], which have all the awareness in the world. Well, this noname airline can go through the decision tree so quickly that you can't distinguish between these things [...] All of a sudden, there's awareness, trial, you know, all of these, there's awareness, preference, whatever, you know, you want to put that into the decision tree, they are all happening immediately. So I think the danger of a traditional decision tree is that it's not... [...] The market doesn't care about your decision tree, the market doesn't care...

The only sequentiality that *is* stated by practitioners is that the ad first needs to draw some level of attention and create some level of brand awareness, before it can impact brand attitude and behavior: “We call it laddering. I mean, basically, you ladder up from awareness, you know, I mean, I’m not aware. You know, then, I become aware. And then, not only am I aware, but I’m somewhat responsive...” (*Account Planner 6*). Or according to one of the creative directors: “You know, there’s all kinds of theories about that, the most important thing you have to do is get the attention of the viewer and say something that’s relevant and unexpected” (*Creative Director 4*).

As both attention to the ad and brand awareness have to do with memory versus brand attitude effects, the model is often described as one that involves two simple stages: ‘breaking through the clutter’ (awareness) and ‘persuasion’ (brand attitudes and behavior): “So no matter what it is, you have to break through the boredom barrier. And once you accomplished that then, ideally, you want the consumer to form a desired perception of your brand” (*Creative Director 8*). Thus the aforementioned model, in essence, consists of two simple steps: awareness and persuasion: “Essentially the two components of advertising, in terms of how it works, in my mind, is awareness and persuasion” (*Account Manager 12*). Or as *Account Manager 4* put it: “It’s getting the attention of the consumer but also making your product or service relevant to them, at a given point in their lives.” Similarly, the duality is often expressed as advertising having ‘stopping power’ as well as ‘engagement power’: “Good advertising would be advertising that is noticed, provocative, engages the consumer. Engages the consumer, and communicates what you would like to have communicated in your ad” (*Account Manager 3*).

Persuasion Knowledge Model. The Truncated Hierarchy Model serves as a basic theory of advertising for advertising practitioners. While applicable at the basic level, the Truncated Hierarchy is complemented by a more focused, mid-level theory that takes into account meta-cognition. This mid-level theory of advertising is, in effect, a practitioner version of the ‘Persuasion Knowledge Model’ (Friestad and Wright 1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model states that the effects of advertising are moderated by the fact that recipients are not blank slates in terms of their knowledge about previous advertising persuasion attempts. On the contrary, consumers have elaborate mental schemas regarding how marketers try to persuade them through advertising. The model is expressed in both synchronic and diachronic (“genetic”) terms. Synchronically – that is at any single point in time – consumers possess persuasion knowledge schemas, which moderate (often block) incoming advertising stimuli. Even if the advertising stimulus is noticed and brand awareness is formed, this does not translate into ‘persuasion’ (attitude change or behavior), because the message is discounted as an unreliable persuasive/manipulative attempt rather than genuine presentation of brand benefits or emotive associations. The diachronic, or genetic – genetics is clearly a metaphor here, no actual physiological-biological change is assumed – version of the theory states that persuasion knowledge schemas form in consumers over time, after repeated exposure to advertising as they progress through life. Their mental constructs affecting how they process advertising messages “mutate” over their lifetime as they become more resistant to ad stimulus. Consumers become increasingly cynical and skeptical toward advertiser persuasion attempts. This process has an equivalent in virology (the formation of resistance), hence the genetic metaphor.

Interestingly, advertising practitioners replicated this theory without any prompting. They envisioned consumers as a somewhat antagonistic group, one that actively resisted advertising

influence attempts as a result of their knowledge of what these influence attempts are usually like. *Account Planner 6* stated:

I think they're more used to it and they can see through things. [...] I think a lot of ads try to use tricks that have been used in the past that consumers are already seeing through. And I just don't... I think consumers realize that, you know, there are certain ads that try to enforce certain tricks that they can see right through and they turned off by them.

Similarly, *Creative Director 1* asserted: "People do come in sort of armed with 'You're not going to fool me, you're not going to... you clever advertising folks, you're not going to make me buy something I don't want to buy.' [...] They all get it, they all know what we are up to." Oftentimes, the fact that consumers do possess mental constructs about how advertising agencies try and persuade them, comes up in qualitative market research (e. g., focus groups), when ads are pre-tested for their effectiveness: "And they feed them [advertising techniques] back to you. And they'll go, 'Oh, this will appeal to a white demographic.' You know? Or 'I love this story,' or 'I love this camera technique' or 'I love this music' or 'That's...' you know... Yeah, they'll feed this stuff back to you, they're getting, you know, yeah, they're savvy" (*Account Planner 3*).

Practitioners also believe in the diachronic version of the theory: persuasion knowledge schemas are formed over time. Practitioners' genetic theories have both 'ontogenetic' (on the level of development in an individual organism) and 'phylogenetic' (on the level of changes in an entire species in the course of natural history) variants. The *advertising ontogeny* of humans is that as they grow older and become exposed to more and more advertising messages, they develop a higher level of resistance to persuasion attempts. The explanation lies in the accumulation of 'persuasion knowledge schemas,' mental constructs about what these persuasion attempts are typically like:

You know, one of the things that's happening is the market is shifting older. So you get more experienced consumers, you know, a consumer twenty years old and a consumer forty-five years old has a different bandwidth of experience. You know, I've seen a lot more commercials, a lot more ads, a lot more selling propositions thrown at me than a twenty year old. I'm discerning on that as a consumer, I know how to block those out. You know, try the same... So you've got to be a little different, a little more subtle, a little more intelligent, a lot more relevant (*Account Planner 2*).

These changes happen, in history, to the entire human race, as well, not just individuals.

The *advertising phylogeny* of humankind is that over the course of history (mostly the 20th century) people have become more cynical and resistant to advertising, again, as a result of increased exposure to influence attempts and accumulated persuasion knowledge schemas: "Well, I think today, the consumer today is so cynical [...] Because of the cynicism and... people are so, consumers today are so anti-advertising, and they're so [...] 'I can see through all of this BS, and smokescreens, and smokemirrors, and all that stuff.' So therefore, you know, I don't think it really has the effect that it used to" (*Creative Director 3*). History is one of the important domains (see discussion later) that might change how advertising works: "I think just from the commercials I saw as a child, I think the rules got turned on their heads. In the beginning, I think it was, you have to have product mention immediately [...] And I think what happened over time was, we were so saturated with that approach that it was an immediate turnoff" (*Creative Director 1*). One of the respondents even used the genetic metaphor directly to describe the diachronic variant of the Persuasion Knowledge Model:

I guess the best way to look at it is... and the thing it always reminds me of is... like vaccination. You know, you get inoculated for polio by them giving you the virus. And then your body becomes immune to it. Well, that's kind of like advertising. If you've seen the Budweiser frogs and now I'm going to come along and give you the Miller Lite frogs... you are already... you know it's not going to work. And even over time, that's the biggest challenge to creative people... to keep ideas fresh because they do wear out (*Creative Director 6*).

To summarize, on a basic level of theorizing, ad practitioners believe in the Truncated Hierarchy Model, a variant of the academic Hierarchy-of-Effects model, with two basic steps assumed, awareness and persuasion, but without a strict sense of hierarchical chain in other effects variables. Their most important mid-level theory is a practitioner version of both the synchronic and diachronic variants of the Persuasion Knowledge Model, a theory that assumes that consumers have enduring mental constructs about how advertisers are trying to influence them and this in turn interacts with basic stimulus-response theories of advertising.

Moderator-focused theories

Knowledge about advertising does not stop at the basic or mid-level of theorizing. One of the most promising areas is finding variables that would increase (or decrease) levels of advertising effectiveness outcome variables included in basic theories such as the Hierarchy-of-Effects or Truncated Hierarchy Model. In other words, variables that moderate basic relationships are also sought. Indeed, the most practically significant knowledge about advertising would be exactly in this area; knowledge that would answer the question: “Under what circumstances can one get more brand awareness, positive brand attitude change or sales?”

When respondents faced this question, they gave radically different types of answers from what they stated in their basic level theories. As the discussion will suggest, their responses were less similar to academic understanding, and the identified emic moderator variables are not as easily translatable into etic social scientific concepts and variables. This finding is intrinsically linked to one group of practitioner meta-theories, presented in Chapter 5. For these reasons, practitioners’ moderator-focused theories will be discussed in their own emic terms and their translatability to social science will be assessed later.

Creativity as a moderator. Almost unanimously, respondents suggested that the most important indicator of an advertising campaign's success depends on whether or not it is *creative*. In other words, creativity is the number one moderator in practitioners' thinking about advertising. *Account Planner 1* emphatically asserted:

How does advertising work, the driver out of all of that is that, literally, it has to be creative. And I don't mean creative simply in the sense of the way that it is visually presented or filmed or worded, but we have to be very innovative in terms of how that message is going to break through the clutter, as well as break through the mindset, and be so compelling that it will ignite that brand relationship.

Similarly, *Creative Director 9* argued: "So I think that there's a strong parallel between fresh thinking and market effectiveness [...] Either you can play it safe and be at risk to losing the marketing war or you can try and constantly come up with fresh ideas." Creativity is described as something 'unexpected': "The other is that it's unexpected. And so much advertising is expected, is the downfall of virtually... probably 98+ percent of advertising that you see" (*Account Manager 3*); unconventional: "Even though again, I think breaking some of these conventions [is the most important]" (*Account Manager 3*); 'different': "The best advertising out there is making you think about a product, or brand, and a little bit different" (*Account Planner 2*); 'break-through': "So the art of good, distinctive communication is breaking... you know, now that's a classic line cliché, breaking through the clutter" (*Account Planner 2*); 'interesting': "And usually, we have a wall full of ideas that will narrow down to a few of our favorites, and the better, the most on-strategy, and the most relevant, and hopefully the most unexpected and interesting [will prevail]" (*Creative Director 4*); and fresh: "It is our challenge to keep things fresh" (*Creative Director 6*).

Creativity manifests itself in a big idea, sometimes also referred to as a good "concept." It is different from the "strategy" behind the ad, the thinking that characterizes the main brand

message, the support for this message, the characteristics of the audience to be reached and sometimes the brand's character/positioning. The big idea is the translation of this strategy into an unexpected, fresh, attention-getting way of communicating it: "I think the key to any good advertising, whether, you know, it's humorous or serious or whatever, is that there has to be an idea" (*Account Manager 3*); "So finding that big idea is really what we concentrate on. And where great creative work comes from is finding that big idea" (*Creative Director 3*). The idea needs to translate the strategy into something that is more interesting; if the strategy is left as it is and is not transformed into a big idea, the creatives did not work hard enough: "If your strategy is transparent in your advertising then it's not going to work. Consumers going to see it, so you can't" (*Creative Director 5*).

Not only is creativity the most important moderator, but it is also an exclusive one. Since by definition it involves radically new ways of communication, it defies any other rules for generating these communications. Creativity means "breaking the rules," or in other words, ruling out any other moderator-focused theories: "In general, you know, one rule is just not to follow the rules. You have to make it fresh" (*Creative Director 2*). Creativity is the polar opposite of "formulaic" advertising or advertising that is built by using moderator-focused theories. *Account Planner 1* explained: "Creativity is kind of what you call the X factor. That can take what according to the formula would generate a 20% return, creativity can turn that into a 200% return. It can also cost you if it's not effective. And it can take a 20% return and turn it into a 2% return."

As a result, unsurprisingly, creativity is perceived as the most important aspect of the advertising agency's work, the industry's specialty, what defines the agency's character, and what establishes agency work as a unique business service that advertisers are usually incapable

of replicating themselves. *Account Planner 4* argued: “I have so much respect for creative, I really do. Because I think that it’s where ad agencies get their leverage. If this business is reduced to a formula, then you don’t need all these agencies.”

Since the imperative for being creative denies further regularities, the question arises: are there any other moderators besides creativity in practitioners’ minds? After all, creativity defies all other rules by definition; it represents the denial of the possibility of any other moderator-focused rules for advertising. As Chapter 5 will explain, practitioners are somewhat ambiguous answering this question. They do talk about certain characteristics of what makes good advertising, but they do not claim these to be iron-clad rules. The discussion of the remainder of the moderators has to be framed by these qualifiers practitioners themselves used. Meta-theories described in the next chapter will provide further details to understand the context in which practitioners’ moderator-focused theories live. For the sake of simplicity, and ease of presentation, qualifications are omitted and presented as if the moderators below had universal applicability.

Entertainment-value. One of the ways in which creativity manifests itself in practitioner thinking is the notion of *entertainment-value*. Good advertising needs to be entertaining. *Account Planner 2* asserted: “I will say this right now, point blank, if you’re in television right now, with the advent of remote controls, and clickers, and TiVo, etc., if you’re commercial is not entertaining, first and foremost, you’re going to get killed, it’s as simple as that.” Similarly, *Creative Director 3* felt that entertainment had a universal appeal: “The whole deal is, I mean, it’s entertainment.” Even if it was not always the case, current day advertising morphed into an entertainment medium: “I think originally advertising could do that [not be entertaining] because

it was a new form. Now, advertising is more like entertainment and the way that you have to be effective is by getting your message across in a way that's entertaining" (*Account Planner 6*).

Practitioners believe that the reason why entertaining advertising works better is because by its very nature advertising is something that consumers do not want to see or hear, and they would use any means to screen it out. However, if the pill is coated with some sugar of entertainment, the advertising effort is less resisted. *Account Planner 2* explained: "Advertising by and large is an intrusion somewhat. So you got to hit a positive emotional cord, which you ought to find. You got to entertain me just a bit." *Creative Director 1* concurred: "It's not just a matter of asking the audience to work too hard for you, it's you're not making it worthwhile. We all want a reward." *Creative Director 3* offered a parallel from the media world: "But nobody is going to sit in on a movie and watch a documentary. They want to be entertained, they are not going to pay you a fee to be preached to."

Entertainment-value also helps maintaining the attention and letting the ad stimulus do its work: "And generally, I think, you have to be somewhat entertaining and not just be, you know, rambling attributes. Because unless you're somewhat entertaining, you may get their attention initially, but they really won't tune in..." (*Creative Director 8*). The belief that advertising, more often than not, work on an emotional level rather than rationally, explains why entertainment is such an important moderator: "I think we need to get back to where it is more of an entertainment medium. And if you look at it like movies, not everything's a comedy. So I think humor has its place, it is a good way to bond with people, it's an emotional connection. So is drama, so is action. And it is like the movies" (*Creative Director 6*).

Humor. Focusing even closer on a subset of a subset of moderators, *humor* as a form of entertainment is often postulated as one of the predictors of successful advertising. There is no doubt in practitioners' mind that humor is one of their most powerful tools. *Creative Director 2*, when asked what his ideal of good advertising is, stated bluntly: "Well, in general, I think, anything funny is good." Similarly, *Account Manager 5* believed: "So, you know, I mean, humor we use it all the time in the ads around here. Humor is very effective." Indeed, humor has infiltrated practitioner beliefs so much that it is often equated with creative work per se: "You know, when you write headlines, it's very much like telling a joke. So you want to study the masters. You want to study the Caytons, the way sentences begin and end, and the way, you know, word economy. The best joke goes this way..." (*Creative Director 7*).

Although it is stated that humor might not be appropriate for all product categories, this fact is perceived to be more of a sign of advertiser conservatism than a question of actual market effectiveness: "And until recently you didn't see a lot of humor in insurance for the same reason, and then they finally woke up and realized, gosh, why are we so dour and dull and grim, you know? I mean life is fun and we are trying to insure it so you can continue to have it" (*Creative Director 6*). Again, humor is perceived to be an effective tool because it is capable of creating an emotional bond, the very objective the majority of advertising campaigns is believed to have:

And I say funny, because that's the easiest emotion to get to, in 30 seconds, you know, that's all your commercial is. If you want to get to intelligent or heartfelt, it's harder, you can do it in a two-hour movie, you can make somebody cry. But I think it's having that emotional power is what makes something stay with people, and you know, it's funny you can get to it in 30 seconds. You can tell a joke in 30 seconds, I can't tell you a story and make you cry in 30 seconds. Harder (*Creative Director 2*).

Ad likeability. Interestingly, practitioners are more polarized on the issue whether advertising stimulus should be *likeable*. While it is generally accepted that likeable advertising can be effective, it is also pointed out that positive ad attitude in itself is seldom enough, while affectively negative or even offensive ads can generate positive results. For example, *Creative Director 2* asserted that likeable ads are effective: “They like it or they don’t like it. Period.” *Account Manager 7*, however, argued for the other side: “You know, some people say they have to like you. I don’t know if that’s true, I’ve seen a lot of work that I don’t like but I remember what it was about.”

Account Manager 5 suggested that views regarding ad likeability were often contested within his agency’s walls:

And actually one [rule] that [agency CEO] here, our CEO talks about fairly often is likeability. And certainly that’s a big... you know big component of it. But I’ve always thought it has to come short because there’s lots of advertising that I see that is... that I like but it means nothing to me from a purchase motivation, because it’s irrelevant or it’s whatever, but it’s... you know, I like it. And you know, there’s lots of stuff that is not terribly likeable that is effective. And you know, a lot of times you see that more in public service things and... I mean, the famous campaign with the... “This is your brain on drugs,” where they... scramble eggs and throw them in pans... is not exactly, “Uuuu, I love that.” It’s more, “Wow, that was relevant for the situation, very unexpected and effective.”

Others suggested that even outright offensiveness can be effective. One respondent went as far as claiming that a level of uneasiness is necessary for advertising to stand out and motivate consumers: “And when then it tells you, ‘No, everything seems to be fine,’ it can be fine, but it didn’t offend anybody, it didn’t upset anybody. But at the same time it didn’t move anybody” (*Creative Director 1*).

Relevance. Besides being creative, in the respondents’ view, the most important characteristic of successful advertising is that it is “*relevant*” for the consumer. By relevance, practitioners mean that the advertising stimulus was created with bearing in mind all the strategic

information available about the target market and what would motivate them to react favorably to the message. Relevance is often paraphrased as “consumer insight,” suggesting that it involves a non-trivial understanding of the target’s attitudes or behaviors as they relate to the consumption of the product in question. *Account Manager 5* stated: “I think one of the best I’ve ever heard that I think explains what works well and what doesn’t is that advertising that is relevant... is one key component of it working. [...] And unexpected without being relevant doesn’t accomplish very much. You really need the two working in combination.” *Creative Director 6* agreed that besides creativity, relevance was the best predictor of the success of the campaign: “And that is the other rule, you’ve got to, it’s got to relate.” As the discussion will show, the requirement for being relevant is different from previous moderators in that it resides on the strategic level rather than creative message-surface and rather than being a generally applicable theory, it has to be arrived at case by case. In short, it is a idiographic theory rather than a nomothetic one.

USP and brand image. Another moderator practitioners identified was the level of *differentiation* the strategic message contains about the advertising product. The argument is: the more differentiation the product message contains, the higher levels in advertising effectiveness outcome variables (brand awareness, attitude, sales) will ensue. Respondents talked about two types of differentiation techniques: USP (“unique selling proposition”) and brand image. USP stands for a rational point of difference in terms of what the advertised brand does functionally for the consumer (an example could be a superior fuel efficiency technology in a new car). In contrast, a competing differentiation strategy is emphasizing less functional, and more emotional, “attitudinal,” perceived benefits. An example is Nike’s strong association with the perennial

sportsman (sportswoman) ethos. The more the advertising message can claim such a difference (either rationally or emotionally), the better the results.

It is universally agreed that the higher the differentiation, the better the campaign's end-results are going to be: "I think the advertising needs to communicate a difference between the competition and/or other factors in their choice, and present that position [...] You're wasting your money if you don't show them the difference between your product, or show what your product stands for" (*Account Manager 3*). Similarly, *Account Manager 4* suggested that all advertising communications had to have "some sort of product benefit that is either perceived or real in the mind of the consumer that would help the consumer choose that product over the other product." Defining that point of difference in either rational or emotional terms is what makes good advertising in *Creative Director 8*'s view, as well: "But there's got to be something to differentiate it from somebody else, and I mean you just take the... take overnight delivery services, for example. I mean, 'What can brown do for you?' It just... stuck with people."

According to ad practitioners, both the USP (rational, functional benefit) and brand image (perceived, emotional benefit) can work; however, the brand image route is a more appropriate solution in present day advertising. Respondents argued that the history of advertising in general could be characterized as a move away from USP-led strategies toward more emotional, image-driven ones. *Account Manager 3* explained:

But I think today more than ever, you need to communicate that more... you need to create, you know, more of the image of the product. How does it relate is more, instead of this is a better product, everyone has it, how does it relate to me, and how does it relate to me as a consumer, and me in my values and ideas. And that's more important.

The perceived reason is that products are becoming more and more similar and therefore it is often impossible to make a distinction in any other way than by associating the brand with

emotions, values, attitudes, or imagery: “It used to be that people could make... a product that was superior to other people’s [...] But it’s almost impossible in the world we live now manufacturing in the field something that’s better than everybody else’s. [...] I guess that whole phenomenon is sort of what led to brand affinity being such an important factor” (*Creative Director 5*). The idea of “commoditization” as a likely reason was also brought up by *Account Manager 10*: “Yeah, I just feel that in that sense, it’s an era or age of really commodity products, which are very difficult to differentiate. [...] You have to really appeal to the emotional part of the process, or that individual sense of self to get them to want them to be really involved with your product.” While some practitioners seem to have argued that brand image or USP, respectively were more important in certain product categories, their overall preference was unquestionably for emotional differentiation: “As you’re well aware, in most categories there are few functional differences between the services, between the products. So the difference is oftentimes emotionally based” (*Account Planner 5*).

The primacy of brand image strategies is again aligned with practitioners’ basic level theory that affectively based attitude change is probably more often utilized as a mediator to sales from ad attention than any other route. It is not surprising that emotionally differentiating brands from the competition (aligning brands with values, feelings and emotions) will generate higher levels of this key mediator. Indeed, it would be surprising to find the opposite, that rationally based differentiation would result in higher levels of affectively based brand attitudes.

Consistency and simplicity. As it will be shown in Chapter 5, ad practitioners emphatically reject the idea that very many specific moderators could be identified for the creative content of ads. Any such “rules” are violently resisted. There were two concepts that kept reoccurring even after the insistent denial of any regularities in this area.

The first one is *campaign consistency*, the idea that different executions of a campaign (individual ads that belong to the overall ad effort for the brand at any given time) should have similarities. *Account Manager 1* asserted: “So, anyway, it needs to have... it needs to be consistent, and it needs to be consistent from, you know, one look to the next, to the next, to the next, so that you have to use the same typeface, you use the same look, you use the same format, whatever.” The reasoning behind this moderator-focused theory is that congruity between the different occasions consumers may encounter different components of the campaign is a much needed cognitive aid in a marketplace that is overflowing with persuasion attempts. *Account Manager 1* explained: “so that when you look at an ad, you go, ‘Oh.’ If it’s a half page, if it’s two-thirds page, no matter what, it’s still... ‘I know I’m looking at the same ad. I know I’m looking at an ad by [client name], and not something else.’ ” The idea of congruous message components resulting in stronger levels of outcome variables is also expressed by *Account Manager 8*: “When you can have [pause] similar elements across different media, used consistently over time, I think it’s just stronger communications.”

Second, ad professionals advised that advertising messages should be kept as *simple* as possible. Respondents often complained about the fact that clients try to put “too much” in their ads (too many copy points, too many details, too many diverse strategic directions), whereas advertising warrants simple presentation and ideally a single benefit. *Account Manager 1* emphatically insisted on this rule: “I try not to put too much, we’re always talking about putting, you know, ten pounds in a five pound bag... We try to keep a single message, to communicate a single message... now, there could be, there’s always peripheral messages, but there is one main message.” Similarly, *Account Manager 4* quoted what he called an old agency adage: “I’m of the mindset that, you know, ‘keep it simple, stupid.’ ” Or as *Creative Director 7* put it: “The only

rule I can think of is keep it simple. You've heard it a million times, but I think that's the one... I think that's the most logical rule."

The explanation why this moderator works on ad effectiveness is somewhat similar to the reasoning behind the campaign consistency rule: cognitive facilitation of the ad stimulus input. Consumers are perceived to be in an ad environment polluted with an overdose of messages and are prejudiced against advertising (as the Persuasion Knowledge Model holds, people maintain mental schemas about advertising persuasion attempts, which are, in turn, effective barriers for new attempts). In such an environment, overcomplicated, overly burdensome messages (or burdensome messages without any reward) are not going to be processed. *Creative Director 6* conveyed this underlying rationale for simplicity:

Okay, well, I think the first rule is to keep it simple. I think the more complicated and involved an idea becomes, the less likely anybody's... (a) it's going to attract attention, (b) they are going to take any kind of a... people don't want to work to read advertising. They don't want to work to read novels. And so I think keep it simple is obviously there...

Formulaic rules: mnemonics and spokesperson characteristics. While ad practitioners subscribe to the above simple rules for ad content, they resist other theories that academic researchers accept as valid areas of investigation. Two of these potential moderators came up during our discussions: mnemonic devices and spokesperson characteristics.

Mnemonic tools inserted into ad content to trigger memory for the brand name are classic devices of the advertising trade: "Well, you know, the classic ones are jingles, and taglines, and you know, those classic devices that cause people to remember your product, and hopefully make that favorable decision for it, when the decision point is there" (*Account Manager 2*). Practitioners accept the assumption that these tools might have worked in the past: "Which if you're going back to early-early advertising and you have radio jingles that were popular and

years later you play them for people and they can sit there and they know the lyrics” (*Creative Director 8*). However, the legitimacy of these techniques is clearly problematic in today’s advertising climate. One of the reasons is that, as any moderator directly visible in the creative content, mnemonics are perceived as formulaic: “I’ve got clients who think the Aflac duck is the greatest advertising in the world. I mean, that’s just stupid. [...] But Linda Kaplan Thaler that did that, you know, she’s got that formula. [...] She’s got this, this hook, this mnemonic hook that’s in all her commercials” (*Creative Director 3*). There is also a belief that such devices simply lost their ability to affect outcome variables, such as brand awareness:

I just saw a study that was published, I think it’s in the current issue of *Brandweek*, that taglines today are of no value or meaning. Coca-Cola has spent, god only knows how many millions, hundreds of millions of dollars on the tagline, which is R-E-A-L, “Real.” Okay? When the survey was conducted nationally, less than 2% were able to see the tagline “Real,” and associate it with the product.

A similar pattern can be observed for the rule that would predict that certain *characteristics of spokespersons* (characters often appearing in advertising to introduce or testify for the product) again would generate better results. As practitioners explained, such characteristics had been known for a long time: “Well, the rule that you almost always follow is to make the people in your commercial appear attractive, and appear as what the viewers and prospects are aspiring to be” (*Account Manager 2*). There is, however, the perception that there is a diminished relevance for such a moderator variable: “By the way, there’s another change in advertising, it used to be, all these Barbie dolls and pretty faces, and now if you just record an hour of TV [...] Maybe less aspirational. Or maybe the aspirations are more subtle. Little more achievable. I mean, you’ll see fat people in ads, bald people. That was unheard of before” (*Account Manager 8*).

The explanation for the above rejection of classic ad moderators is not explicit. One possible reason is practitioners' belief in the Persuasion Knowledge Model that would predict that any devices that are well-known for the audience, will ultimately lose their effectiveness. The longer they have been around the more likely this loss will occur. Mnemonic devices (jingles, taglines, and other auditory or visual hooks) have been around since the earliest days of advertising and so has been the notion that one always sees attractive human models in advertisements. Precisely because these tools have been so widely known among consumers, they might have lost some of their effectiveness. Another explanation may be (and this will be elaborated on in Chapter 5) that practitioners have meta-theories that forbid any 'formulaicness' in advertising.

Aesthetic rules. The moderator terrain also reveals that ad practitioners (unlike academic researchers) do not limit the sphere of knowledge to behavioral-cognitive psychology or even the social sciences. Ad practitioners (especially the ones who are in the creative functional area within the agency) believe in *aesthetic rules*, ideas borrowed not from the social sciences, but the humanities. This orientation is especially expressed among those who actually conduct such aesthetic work at the advertising agency: copywriters and art directors – and perhaps even more so among art directors who are typically trained in graphic design, typography, and such basic aesthetic disciplines as composition or color theory. As *Account Manager 2* explained: “I know from being around them, that there are... the guys who are art directors and copywriters have certain rules, again, rules-to-be-violated that they follow. Like when do you put the headline on top, when do you put the headline on the bottom? How big do you make the logo? How big is the subhead? How much copy?”

Interestingly, creative respondents themselves were not eagerly willing to discuss such aesthetic knowledge forms, or if they did, they quickly rationalized them with psychologistic language and concepts:

The Z, you know, the headline comes here, the photo here and it leads you eyeball, here the bodycopy, and the bodycopy comes across this way and the logo is all the way... always on the right-hand side of the page, and then had to stop. Then you had a thing called Ayer #1 that was invented by N. W. Ayer back in the 50s and it was the page... we divide it into five fifths and four fifths of the page is photo and one fifth of the page is white space and copy. And I mean, you know, that's all... I mean it's formula. And you know, I mean and it does... it takes into consideration some basic principles that we now know about human beings and how they look. I mean your eye moves this way, so it makes sense to have something there (*Creative Director 3*).

Why creatives are reluctant to discuss any rules for the generation of creative content has to do with the central problematic of this dissertation, and will be discussed in detail later. Here, suffice it to say that there exists a realm of aesthetically-based mental constructs that ad practitioners seem to possess, but for reasons to be uncovered later, are unwilling to admit to. To give a glimpse into this world, the reader can see an exhibit from a print source a number of respondents directed the investigator's attention to (please refer to **Appendix C**). During one of the interviews, a creative director respondent indeed pulled out this book, holding it up as a source that sums up the best of creative techniques in advertising and what he regularly uses as a source of inspiration: "There's a great a book, I just go and grab it for a little bit... [subject leaves room to get book] on that stuff. *Creative Advertising*, seen it?" (*Creative Director 2*) Such sources are the best approximations of some of the implicit and aesthetically based beliefs creatives possess, mental constructs that are otherwise very difficult to get to for field researchers. The discussion on practitioner meta-theories will put the status of such aesthetic moderators into context.

Contextual moderators: selective perception and clutter. So far the discussion only covered moderators that are potentially under advertisers' control, circumstances that they can do something about. Even though practitioners reject the idea that science is the best method to control such moderators, controllable moderators have the most significance. The interviews uncovered two conditions that (even though uncontrollable) are also of great importance for agency workers: selective perception and advertising clutter.

Selective perception in advertising is a psychological process that predicts that those who are in some way predisposed to purchasing a certain product or brand are more likely to notice, process or be attitudinally influenced by advertising messages. A typical example is the car industry and related products: "One of the exceptions happens is, if you are in the market for a car, you start paying attention more to car ads, particularly the ones in the genre of cars that you're looking for" (*Account Manager 2*); "Most notably, if it's a product they're interested in then they'll look at it. And I think the automotive people and tire people, probably, know that better than anybody. [...] Well, the tire ads, nobody reads them until they are in the market for tires" (*Creative Director 6*). Selective perception, however, is not limited to a single product category, practitioners believe it is a general moderator of advertising effectiveness: "Well, to begin with, I don't think a consumer gets an advertising message unless it's something they're really interested in [...] If your house gets flooded, then all of a sudden you might be in the market for carpet cleaning, whereas if that's not an issue, then the mind filters out the carpet cleaning ads" (*Creative Director 3*); "Well, before you weren't looking, but now that you're looking, the light goes off, so you open your mind to those messages, while before you were filtering them out. And I think it's like that with every product category" (*Account Manager 4*).

While selective perception is not something advertisers can control, being aware of such regularities can help them with efficient strategizing (e. g. segmentation and targeting).

Similarly, *advertising clutter*, the overabundance of persuasive commercial messages is a given in today's marketplace, according to ad practitioners. Ad messages are everywhere, and the result is a lower level of effectiveness of any advertiser's own campaign:

And it's really the battle for the mind of the consumer to gain attention of the consumer, when the consumer is (a) being bombarded by more and more messages, more and more frequently, from more and more sources, all over the place, everywhere from when you're going to the bathroom stall to TV, to fragmentation of television via cable, Internet, etc. It gets more and more difficult to gain the attention of the consumer (*Account Manager 4*).

As it is the case with many other practitioner theories, the belief in ad clutter and the belief that it has a negative moderating effect are placed in a historical context. As the next section will highlight, it is applicable mainly in a single domain (here: current time period) rather than universally. Notably, all the following explications of clutter theory are framed by a comparison between the present and past: "If they heard a hundred messages before, now they hear a thousand. And it's just a filter [...] now, the response is simply a block" (*Account Manager 8*); "People are bombarded with so many more images, so many more TV channels, so much more information. It has to get more impactful to break through" (*Creative Director 2*); "I think it is more difficult because of the bombardment of messages. I mean, I remember hearing a long time ago that people were exposed to something like 5000 messages per day. And that was a long time ago, so it's probably double of that now" (*Creative Director 8*). What is important, however, is that ad clutter is a true moderator of advertising effectiveness. Just as advertising clutter increased in the history of advertising, so did the ad's ability to be effective decrease.

Domain-specificity

As the last part in the previous section suggested, some practitioner theories are often framed by a particular domain in which they are considered applicable. A historical time period is not the only such domain, however. As suggested in the academic theory section of the literature review, domains are conditions that influence basic relationships between advertising stimulus and outcome variables. The way in which they influence this relationship, however, sets them apart from moderators, circumstances that only result in higher or lower levels of the outcome variables. In contrast, domain circumstances necessitate a whole different arrangement of the variables assumed by a basic level advertising theory.

According to advertising practitioners, the domains that would result in such a change in the way in which advertising works are the following: (1) the *strategic objective* of the campaign, (2) the *product category* the advertised brand belongs to, (3) the *medium used* for advertising communication, and (4) *historical time periods*. These domains and their relationship with basic advertising theory will be discussed next.

Strategic objective. Trivial as it may seem, not all advertising is designed to work the same way. There are different *objectives* different campaigns aim to accomplish. According to practitioners, these objectives, set before the production and distribution of the advertising stimulus, are one of the best predictors of how advertising *will* work. *Creative Director 9* offered this overview of possible alternatives:

Sometimes it's designed to get you to get up off your ass and go, you know, buy something, sometimes it's designed to get you to change your opinion, sometimes it's designed to make you go vote. Sometimes, it's... You know, the actions that you're trying to cause, sometimes they are not even really true actions. Sometimes they're just, as I said, changes of opinion.

How advertising works depends on the goal as it can work in different ways. To translate into academic advertising research language, the objectives you set activate different paths in the Truncated Hierarchy Model. It is not to suggest, in practitioners' view, that an advertising campaign can only contain ads that work according to a single scenario. It is also common that different components of the overall campaign are designed to work differently, each having their own contribution to the overall marketing goals. In the case of the individual elements, however, advertising does work in different ways:

And for instance, car advertising generally has three tiers of advertising. They have the factory advertising that is creating image and awareness, they have the dealer groups that is providing some level of promotion as well as awareness, then you have individual dealer advertising that is largely selling on price, having had awareness and image established by other means (*Account Manager 12*).

The Truncated Hierarchy Model allows for a number of different path models to be activated. Although all these path variations can be activated, only the most typically occurring scenarios will be discussed.

A very common objective is to increase the *awareness* of the given brand. Brand awareness is often the only goal of introductory campaigns. It may also be the objective for campaigns for even older brands, if awareness levels are insufficiently low, despite previous advertising activity. As *Creative Director 4* explained, how advertising works “depends on the goals. I mean, obviously if... there are some campaigns where your whole goal is awareness. You're a new company, got a new product, awareness is key, alright?” *Account Manager 3* used the example of the then salient Aflac duck campaign to illustrate the importance of domains: “I think the key is that the guy [CEO of Aflac] evidently said, ‘We spent 40 million dollars a year and nobody knows our name. All I want is for somebody to remember my name.’ So the Aflac duck came in.” Therefore, there are potential scenarios where brand awareness is the only

variable that is assumed in the model and attitudinal shifts or sales results are not expected to appear. To plot the basic theoretical scenario for this domain, brand awareness campaigns, the Truncated Hierarchy Model looks like the following (see **Figure 4.3**):

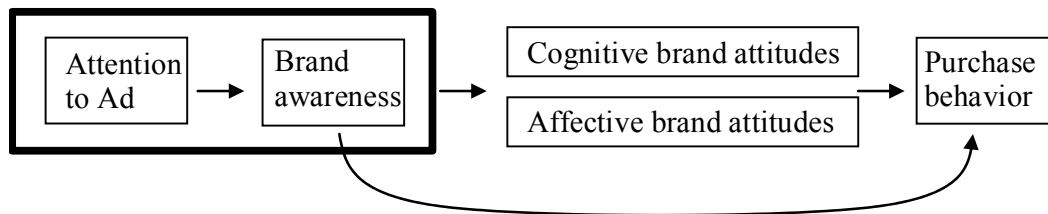


Figure 4.3 The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “brand awareness objective” domain.

It does not mean that sales are not expected to increase as a distant future objective, but these eventual behavioral outcomes might be driven by other variables and not a campaign that was set out only to move brand awareness. As it was discussed above, in the case of Aflac, for example, the sales force’s persuasive attempts are perceived as full mediators to final behavioral response (sales). Future campaigns can also focus on attitudinal shifts or direct sales results or indeed, campaigns can be built to activate the entire Truncated Hierarchy Model with all its variables, all at once. What practitioners suggest is that under certain circumstances, only parts of the model get activated and that this depends on the intent of its creators.

Another typical scenario is when the main goal of the campaign is *attitudinal change* and then behavioral response. Practitioners commonly refer to these campaigns as “image” or “brand” campaigns. In such cases, while the brand still needs to be mentioned, the focus is on a change in attitudes toward the brand: “But if your objective is, let’s say your product that has tons and tons of awareness. [...] You know that you have tremendous brand awareness, what is

more important to that particular advertiser is brand likeability, favorability, and preference in some way” (*Account Manager 4*).

Image advertising is indeed the most common type of advertising and it is what practitioners appreciate the most highly. As *Creative Director 2* suggested: “There are different ways. The most fun is when you’re after an emotional connection to brand, you try to build a brand. Nike or whatever, you know, Mini is a great example of that, the whole advertising is about creating a personality about that brand. That’s when it’s the most fun, and it’s most exciting.” In the image advertising domain, all variables of the Truncated Hierarchy Model are assumed to be present (see **Figure 4.4**).

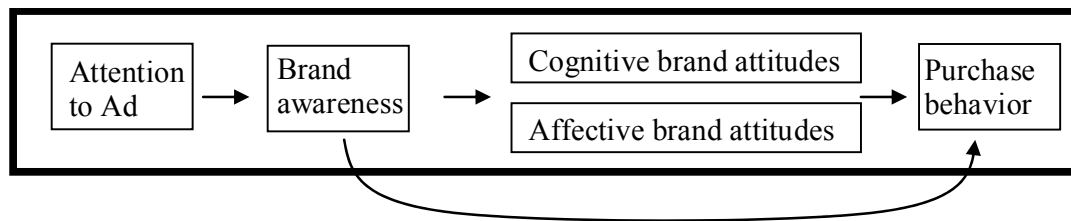


Figure 4.4 The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “brand image campaign” domain.

Finally, advertising can be designed to generate *sales* directly. Practitioners refer to this kind of advertising as “direct advertising” or “direct marketing.” This type of advertising often includes a “call to action,” a verbal or visual trigger to induce immediate purchase behavior. These are the ads with the 1-800 numbers or found in mailboxes with “limited time offers.” A further example is what practitioners refer to as “price advertising” where the main focus of the advertising stimulus is the product’s retail price. In the “direct” domain, the basic model of advertising becomes quite simple: advertising stimulus (presupposing it identifies the advertiser

brand consumers develop some awareness of) directly leads to sales without any intervening variables (see **Figure 4.5**):

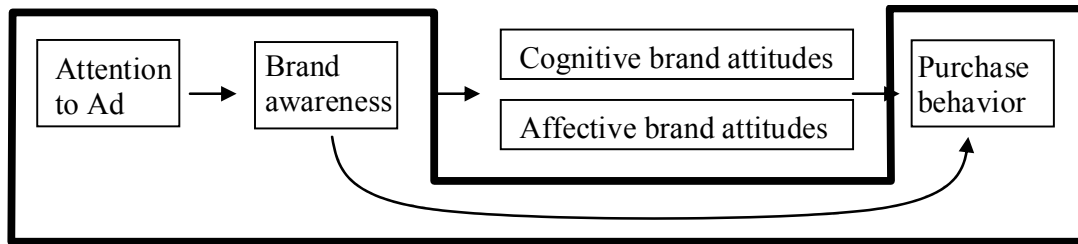


Figure 4.5 The Truncated Hierarchy Model – “direct advertising” domain.

Practitioners offered a number of examples for this domain: “I mean direct response advertising is specifically created to get the phone to ring right now, you know, or get somebody to call right now to buy” (*Account Manager 1*); “Direct advertising can absolutely sell directly. I mean, the ad you see on television with the 1-800 number... those sell like crazy” (*Account Manager 6*); “I mean, the easiest example from all the advertising out there that has a 1-800 number on it. Where it says call today and buy. [...] So yeah that absolutely sells. If you think of... They call in, you know, they buy that stupid Bose radio phone. That’s the dumbest” (*Account Director 10*); “So I think in a lot of cases, building awareness isn’t as big of importance as... They want to see, did it move units off the shelf, or did I get heads in beds” (*Creative Director 7*).

Practitioners perceive direct advertising as being separate from the advertising industry’s mainstream and often relegate lower status to it. Organizationally, it is often the case that direct communications are produced by specialist agencies and not the advertising agency that creates image or awareness building advertising. The existence of a different status level, organizational

position and a perceived distinct area of expertise further corroborate the fact that direct sales response-type advertising is thought of as a different domain in practitioners' theories of advertising.

Product category. Objective is not the only domain in practitioner thinking. *Product category* serves just as important of a determinant of basic level theories as advertisers' intent. Practitioners very commonly say that different categories necessitate different approaches to advertising. They have a number of dichotomies about product categories: impulse versus considered purchase, categories where specific versus only generic benefits are available, emotional versus rational categories, and visible ("badge") versus invisible category use. Let us look at all of these dichotomies and their implied basic level advertising theories in order.

Practitioners believe in the distinction between impulse and considered purchase product categories. Impulse products are ones whose purchase is not planned out in great detail and is not very risky. Low-price, fast moving consumer packaged goods are the most likely candidates. From a consumer consumption point of view they are markedly different from higher ticket price, more expensive and risky products, whose purchase decision consumers spend more time with ("considered purchases"). *Account Planner 5* asserted that the way in which advertising worked depended on this dichotomy of product categories: "To my mind it varies by category. It varies by considered purchase versus impulsive."

Advertising for these two distinct product classes work in different ways. For impulse items, the role of advertising is to create a certain level of brand awareness, which in turn leads to purchase (see **Figure 4.5**). In contrast, for considered purchases, the full truncated hierarchy is likely to be activated (**Figure 4.4**). As *Account Manager 12* explained: "Awareness is a significantly more important part of advertising communications for what I'm going to call the

impulse items. More studied purchases, like a car, you know, an expensive appliance, something like that, generally speaking, they are going to need more information.” For impulse products, brand awareness is the key mediator to sales in *Account Manager 4*’s opinion, as well: “For high turnover, short-span consumer products, like toothpaste, and pure consumer branding products... In those cases, I think it’s a matter of brand recognition.”

Ad practitioners also make a distinction between products that are more emotional or more rational in nature. Certain product categories are more likely to emphasize an emotional or attitudinal alignment with the consumer, versus others that are mainly consumed based on performance characteristic, rational benefits or functional superiority. As expected, emotional categories activate the affectively based attitude path in the Truncated Hierarchy Model, whereas in rational product categories the cognitively based brand attitude route is more likely to be taken (even though emotion is still going to be a factor to some extent). **Figure 4.6** depicts the activated paths for the emotional product category domain, whereas **Figure 4.7** illustrates the activated paths for the rational products domain:

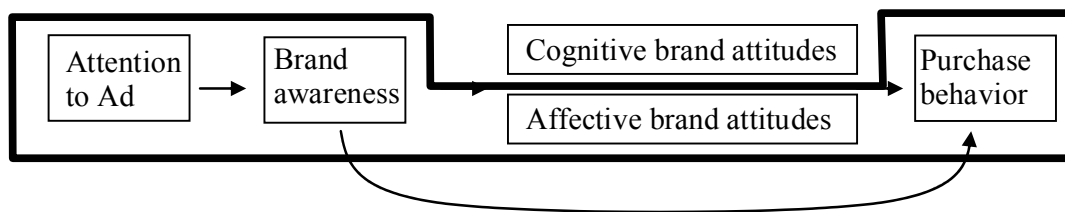


Figure 4.6 The Truncated Hierarchy Model – emotional products domain.

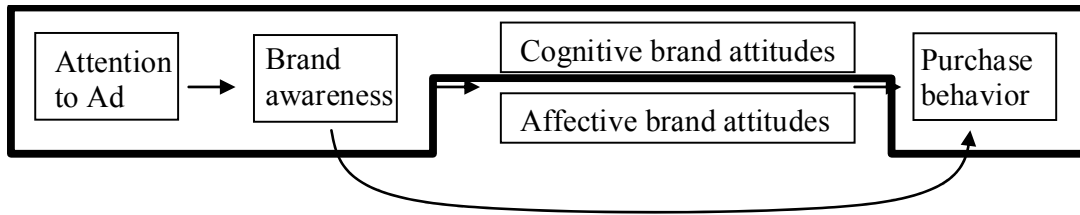


Figure 4.7 The Truncated Hierarchy Model – rational products domain.

Creative Director 6 explained these domain-specific theories:

But I think, I think there are categories certainly like the fashion industry, to a degree the beverages, the beers, and the soft drinks and everything are very... you know, it's what you want to be associated with, seems to be the motivating factor. Whereas I think if you go into other categories, like I worked in, you know like, home building products, on [brand name], and there it's an aesthetic appeal to the consumer but there'd better be some hard facts supporting because it's an expensive purchase. And people need validation for it. [...] And those are factual based things, but still... emotion is a huge part of it.

A very similar pattern is observed with regards to the distinction whether it is possible to claim a unique benefit in a product category, or if the category is largely commodified. In commodity categories, where there is very little perceived rational differentiation between brands in the category, advertising is more likely to be emotionally based and thus affectively processed; whereas in highly differentiated categories the unique rational benefits are going to result in cognitively based attitude change. *Account Manager 9* summarized the implications of the commodity versus unique benefit domains: “Yeah, kind of depends, the more the product falls within a commodity category, then the more emotion plays into the decision making process. If you’ve got some new or unique thing, then sometimes the rational side can overlay.”

Finally, respondents made a distinction between “badge” brands, brands that are consumed in a way that is visible for others versus brands that are consumed in a solitary fashion. Visibly consumed brands are called badges because they are signs representing a

semiotic set of preferred meaning about the consumer's self. For this very reason, when badge brands are advertised, the stimulus is believed to be processed on an affectively based attitude change route rather than cognitively. Advertising for badge brands impacts consumers' sense of self and "attitudinal" alignments, which are understood as emotional rather than cognitive-rational concepts. *Account Planner 2* explained: "The car category is very emotional, very high interest. [...] It's also a badge. So, you know, it's like wearing a... I don't have a logo on today, thank god... but it's like wearing a logo on your shirt or something. It means something, you know, it describes something about that person. It's very emotional." Similarly, *Account Manager 7* said: "I mean, there's badge products, for example. I mean, there are certain products, Harley Davidson is a badge brand [...] So what does it say about you that you use it?"

Product category is such an important determinant of what domain-specific version of the basic level Truncated Hierarchy Model ad practitioners should assume, that some of them even developed planning tools based on such distinctions. The archetype of these product-category-as-domain planning tools is the FCB-grid (Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan 1991; Vaughn 1986) a highly influential theory that made its way from its practitioner origins to advertising academia. Interestingly, one of the respondents of this study presented a similar tool to the interviewer: "You know, we're using this table, it's sitting right here [interviewee moves to chart mounted on carton board sitting next to wall]. You can look at it, this is our academic stuff, so don't laugh" (*Account Planner 2*). The tool (reproduced in **Figure 4.8**) shows a matrix of six different product category types. The horizontal axis denotes rational versus emotional categories ("stature" falling somewhere in between), the vertical axis represents whether or not a unique articulation of the benefit (emotional or rational) is possible.

	Attribute/ benefit	Stature	Attitude/ emotion
Tangible			
Intangible			

Figure 4.8 Planning tool for domain determination.

According to the respondent, the tool is used every time strategy is discussed with advertiser clients and serves as an aid to work out a consensus on how advertising is supposed to work in the client's case. In other words, the tool is used to decide what domain-focused basic level advertising theory is applicable to the given class of cases.

As the aforementioned theories suggested, product category could very strongly influence what variants of basic practitioner theories of advertising apply. The influence of product categories advertised is so strong that its effect is even felt at the moderator-focused theory level. Is it possible that product categories would determine the “rules” for generating advertising creative content for products that belong to the given category? *Account Manager 2*, for instance, described such a moderator-focused theory as specific for the “food” category in vivid detail. According to this theory, advertisers can get better results in the food category if they depict food items moving rather than motionless:

Well, that's what the food experts tell you you should do, because food sitting still, even if the steam is coming off of it, or whatever, tends to be dull, and can be very, can be, can easily perceived as unattractive and unappetizing. You know, the old Jell-O commercials, you know, the Jell-O was always quivering, you never saw it sitting still. Soup is almost always being ladled from some place, or stirred, or some other, you know, or somebody is taking it to their lips, in a cup, it's moving. Pizza, you know, the cheese is dripping, you know, and the steam is coming off, and somebody is taking it from the pan to their mouths or whatever,

it's almost always moving, because you... Again, it can be very unappetizing if it's not moving.

However, just as in the case of universal theories, when it comes to moderators, most practitioners vehemently resist the possibility of any regularities, and category rules are no exception. *Account Planner 2* pointed to the ads plastered on the wall in the room the interview took place and explained that initial brainstorming started in the room by looking at typical ads within the category only to determine what *not to do*. He asserted: "You know what, I will just say emphatically, that's BS. You know what, for every person who throws out there anything like that, that is formulaic advertising, I'll show you somebody who breaks that rule, and it's very effective." *Account Planner 5* had the same view: "One of the things that we should be striving to do, as an advertiser, is break the rules of the category. So if the category convention is, you should be doing this style of advertising, is a good reason not to do it." Even though ad practitioners acknowledge that ads in certain product categories tend to have very strong similarities (e.g., cars depicted on mountainous, winding roads; financial and insurance ads being subdued and serious; extreme sports ads being energetic and more "edgy"), they insist that the greatest results are to be expected from the violation of these unwritten rules. A full account of why ad practitioners resist such rules will be given in Chapter 5 about meta-theories.

Medium used. Domain-specific basic level advertising theories may also differ based on what *medium* the advertising stimulus is channeled through. In other words, a different variation of the Truncated Hierarchy Model might be applicable to TV, radio, print, etc. Ad practitioners indeed believe in such domains. Television, for example, is perceived as a medium for emotions (affective route is activated in the basic model), whereas print is more informative (cognitive route is activated). *Account Manager 6* stated: "You know, broadcast advertising is more the fun and emotional, where the print is the more the informative." Similarly, *Account Planner 3* said:

“There’s an opportunity with TV to deal much more on the emotional level. [...] When you’re in print media, in a magazine, you have this look, you have a few more seconds to draw them in, to get them to look, and then do you want them to look again, and know something more in detail, and come back to that.” Outdoor media, on the other hand, build brand awareness. Outdoor works like an “iconic flash” (*Account Planner 3*), reminding consumers of the brand. In *Creative Director 1*’s words: “So many times today is a one liner or something like it, and it really... we have a billboard, and as being a two-page spread even, so it even looks like a billboard. That’s building awareness, it’s keeping the name in front of you, so that it’s good recognition like that.”

Similarly to product categories, media might dictate different moderator-specific theories. In broadcast advertising, for instance, it is often believed that the product has to be mentioned early in the commercial. The rationale is that one has to “hook” the attention of the customer, otherwise her/his attention waivers. However, just as previously, practitioners resist the idea that such moderators are legitimate: “So... and you know, advertisers talk about, ‘Well, you’ve got to get the product in the first five seconds.’ [Market research firm] doesn’t say that. They say that it can be anywhere as long as it makes sense where it comes in” (*Account Manager 5*). *Creative Director 3* also stated:

I mean I was also taught that in radio [...] you got to say the brand name at least in the first five seconds, then you’ve got to repeat more times within the 30 seconds or 60 seconds or whatever it is. And you know what, I don’t... think that stuff works, we don’t sit around today and discuss radio copy based on did it mention the brand name in the first 10 seconds or did it mention it at least five times in the copy...

Moderator-focused theories, even if stated for a domain are resisted by advertising practitioners.

History as domain. Finally in the discussion of domain-specific theories, a very significant finding is that unlike academic advertising research, practitioner theories are always situated *in history*. Practitioners do not think about how advertising works independent of the time period in which the advertising occurs. They have a keen sense of history. Time, therefore, is our last, but not at all the least important domain to discuss.

Ad practitioners are careful to frame their beliefs about how advertising works within time boundaries. These boundaries, however, are not of sharp contours. The two domains are: a roughly circumscribed *past* (often reminiscent of a mythical Golden Age) and the *present* (often believed to be a less advantageous environment for the advertising industry). What are some of the perceived differences in the ways in which advertising works based on the “past” or the “present”?

First, there is a sense of limited effectiveness in the present compared to earlier decades. Respondents often complained that advertising did not affect consumers as strongly as it used to. Mass media advertising is believed to be losing its power: “I think there’s probably a place for the television commercial, to just let people know we’re still that brand, it’s out there, and whatnot, but as far as... being as effective as it used to be, you know...” (*Creative Director 5*); “I think it [persuading consumers] is more difficult” (*Creative Director 8*); “I don’t think it [advertising] really has the effect that it used to.” (*Creative Director 3*). It is also believed that there are alternative ways to get at the effects advertising used to be designed to achieve. As *Account Planner 1* noted some of the most successful brands have done just fine without any advertising:

You know, you’ve got brands today, like Starbuck’s, that essentially don’t advertise, and they’re one of the champion brands. Apple is the same way, you know, Apple historically really has not advertised much. You’ve got other brands that are out there that has spent just tons of money on advertising that are sitting

there struggling, so that historic model that we use of a cause and effect... if you advertise therefore your sales will go up, that doesn't... that model is completely out of whack.

Ad practitioners believe that one of the main reasons why advertising works less effectively is the increase in the overall level of advertising messages or what they call: advertising clutter. As *Account Manager 6* lamented: "Because there's more advertising out there, and the majority of advertising is bad, so there's more of it, and most of it... It becomes worse and worse and worse." The sheer volume of advertising that competes for consumer attention greatly reduces the effectiveness of any one single message. *Creative Director 8* asserted: "And there are much, there are many more ad exposures out there that you compete with [...] So you're bombarded by ad messages. [...] Which makes it, I think, all the more challenging to stand out and be remembered."

Another explanation may be provided by the Persuasion Knowledge Model, especially its time-based, diachronic-genetic variant. Practitioners believe that during the course of advertising history, consumers have acquired mental schemas about the ways in which advertising campaigns attempt to persuade them to become aware brands, change attitudes towards them or eventually purchase them. These mental schemas in turn, in the present, started to act like filters to block persuasion attempts that are similar to ones that consumers learned from past encounters. In other words, consumers have become more "cynical," cynical towards advertising persuasion attempts. This genetics-like resistance that has built up in consumers is believed to be one of the reasons why advertising does not work like it used to. *Account Manager 4*, for example, asserted: "You also, on top of that, have consumers that are more advertising or marketing savvy than they used to be, and I think there's a little bit of cynicism, because of they

are being bombarded constantly by messages left and right. They're smart, they're educated about it, and that makes even more... tough to impact them with credibility."

Partly as a result of these changes and partly because of changes in practitioners' own meta-theories of the ontological and epistemological status of advertising knowledge, there has also been a shift in what paths of the basic Truncated Hierarchy Model get activated. Putting it simply, advertising practitioners believe that while in the past brand advertising used to work cognitively/rationally, today, it persuades emotionally. *Account Planner 6* summarized this idea the following way:

I think companies are realizing that the rational benefits, while are important, are not what carries an ad anymore. And that in and of itself, it's not going to create the interest or excitement about your brand. I mean, at one point, that's the way people measured good creative. Now, saliency is probably more of a true measure of the effectiveness of advertising. So it's do you relate to this ad, do you relate to this brand because of this ad, does this appear to be an up and coming brand or a brand that's for someone like you. Really... that's really what advertising has kind of transitioned into.

As noted earlier, this shift also manifests itself on the moderator level: the "USP-theory of advertising" (the idea that advertising messages built around unique product features generate higher levels of attitude change than any other moderators) is not perceived to be valid anymore: "USP, a unique selling, you know, proposition of the product, I can't... I mean, I'm bold enough to say that there's very few of those traditional models that I have seen, that even work today" (*Account Planner 1*). In current day advertising, it is brand image (emotional differentiation) what moderates advertising effectiveness. To quote *Account Manager 3* again: "I grew up in a packaged goods environment, which was in the 60s and the 70s, it was, you know, USP [...] But I think today more than ever you need to communicate [...] more of the image of the product. How does it relate is more, instead of this is a better product, [...] me in my values and ideas. And that's more important." Emotion and techniques to achieve higher levels of affectively

based attitudinal change, in more cases than not, is what ad practitioners believe to describe the present-day domain of advertising effectiveness.

Summary and discussion

To summarize, advertising practitioners do have theories about how advertising works and thus the findings of this study corroborate Kover's research (1995) on implicit practitioner theories. Moreover, the present study has found that practitioners' theories about advertising are rather complex, layered mental constructs, not simple lay beliefs. They range from the simplest articulation of stimulus-response relationships to nuanced path models curtailed by boundary conditions.

Ad practitioners on the most basic level believe that "advertising works," even if its effects are not limitless. In accordance with dominant mass communication theory, advertising does not work like the propaganda and hypodermic needle theories predicted (Lasswell 1927; Cantril, Gaudet, and Herzog 1940), its effects are muted by a lot of factors. However, advertising does have effects (even if lower than some may expect) on attention to ad stimulus, brand awareness, cognitively or affectively based attitudes toward the brand, purchase behavior (sales) and even indirectly, through word-of-mouth, internal audiences or the sales force.

Practitioners also organize these simple effects into "systematically related set[s] of statements" (Hunt 2002a, p. 193), or 'theories.' Practitioner theories (just as their academic counterparts) occur in a number of varieties. **Table 4.1** summarized the typology of practitioner theories of advertising.

The overarching basic-level and universally applicable practitioner theory of advertising is the Truncated Hierarchy Model. It states that advertising "breaks through" as a first step and

then changes either cognitively or affectively based attitudes or results in purchase behavior directly. It is “truncated” because it does not assume all the hierarchical steps the Hierarchy-of-Effects model does. The Hierarchy-of-Effects model, in some of its formulations (Colley 1961) presupposes a long list of perceived hierarchical steps such as: awareness → knowledge → liking → preference → conviction → purchase. The Truncated Hierarchy Model is much simpler and much more flexible; it assumes only two steps: the input of the message (attention to ad and some level of resulting brand awareness) and then cognitive/affective/behavioral response.

The Truncated Hierarchy Model is not even a “learn → feel → do model” – as a somewhat different, simplified interpretation of the Hierarchy-of-Effects model characterizes it (Vaughn 1986) – because it does not assume that there is any order in which affect, cognitive attitude change or behavioral response should occur. Indeed, it does not assign too large of a role to the time order of individual effects, other than the two basic steps of memory change and attitude/behavior change. It bears more similarities to what Vakratsas and Ambler (1999) describe as “hierarchy-free” models. To acknowledge that there are still two steps involved, the Truncated Hierarchy Model name was given. This basic finding also corresponds to that of Kover (1995). He writes: “Copywriters’ implicit theories of advertising were built on a two-step advertising process: (1) breaking through to attract interest, and (2) delivering a message” (p. 599). The Truncated Hierarchy Model expands on Kover’s results in that (a) it has been found to be uniformly accepted not only among copywriters but creatives, account management and account planning/research, (b) represents a more detailed understanding of the two steps and (c) spells out the conditions under which different variants of the model apply.

The Truncated Hierarchy Model seems to be ad practitioners’ basic and universal theory of how advertising works. Ad practitioners, however, note that there is little use of universal

theories in practice; they almost always have to be observed in a domain-specific form. In other words, even if practitioners believe that there are two basic steps they insist that the details of what happens vary based on different circumstances. Different paths of the Truncated Hierarchy Model are activated based on different objectives, product categories, media used for communication, or even historical time period.

Further, this study has found that when it comes to understanding how consumers react to advertising more closely, on a mid-level theoretical height, practitioners subscribe to a native version of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994). Practitioners acknowledge that consumers are not blank slates in their relationship with advertising. They believe consumers have enduring mental schemas about how advertising works and how advertisers attempt to influence them, and that this in turn interacts with how consumers respond to advertising. It is very significant that while in advertising academia the Persuasion Knowledge Model is still somewhat of a heresy (it is not even mentioned in Vakratsas and Ambler's (1999) standard review of advertising theory), respondents in this study uniformly professed to it. Ad practitioners believe that while the Persuasion Knowledge Model applies universally, it is of heightened importance in the present day historical domain. In other words, they accept the historical-genetic variant of the model, which states that persuasion knowledge schemas accumulate in consumers over time, and lead to advertising resistance either ontogenetically or phylogenetically.

Practitioners also like the Persuasion Knowledge Model because it naturally fits one of their strongest beliefs (so strong that we will argue it is "ideological"): creativity. If consumers are constantly acquiring mental schemas about advertising practitioners' persuasion attempts, it follows that in order to be effective agencies have to constantly innovate. In other words, they

have to be creative. The logic of the Persuasion Knowledge Model is one of the strongest legitimators of the moderator-focused belief that advertising needs to be creative.

The question “What works best in advertising?” or the existence of quantifiable variables that would moderate the above described basic theories is more problematic. Chapter 5 will argue that practitioners actively resist admitting to such moderators (or “rules”) in advertising – with the exception of the directive that advertising needs to be creative. The findings in this chapter also depict a somewhat ambiguous set of beliefs (this ambiguity was also observed by Kover 1995). While respondents did talk about a number of moderators, they insisted that the only real one that surpassed and even suppressed all others was: creativity. Creativity works as an ideological force in advertising, it represses every other potential moderator for the generation of creative content. This ideological character of creativity was uniformly observed by all respondents.

Insistent probing has uncovered some further moderators, but the ideology of creativity forces them into two groups, both of which need to conform to the “suppressor” variable. The first group of moderators are those that can be reconciled with creativity: these rules are creativity-conform. Rules such as “entertainment and humor are effective in advertising” are naturally compliant with creativity. Indeed, in many practitioners’ minds humor is almost synonymous with creativity. Relevance and differentiation are also compatible rules, since they have to do with the strategic bases of advertising and not so much the executional surface. Further, the requirement of relevance is best thought of as a constellation of ‘idiographic’ pieces of understanding (Babbie 2001), aiming at theorizing at the individual case-level and not at the ‘nomothetic,’ general plane. In other words, the directive to be relevant is meaningless on a general level, because it is a composite of idiographic relationships explaining what may be

appealing to the particular target consumer, in the particular market situation, given the particular product characteristics – as supported by strategic market research. The rules of ‘simplicity’ and ‘consistency’ are broad and common-sensical enough to comply with any (however restrictive) requirement. They do not contradict the primacy of creativity – because they do not contradict anything. Practitioners also discussed some of the uncontrollable (“contextual” in academic language) moderators, such as ‘selective perception’ and ‘ad clutter.’ These again do not cause a conflict with creativity as they are beyond agency workers’ control.

The second group of moderators constitutes what we can call “shameful knowledge.” Rules under this umbrella (practitioners mentioned rules about mnemonics and spokesperson characteristics) are moderator-focused theories that everybody in the ad industry seems to know about but nobody believes in. These “rules” do not comply with the ideology of creativity because they are believed to lead to “formulaic advertising.” Indeed, the specificity and surface-focus of moderators that would dictate what type of spokesperson would lead to better results (in terms of advertising effectiveness outcome variables) would be difficult to reconcile with the denial of any hard and fast rules, a directive that creativity implies. Domain-specific moderator-focused theories (“category rules”) are resisted for the same reasons.

Ad practitioners (especially creatives) also talked about some aesthetic regularities (e. g., design, layout and typographic rules) that evidently played a role in advertising effectiveness. These types of rules are an interesting group because they are generally admitted to, however, when asked for specifics, are denied. Practitioners are in denial about these “rules” most likely because these regularities are directly related to creative work and therefore are the most susceptible to the ideology of creativity. It would indeed be “shameful” to follow “cheat-sheet”-like rules, when the highest perceived value in creative work is innovativeness and the denial of

any rules. It seems, however, that ad practitioners do have such “suppressed” aesthetic rules in the back of their minds, with which they are in an ambivalent relationship (they have them and they also violate them). An exemplar about what these suppressed aesthetically based theories might be like is provided in **Appendix C**.

It is important to note that practitioners’ moderator-focused theories are not as easily translatable into a social scientific language as basic or mid-level theories. Many of practitioners’ moderators are ‘metaphysical’ from a strict – experimental psychology-based – social scientific perspective (Kerlinger 1986); they are not easy or even impossible to be operationalized. Concepts such as creativity, entertainment value or even humor seem to be highly subjective and difficult to define (for quantitative measurement). Aesthetic rules are especially (as the exhibit in **Appendix C** indicates) problematic to reconcile with the language of psychology. These observations will gain a deeper meaning when placed in the context of practitioners’ ontological skepticism in Chapter 5.

To summarize, advertising practitioners do possess a complex system of mental schemas about how advertising works and what works best in advertising, schemas we can reliably call theories. These mental schemas are indeed composed of “systematically related set[s] of statements” (Hunt 2002a, p. 193). While the differences between academic (Hierarchy-of-Effects) and practitioner (Truncated Hierarchy Model) theories of advertising are already apparent, is there still something missing from our understanding of why the gap exists between academicians and practitioners? Are there potential explanations left out?

As the discussion of moderator-focused theories (arguably the most significant type of knowledge for actual advertising work) showed, there were some question marks in practitioners’ minds about the epistemological status of at least some portions of practitioner

advertising theories. As the issue of suppressed aesthetic theories also showed, practitioner knowledge may not be as epistemologically homogenous of a concept as classic academic advertising theory suggests. Is it possible that there are ontological and epistemological considerations that make knowledge about advertising problematic?

As the interviewed testified, these are questions that do not only occur in the theoretician's mind. Advertising practitioners *themselves* have deep-seated views about the problematic nature of advertising knowledge. What exactly is known and knowable about advertising, in the practitioner view, are questions the next chapter will try to answer. It will set out to discover practitioners' meta-theories (theories about advertising theories) next. Only after accomplishing this goal can we fully comprehend the nature of practitioner knowledge about advertising. And only after such understanding can we assess what the current state of practitioner knowledge means for the professionalization project of the advertising industry.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS: PRACTITIONER META-THEORIES

In the interviews, agency practitioners did not only talk about how advertising works. They also discussed if it was possible at all to know anything about this subject. They were offering their meta-theories, or theories-on-theories.

The significance of practitioner meta-theories is quite clear. If practitioners, despite giving their “opinion” about how advertising works and what it is moderated by, deny or seriously question the possibility of knowledge about advertising, then the advertising industry’s professionalization project and the possibility of narrowing the practitioner-academician gap are clearly in danger. Therefore, it is essential to uncover practitioner meta-theories before progressing further to place practitioner knowledge in the context of professionalization theory and assess its standing.

In this chapter, first, practitioners’ resistance to “rules” will be discussed. Second, the causes for such doubts will be revealed by analyzing ad practitioners’ “ontological skepticism”: how their fundamental views on the nature of advertising prohibits any firm belief in moderator-focused-theories. While practitioners are insistent that moderator-focused theories are impossible, they have a meta-theory, which we will call “layered view” about advertising. This states that certain aspects of advertising (such as its basic level understanding of how it works as well as upfront idiographic market research) are more theorizable than others (most notably: creative work). Third, practitioners’ “epistemological skepticism” will be discussed. Ad

practitioners have serious reservations whether a systematic-scientific mode of learning is available or even possible to them. They also have serious concerns about the external validity of evaluative advertising research, copytesting methods in particular. Finally, these findings together with those of the previous chapter will be discussed in the context of professionalization theory.

The only rule: there are no rules

Advertising practitioners' first and most important meta-theory about advertising is that there are no rules for the generation of creative content. Even though there might be some regularities in the ways in which practitioners get at strategy (i.e., *what* the advertising should say, but not *how* to say it), what the best way is to be "relevant" for the consumer (basing the strategy on consumer insight and market research), there are no rules for the making of creative content. In the framework of the previous chapter, these potential "rules" were called moderator-focused theories. To define this framework again: practitioners' number one meta-theory about advertising is that moderator-focused theories are not legitimate.

Respondents of the study expressed this belief in a number of different ways. Most commonly, they simply claimed there were no rules for the generation of the creative content of advertising. Respondents quoted what they called one of the oldest adages of the ad business: "the only rule is there are no rules." A number of respondents stated: "In general, you know, one rule is just not to follow the rules. You have to make it fresh" (*Creative Director 3*); "Yeah, there are rules. And the first rule is to break them" (*Creative Director 6*); "You know, the old cliché, 'The only rule is there are no rules' " (*Account Manager 7*).

Account Planner 2 expressed the thought that even though moderator-focused theories (“rules”) would be extremely useful, they simply did not exist:

I wish that there were rules, that we could say, the headline has to be positioned here, or even that a headline has to exist, or that three key facts about the product should be stressed, and that the visual ought to be here, and that the commercial should run with, you know, 30 seconds long, and it should be this sound level, and this music style, and, you know, there should be a spokesman stressing this...

Almost all respondents concurred in their view that moderator-focused theories were impossible to come by for the creative product: “Well, that’s the thing, there aren’t, you know, there aren’t very many rules in advertising. You know, you never know what’s going to work” (*Account Manager 2*); “No. I don’t think there’s a set of rules. I think it’s different for every category and every product within every category” (*Account Manager 6*); “The more rules the more trouble you get in. [Laughs.] [...] There’s not rules for what makes good advertising, I don’t believe.” (*Account Manager 8*); “Er, I take the Woody Allen line in one of his movies, *All you ever wanted to know about sex*, if you’re doing it right, you’re doing it wrong. Apply that to your rules. If you’re doing it by the rules, you’re doing it wrong” (*Account Planner 2*); “Do we do formula? No. No” (*Creative Director 2*); “I don’t think there are rules in the business” (*Creative Director 5*).

As this plethora of responses show, ad practitioners believe strongly that no rules are possible in the creative area. In their view, advertising, especially the core of the work, the generation of creative ideas, is *admittedly subjective*: “Well, you know, it’s subjective, I mean, again, that’s why it’s such a volatile business” (*Account Manager 2*); “I think it’s very subjective, you know, I think if you ask two different agencies you get two different answers, obviously” (*Account Manager 6*). Not only is the genesis of the ideas subjective but also the decision among possible alternatives, as *Account Manager 9* explained:

So it's a very subjective kind of thing. You know, I can come in with an idea that you don't like and he does like. And then if you're more powerful than he is, your idea is the one that's going to get approved. Totally subjective. It's got nothing to do with whether it's more effective, whether it's... You know, it's just a very subjective thing.

Admitted subjectivity, in other words, relegates advertising to the area of opinion rather than firm knowledge – at least when it comes to moderator-focused theories: “And I think when you are dealing with an intangible product like advertising, everybody has an opinion, and you know, there's nothing wrong with clients using it. Some of the best advertising over the years has been done solely on the basis of good judgment” (*Account Manager 12*); “I mean, it's a pretty subjective business I think. You could put six creatives in a room and they wouldn't agree, sometimes” (*Account Planner 5*); “Advertising is subjective, it's extremely subjective. You have to realize that it's one of the few disciplines where every single person who's grown up in front of a television is an expert, you know” (*Creative Director 9*).

In other respondents' words, the definition of advertising work is *not following* the rules, rather *breaking* them. *Account Manager 4* characterized advertising creatives' work as breaking the rules: “Er... [Laughs.] There's more rules that they break than what they follow.” *Creative Director 9* emphasized that the main focus of advertising work was avoiding what other advertisers were doing: “I mean, I think in general, you just try not to do what everybody else is doing”; and so did *Account Planner 6*: “Advertising is all about trying to find out how you can break the rule, and do something that's different, better, more unique.” Similarly, *Creative Director 4* stated the imperative for advertising to break the rules: “Well, I mean, on the creative side any such rules should be broken.”

Practitioners also cited examples of campaigns that had broken the rules and had been extremely successful: “Well, I think every time there has been research, and there has been

research since the thirties about where to put the headline. And every time that happens, there's a ground-breaking ad campaign that ignores those rules and works." (*Account Manager 6*); "So you change the rules every time you play. You have to change the rules" (*Account Manager 10*); "I'll show you somebody who breaks that rule, and it's very effective" (*Account Planner 2*). *Account Manager 7* offered a specific example, Volkswagen's classic introductory campaign to support this argument:

And I don't remember who it was, but an agency did this very cool thing, they... back... the seminal introduction... The Beetle, the Volkswagen Beetle, in the States. You know, it was basically, the Beetle with that I think it said, "Simple." That was it. Or something... But it was a shot of a Beetle. And they took what the present... at that time what the books said advertising should be about, so they took the rules, and projected them on the advertising and made what the Beetle advertising should have been, had they followed the rules, and we wouldn't have had the breakthrough we had. So I think, you know, the only constant that we've had is not assuming that there's any rules.

One of the reasons why avoiding moderator-focused regularities is an objective in itself in advertising practice is because such theories would lead to conventions, which in turn are emphatically rejected. The anger expressed by *Creative Director 5* was emblematic of the way in which practitioners felt about conventional advertising: "But any time you get into a grid that, 'We'll always have a picture of a family, and one out of every three ads will have a minority component to it, and the headline will always be in the top...' [...] That's the kind of garbage you see full of magazines [...] that stuff's just... is just junk." *Account Manager 4* offered a similar view: "You see, that's the other thing about a formula, it's been done by somebody. I think that puts a wall up, you know, we don't want to be stuck with what someone else has done for another product, we want to do something that's fresh and unique for this product." *Account Planner 2* gave this account: "You see somebody gets into a pattern, then it's like, boom, boom,

boom, you know, it gets ripped of, and copied.” *Account Planner 4* even noted that academia might be responsible for some of these negatively perceived conventions:

There have been many studies over the course of, you know, past decades on everything such as at what point in the commercial should the name of the, you know, the company be mentioned, and how many seconds of the commercial must the logo be on the screen, and so forth in order for you to have a successful TV spot. [...] It’s just very difficult in reality to say those are always true. [...] It’s just a... generality.

Just as there are no universal moderator-focused theories, there are not any domain-specific ones either. In practitioners’ emic terms: there are no “category rules.” *Account Manager 8* mentioned the example of food products: “Like we sell candy, we sell a lot of candy. They’re fun, they’re always fun, we don’t want to get too serious about that. And as soon as I say that, so there is the general rule, someone... They will break the rule and, you know, succeed.” *Account Manager 10* pointed to animal food: “And as soon as you define the box, meaning if you’re a dog food, you have to show a big dog and a little dog and you have to show a kid, as soon as you do that, people who go outside the box, are going to be more successful.” Just as in the case of universal moderator-focused theories, the logic of predictive science is reversed for category rules: “One of the things that we should be striving to do, as an advertiser, is break the rules of the category. So if the category convention is, you should be doing this style of advertising, is a good reason not to do it” (*Account Planner 5*). Breaking the rules in a lot of cases means breaking the rules of the category: “So the first thing, one of the first things I did was look in the publications they are going to be running in, and what do ads look like, what a page looks like, what is the kind of... get an overall feel of what happens inside that magazine. So you ask yourself, how can you stand out from that, how can you go a 180 degrees” (*Creative Director 2*).

Creative Director 8 told a story where not having access to category rules even served as competitive advantage for his agency at a new business pitch:

And you know, we have a client [company] and when they were reviewing agencies, probably nine-ten years ago, we went to see them and they said that, “And so why should we hire you?” And we said, “Well, one advantage that we have is that we’ve never worked in the furniture category before.” And they had a strange look. And we said, “Because if you look through the furniture books, you look through *House and Garden*, all those books, the ads seem to look very much alike. They are all room settings, you know, they all look like... You cover up the logo and they all look the same. And I said, “The fact that we’ve never worked in the category before, I mean, we’re going to dig in and we’ll have a very different approach to it.”

The biggest problem with moderator-focused rules in practitioners’ view is that they in fact *do function* as moderators: they do affect the outcome variables of advertising, but *negatively*. The most damning criticism of all is exactly this: rules in advertising do work; they result in decreased effectiveness, while those ads that break the rules, are more effective.

Account Planner 1 stated: “You know, again, there are ads that I see that are great ads that are very conventional, with a headline, a great headline, and a great bodycopy. Then I see other ads that completely break the ru... quote rules, and they do things that are just out of the context of what we define as okay, and proper. And they tend to be the ones that tend to work the best.”

Account Planner 4 expressed a similar view: “Because rules break down. And you learn those rules don’t work. I mean, there’s too many exceptions. People make a lot of money breaking the rules. What kind of science is that?” *Account Planner 6* pointed to the fact that those agencies that had tried to use rules ultimately failed in this effort: “And I know, as part of [agency network], [agency network] has come up with rules, here’s rules to making good ads, that didn’t work.” *Creative Director 9* asserted that market success in advertising is driven by breaking the rules and not following them: “I think that the more interesting ideas work harder for the client’s

money. So I think that there's a strong parallel between fresh thinking and market effectiveness, you know, and... Although it's very hard to prove. It's very hard to prove."

Ontological skepticism

Why do moderator-focused theories fail to work in advertising? What is it about the advertising industry that sets it apart from other fields where using predictive models adapted from applied science would result in increased efficiency? What is so special about advertising that would explain that? Such questions have to do with the ontological presuppositions each discipline has about its subject matter. Ontological presuppositions describe (implicitly or explicitly) what the inherent nature of the subject matter is and what attributes it has. Do practitioners have such meta-theoretical notions? Interestingly, the answer is yes. Ad practitioners – commonly thought of as atheoretical – do have meta-theoretical ideas about the fundamental nature of advertising. The investigation of these beliefs can help us better understand practitioners' theories of advertising in general, and why they resist "rules" for advertising in particular.

The creative nature of advertising. To put it simply, practitioners' core ontological meta-theory of advertising is that advertising is a creative endeavor, an inherently innovative activity and therefore proposing rules that would prescribe what works and what does not, is contradictory to this essential characteristic. In practitioners' view, advertising *by definition*, is indeterminate, artful and creative. On the other hand, "rules" – moderator-focused theories that would predict what modifications of an ad message's components would cause better results are – *by definition*, deterministic. The reason why practitioners resist rules is because they believe it contradicts the very nature of advertising on this ontological level.

Let us look at a few examples how practitioners expressed this argument. Since these quotes illustrate a more complex theoretical reasoning, longer passages will be included to adequately support the argument. *Account Manager 6* argued, for instance, that it was impossible to know what worked and what did not in advertising. He stated that the underlying reason was the nature of the advertising business itself, the fact that it was an “industry of subjective ideas”:

Because there’s no way to know. All we can say is: “Let’s test it.” You know, let’s take it out into testing. But there is no way. I mean, the advertising business is still an idea of subj... I mean, it’s an industry of subjective ideas. You know, and anybody that can stand up and say “I know this will work,” without testing it is wrong. I mean, there’s just no way you would know.

Account Planner 1 eloquently reasoned for creativity in advertising and against the application of any rules to it – while suggesting that the very nature of advertising was creative and the introduction of rules had been a devastating force:

I would say without a question that those rules are rules that we have to be willing to break, and be willing to even challenge in terms of what we approach. Because I think what ends up happening, in more cases than not, is that as an industry we end up getting ourselves so caught up in the rules that that has in and of itself broken down the advertising community. [...] Why the hell do they hire an advertising agency, defined creative, if it’s a template, and it’s this type of a type font, you know, they can go out and for, you know, for 139.95, they can buy a computer program that can do that.

Account Planner 1 summed up the dynamic between predictive rules and advertising creativity in the following aphorismatically short statement, a testament for innovation and non-determinism: “A lot of times the models that we produce, are models that explain why. Success in our category and in our industry is based on answering the question, ‘Why not?,’ not ‘Why?’ ”

Account Planner 4 also acknowledged the direct relationship between the impossibility of “rules” in advertising and its creative character: “And again, there’s no hard and fast rule. If there was then there would be no creativity.” He insisted that the deterministic nature of moderator-focused theories should be resisted because it takes away the “leverage” of the advertising

industry, which he equated with its creative nature: “To bring this to a point. I respect and appreciate the application of science... the approaching of advertising as if it was a science in order to analyze it and so forth... What I don’t appreciate is reducing advertising purely to a science, because I feel like you’re taking away the leverage.”

Account Planner 7 suggested that creativity was the most fundamental characteristic of the advertising industry: “Ultimately, if you can’t create ideas, you don’t need to be in this business. And that’s everybody, not just the creative guys quote and quote. The media guys, it’s planners, it’s brand guys, you know, it’s everybody that’s in our business, we’d better be constantly pushing for that, you know, that idea.” He also suggested that, for this reason, rules could not be applied to advertising: “You know, there are some definite disciplines that have been created over time that I think are very helpful. But I don’t like to be a slave to any rules.”

Creative Director 2 depicted a direct “inverse relationship” between rules and creativity in advertising:

In general, you know, one rule is just not to follow the rules. You have to make it fresh. Because that’s what makes it memorable, something different than people have seen before. A lot of clients are not comfortable with that. You know, they want to go the tried and true way, you know, the way it’s worked for Procter and Gamble for thirty years. You know, but being a creative person you want to try a new way. You want to innovate. So I guess that’s why I’m saying there aren’t rules.

Very similarly, *Creative Director 9* suggested that rules were by definition antithetical to creative advertising: “I think there’s probably a dozen sort of templates that you can follow. There’s a book called *Creative Advertising*, which has those in it... That’s a pretty good, that’s the best summation of kind of the usual channels that I’ve seen. But the things that really work are the things that aren’t that. *Just by definition*” (emphasis added).

Finally, *Creative Director 5* gave a very similar argument and a vivid illustration of what the end result of rule-driven advertising could look like:

No, no, no. No, I don't think... I think any time you do that, you're really... you're really hampering creativity, and you just create bad work. It's sort of like these... I kind of like look at these producers that put boy bands together. If I get four boys who could carry a good tune, who can dance well, who are between 5'8" 6'1", have a body mass index of this, can harmonize together, I can put them together, come up with a name that's certain long and then I'm going to have them on the top of the charts for a couple of years. That's just crap. You know? And nobody... And a lot of advertising that's made like that is just crap in my opinion. You know, you hear these rules, "The billboards should be seven words or less. Print ad, a headline should be..." In my opinion, that just a bunch of garbage.

Art vs. science. Another way practitioners expressed their ontological skepticism toward rules for advertising is by placing it into the context of the 'art' versus 'science' dichotomy. They argued that since advertising (at least the creative portion of it, which in turn is defined as its essence) was not science but art, there should be no rules prescribing how to create it. In their view, the legitimacy of scientific laws is a system of legitimation that does not apply to the realm of art, because art is understood as ontologically different and free of scientific determinism.

Account Manager 12 explained that even though, hypothetically, it would be advantageous for the advertising industry to have moderator-focused science for the creation of creative content, it was impossible as its ontological status was so foreign to science: "You know, it would make everyone's life easier, if there were, you know, some formula that you can work with, but there really isn't. I mean, there are principles of good design that are always there. You know, other common sense things that you want to do, but in terms of rules like mathematical theories or something, no, they don't exist. This is not a science, it's art."

A number of respondents suggested that there was a link between the ontological art status of advertising and the imperative for the avoidance of any rules. *Account Planner 2* said,

for instance: “And this is an art, this is not a science. I think people, you know, try to make marketing a science, and that’s a mistake. It’s back to the rules thing. You show me six people in the category, and they’re all doing blue, I’m going to do red, I’m going to own that category, at least a sizeable percentage of that category.” Similarly, *Account Planner 7* stated that even though advertising was both art and science, art was the predominant part: “Yeah, I’m going to say, it’s an interesting blend of both, but ultimately, it is definitely an art form, in its most effective... And that’s why I love it. It’s because it is an art. The idea is king.”

Creative Director 1 described the tensions between art and science in advertising, from which, in his view, art had emerged victoriously. This however, resulted in the dismissal of any potential rules for ad creation:

There is sort of two souls that get into this business, it seems like, and one of them wants this to be a science. It wants everything to be very measurable, and I think what happens is we run through little flurries where that is true, where you can put numbers against these things and say, I can put, it becomes Pavlovian, I can put this in front of somebody, and by god, they are going to start foaming at the mouth for it, they are going to want this, you know. But it doesn’t hold up for very long. Mercifully. I think the business would be horrible if we could sit here and manipulate people, and I will run this commercial at that moment and people would respond.

The importance of tacit skill. There is a third way in which practitioners challenge the legitimacy of rules for creative content in advertising. They compare the process of creating advertising to the tacit skills of exceptional sportspeople or musicians. *Account Manager 7*, for example, compared the creation of advertising to playing hockey: “I played hockey so... I used to like in hockey the jazz. And I think what we do in a way is... There are rules to music, you know, improvisational jazz is, I mean, people don’t have... There are rules to it, there is a structure, but there aren’t... [...] It’s you’re going, and you’re doing what you’re doing.” *Account Manager 12* used the metaphor of soccer play: “I’ll make a wild analogy here, if you’re

a soccer star, it's a worldwide sport, there's no formula for being a great player, there are clearly things... you know, there are drills, there's conditioning, that all load into it, but ultimately, there's some innate level of talent that isn't coachable, isn't teachable, that'll make somebody outstanding in that sport." *Creative Director 2* compared advertising creation to music: "You know, it's like becoming a master musician. Practice, practice, practice, practice. You know, no one can learn, no one can play in a rock and roll band until they practiced painfully for three years. No matter what the instrument. [...] I think it gets easier as you go. You know, just like a jazz musician, gets easier for him to improvise." Similarly, *Creative Director 5* said advertising creative work was like being a musician: "It's sort of like music. You know, you learn the notes and you know the basics but you know... How does Bob Dylan sit down and write? And how does James Taylor or Sinatra write a song?"

Although hardly a fully formulated meta-theoretical conception, the sports/music metaphor for advertising work presents a strong challenge to the possibility of moderator-focused rules. It also underscores the importance of tacit skill in advertising work.

Summary: a "layered" ontology. To summarize, one of the reasons why ad practitioners so vehemently resist the possibility of any predictive moderators in advertising (besides the conviction that it leads to ineffective, formulaic, conventional advertising) is because they do not believe advertising is a good fit ontologically for such rules. Rules are not "allowed" because advertising, by definition, belongs to the realm of art, creativity, innovation and the mastery of skill, which are free from the predictive determinism of assigned scientific rules about how to do it.

It would be erroneous to claim that ad practitioners discredit the legitimacy of a possible theoretical knowledge base for advertising completely. As the above presentation of the findings

very cautiously remarked, ontological doubts were only expressed about the rules (the hypothesized effect moderator variables would have on outcome variables) for the generation of creative content. As *Creative Director 1* very discerningly noted, there were multiple knowledges in advertising and their relationship to theorizability might significantly differ: “I think there are bodies of knowledge. I think that every art director, every writer, every account executive, everybody in research, everybody in media, I think all these people bring... It’s almost like lords. We gather all the tribes together. [Laughs.]”

Ad practitioners do not discredit the basic or mid-level theories that were presented in the previous chapter. Indeed, it seems ad practitioners have a meta-theoretical view that knowledge about advertising has different “layers” to it, some of them more “knowable” than others. A basic understanding of what psychological effects advertising has on people is legitimate, in practitioners’ view, just as all the idiographic theorizing that goes into the development of strategy (involving market research and consumer insight). *Account Manager 4*, for example, explicitly argued for the legitimacy of upfront market research and planning:

Yeah, that solid base is really what brand planning is all about, what advertising research is all about, but particularly brand planning. Because brand planning is, you know, you’re interpreting, you’re taking quantitative information and qualitative information, and making some assumptions about it, and interpreting it in some way to be able to explain the consumer’s reasons for doing things, or the consumer mindset, or their attitudes and behaviors. So, you know, I think there is some validity to that.

Account Manager 5 laid out a similar “layered” meta-theoretical view: “And certain parts of it are more... easy to scientifically analyze than others. [...] I think you can be scientific about the inputs to develop strategy, and you can be very scientific about your awareness levels, your perception by consumers, or lack of perception.” *Creative Director 6*, similarly, emphasized: “I think I can see that in parts of the business like media, for example. Most certainly in... you

know... the effects of advertising on people and things like that. Into the creative process I see it a little harder to do [...] In creative that's tough."

Creative Director 5 very specifically circumscribed the sphere in which science can play a role in advertising:

I think... in understanding consumers, and how they shop, and how they live, and finding the emotional motivators in the things that would make them have an affinity for a brand and want to buy a product, there's a huge role for that [science]. Where I think there's not the role is... just, "Okay, we can..." you know, "We come up with a way to develop a headline or grid of action that will always result in this."

Thus it is the creative area that seems to be off-limits in practitioner thinking for scientific interruption and not the whole of advertising. *Account Planner 6* suggested that advertiser clients did not expect science in the generation of creative either: "They realize that the creative piece is not a science. [...] They want to have, at the back end and the front end, some science, but the creative piece in the middle, there is no science to that. And they don't want there to be." As Chapter 6 will further elaborate on this point, they do expect, however, certainty that the produced work will be effective. What influence this 'need for certainty' has on the agency business and how it relates to professionalization theory will be discussed in the next chapter.

Clients' expectations from the advertising agency business are twofold. Clients want both creative ideas and certainty that the proposed ideas will result in the agreed-upon market results. *Account Planner 7* stressed the existence of these two separate layers: "They are paying for ideas that, because we're in a service business, that they could not have created themselves. And obviously, the application of those ideas, the strategic positioning of those ideas and the measurement of those ideas." As the discussion will show, the agency's capability for offering a theoretical knowledge base differs in the case of these layers: it cannot offer theoretical

knowledge for creative, however, it is capable of showing theoretically based certainty for strategy and to some extent measurement of the basic effects of advertising.

Creative Director 8 summed up succinctly practitioners' "layeredness" meta-theory: "You want the base of science, but you don't want the science to dictate the execution. To the point where it becomes more of the same."

Epistemological skepticism

While advertising practitioners are ontologically skeptical about moderators in advertising theories ("rules" for generating higher or lower levels of outcome variables), they are epistemologically skeptical about the use of science (especially scientific validation) in advertising in general. Ad practitioners are somewhat hesitant about the ways in which we can know anything about advertising with scientific rigor. This epistemological skepticism goes beyond views about the nature of advertising (and their consequences), it questions whether our supposedly "clear and distinct" scientific ways of learning are available or even possible in the case of advertising. Even though ad practitioners have strong beliefs about how advertising works on a basic theoretical level, they do not attribute this knowledge to academic research in advertising, nor do they think that such beliefs are on a scientific epistemological level.

This section will highlight some of ad practitioners' epistemological meta-theories: (1) Ad practitioners are somewhat frustrated by the fact that the most important explanandum, purchase behavior is difficult to relate to advertising stimulus because of the complexity of possible causes. (2) Some practitioners feel that whatever is knowable about advertising, in the form of a basic-level theory, is not scientific knowledge, rather common sense. (3) Agency practitioners also have a very tenuous relationship with academic advertising research, which –

as professionalization theory would suggest – should be perceived as the gold standard of epistemology: the best and most refined way of knowing about the subject matter. Ad practitioners, however, seem to think otherwise and are epistemologically skeptical about advertising academia. They (a) are unaware of its contributions to advertising knowledge, (b) have doubts about its validity and (c) prove to be somewhat misguided about its true nature and attributes. (4) Finally, agency professionals are somewhat ambiguous about applied market research (especially of the evaluative kind). While most of them acknowledge the importance of some form of market research support for their work, they are very skeptical about the epistemological assumptions such research typically involves. These issues will be covered next.

Purchase behavior as an unexplainable explanandum. Ad practitioners' biggest concern is that what is the most important to explain (both for advertiser clients and for the advertising industry itself), purchase behavior, is very difficult to relate to advertising. Practitioners believe that this is, indeed, virtually impossible because of the complexity of external variables that may also have an effect on purchase. The problem with the "complexity of causes" also overflows into other areas in advertising knowledge and makes ad practitioners generally skeptical about the possibility of scientific knowledge in advertising.

Account Manager 1 stated, for example: "Can't do it [relate advertising to sales]. It's impossible, people have tried, there's all kinds of formulas, all that stuff. It can't do it, because there's too many influences in the sales process that have nothing to do with what I write and where I place it." *Account Manager 2*, similarly, doubted the possibility of scientific knowledge: "And that's one of the things that makes advertising an art, rather than a science. Because you rarely do know exactly what it is, because advertising is only one variable in the overall mix of things that can cause people to buy your product."

Account Planner 4 argued that scientific knowledge was not possible for advertising because (among other things, such as the ontological issues discussed above) there were too many factors influencing sales outcomes:

And I don't have a lot of faith... that's where you take the scientific approach, I appreciate it. But the moment you say advertising is a science, the same way chemistry is a science, the same way physics is a science, I would say that is a dangerous assumption [...] You can't control for all the factors.

Creative Director 3 expressed his doubts about whether it would ever be possible to link advertising to sales: "And the reason why I maintain that it's bogus to try to link advertising specifically to sales is because there are so many variables relating to the sale that don't have to do anything with advertising." *Creative Director 7*, similarly, insisted that scientific theorizing and measurement are dubious because of this inability to explain what would be the most important thing to explain: "I mean, for every argument that you're used to see that you can measure it, there's probably one against it. You know, you may have a campaign come out and sales go up... Is that because of the message or that's because you just advertised?"

Advertising knowledge as common sense. Some practitioners are skeptical if knowledge about advertising (including their own beliefs about how it works) is scientific in nature and is more than common sense. *Account Manager 12* summed up succinctly: "You know, other common sense things that you want to do, but in terms of rules like mathematical theories or something, no, they don't exist. This is not a science, it's art." *Account Manager 4* had a similar view: "It's not rocket science, just get people's attention, and then let the product, once they try the product, the benefits of the product will help sell the product the second time. [...] We all realize that this is not rocket science." *Creative Director 5* agreed: "I mean, it's no... it's no, like really, we're not witch-doctors, it's not some kind of crazy science that we do."

Account Planner 5 also doubted that science could add much to practitioner thinking, something

he equated with common sense. When talking about academic advertising research, he stated: “I haven’t got the time to read through all this shit [academic research articles], because there’s so much, you know, acknowledgement of the other sources, and this is the method, and it’s just... ‘You did all of that to get to that? I could have told you that before you did all of that.’ You know what I mean...”

Creative Director 3 also identified knowledge about advertising with common sense and argued that, for this reason, it was very difficult to measure advertising phenomena with the rigor of science: “It’s like... [agency owner] said the other day, ‘There is no way to measure common sense.’ [...] And it’s hard to do, it’s hard to quantify common sense.”

Creative Director 7, similarly, admitted that advertising was one of the easiest careers, as it did not involve much more than common sense; ad practitioners were very well paid for the use of their common sense: “I don’t get it, I really don’t get why we have... [...] it’s the easiest... If people knew how easy this career was to do well in... [...] And it’s the biggest joke in the world, it’s just like, the best secret ever. I mean, it’s like... I’ve written a sentence and that’s it.”

Skeptical views on academic knowledge. Agency practitioners’ epistemological skepticism is especially strong towards advertising academia. While according to professionalization theory, academic research – as the most sophisticated mode of knowing about any subject matter – should be welcomed by those who conduct practice in the area, ad practitioners ignore it and even question its legitimacy.

The findings of this study corroborate anecdotal and sporadic scholarly evidence (discussed in the first chapter) that advertising practitioners do not use academic research. Let us quote here a couple of examples from the bountiful of evidence available in the data: “I have

never read one of those [research articles]. Ever in thirty in years. Never once. [...] But I don't even know where this stuff is published that the professors write. I've never read any of it"

(*Account Manager 1*); "No, I personally don't [read advertising research journals]. [...] I don't

think they are widely read in the practitioner community except by perhaps those people who'd have a narrower focus on, you know, research methodology or something" (*Account Manager*

12); "I don't read the research journals. I don't think I would understand them" (*Account Planner*

4); "A very good question, and I have to say that we don't as often as we could or we should."

(*Creative Director 8*). *Account Planner 7* claimed that he did not read *Journal of Advertising Research* (or any other research publications), even though he had once even published in the journal.

Further, ad practitioners do not have any name recognition for the classic theories in academic advertising research. During the initial interviews the interviewer probed such theory names commonly used in academic research as the "Hierarchy-of-Effects," "low involvement theory," or "FCB grid," but no respondents could recognize any of them. The interviewer stopped probing these names and used implicit techniques to try and elicit if practitioners were familiar with these theories. Practitioners seemed to have some understanding of the Hierarchy-of-Effects model; however, it might have been that their own beliefs (described earlier as the Truncated Hierarchy Model) interfered with this assessment. Ad practitioners had no recognition or even implicit understanding of any other academic theories.

Respondents did not fully exclude the possibility that academic research might be useful for them, but remained skeptical especially regarding the creative area. Corresponding to their beliefs that moderators in the creative content of the ad should not be researched, they claimed that it is account planning and management where academic research might have some benefit,

but the creative area should be off-limits. As *Creative Director 2* put it: “[Is research useful?] For creative? Not at all. For planning, absolutely, for account management, absolutely.” It is theory and research on the basic level, trying to explain and predict the general ways in which advertising influences consumers as well as idiographic theorizing about strategy that practitioners think are useful to pursue: “I think research on how advertising works in, you know, in terms of, you know, what portion of the mind does it go in and what influence it has... that’s all important stuff” (*Creative Director 6*).

Even though practitioners do not read academic research, they have strong beliefs about what they believe the shortcomings of academic advertising research are. Ad practitioners are skeptical about the epistemological value of academic research, most importantly: its external validity. They have concerns in three main areas: the credibility of academic authors as sources, the perceived artificiality of the research and the timeliness of the results.

In ad practitioners’ epistemology it seems to matter more where the information is coming from than its inherent validity. Some respondents claimed that academic advertising research was less valuable (even in the ontologically “permissible” areas such as basic-level theory) because of certain characteristics of the producers of this knowledge. In this view, academic ad research is of dubious epistemological value because academic advertising researchers lack real life experience in the advertising industry: “It’s a shame to me that more of them aren’t in the work-force, and actually don’t know exactly how it works. Or have been in, but were in for a very short time, or were in and out very quickly. [...] It really takes longer than that to understand the whole dynamic of what goes on” (*Account Manager 1*). Similarly, *Account Manager 2* made the following statement about his fellow practitioners: “So people who tend to go into that business, and stay in it, can live without security, which means they are pretty self-

confident, sometimes they're cocky, and too self-confident. And so they tend to know, to say, 'Show me, you're coming in from academia, and you're going to tell me what to do, 'cause I've been in the business for so long.' " Academicians' personal experience is perceived as very distant from the reality of practice: "You're in the bubble of academia, it's not real world experience" (*Account Manager 4*). As *Account Manager 12* suggested, this may be part of the reason why academic research was less accepted in ad practice: "And I think if you look at, you know, our business over time, there is no, you know, there is no academic giant that is widely quoted or even widely known."

There is also epistemological skepticism regarding the external validity of the academic research process itself. Ad practitioners believe that there is a level of artificiality and remoteness of academic research from the "real" business phenomena it sets out to investigate. As *Account Manager 12* explained:

And you know, directionally, it's [academic advertising research is] interesting, but it doesn't always hold up. I think that there is a... [Pause.] *But I don't know if there ever is a solution that will come from the academic community.* Simply because it will require lots of money, lots of data that is probably not available in the academic community. I could be wrong, someone could stumble on something but... (emphasis added).

In another respondent's view, the external validity problem in advertising academia may manifest itself in low applicability: "It may be difficult at times to have a practical application of it [of academic advertising research]" (*Account Planner 4*). The practitioner concern that surfaces here is that even though external validity should be of paramount interest in the case of any applied scientific endeavor, this may not always be so in the case of academic advertising research.

Practitioners also question whether the findings' sphere of applicability is as carefully demarcated as practitioners would want it to be. As discussed in the previous chapter,

practitioners place a lot of emphasis on domain-specificity; they are suspicious whether academic researchers are equally interested in it: “We don’t use it [academic research]. I’ll be honest with you, we don’t. [...] And I think the reason why is, we see every category and every way to position products in every category to be different” (*Account Planner 6*).

Another aspect of external validity that is often criticized in academic research is that it may become outdated quickly. As discussed before, ad practitioners have a keen sense of history and what influence the ‘time’ domain has on the composure of basic-level advertising theories. As *Account Manager 6* suggested: “The problem with... part of the problem with academia is that the examples that they use by the time they make it to a textbook are three years old. And you know, the world has changed in three years.” *Account Planner 6* argued that societal changes were not reflected in academic advertising research despite the fact that advertising is so much dependent on such changes: “Consumers’ mindsets are always changing, what’s hip and popular now is always changing, advertising is really a reflection of society and it’s always changing as well. [...] So I think from now-perspective it’s hard to say that we use stuff that’s more academic, because we don’t see it as being relevant or up-to-date as we’d like it to be.” Similarly, *Creative Director 6* noted that it was very difficult for academic researchers to stay current with what was happening in practice: “So I think what would be helpful but I think would be incredibly difficult [for academicians] to stay current with it.”

Ad practitioners also have views that pertain to more general ideals of academia and science. Practitioners show a certain level of naiveté in understanding what the academic research endeavor entails. They seem to believe that textbook writing is equivalent to basic research published in journals (see the above quote from *Account Manager 6*). Ad practitioners also seem to be at loss regarding what the basic function of research journals is. *Account Planner*

2, for example, suggested that research journals contained case histories, while in reality that is a very rare type of publication in academic advertising journals: “I mean, personally, I subscribed to those things, and I got very little out of them, to be honest. There were maybe too much case histories, specific case history. A lot of them tend to be, here’s our case histories, so now we’re going to make rules off of that. It’s great for that case history, but the next one is a little different.”

Ad practitioners also seem to be less than clear on the epistemological value of academic research. As *Account Manager 4* asserted, research journal articles sometimes found their way into piles of secondary research documents the agency processed but their different epistemological status was never noted: “Any and all secondary sources that we can use, again through [agency brand] New York, we can access secondary articles on a given subject, it’s almost like a Google search, but someone in New York doing it... they send you a stack of paper.” Similarly, *Creative Director 5* gave the following assessment of the value of science in advancing knowledge: “I mean, you can think about it... when they went to the moon the first time [...] We did everything right, we’re going to count down to ten, and fire this sucker, and we hope it hits the moon. But there was no way to tell if we were going to get to the moon or not.” These meta-theoretical concepts show that practitioners may be less clear on the basic purpose and functions of academia in general (irrespective of academic advertising research per se) than it would be ideal.

In practitioners’ view, academic advertising research suffers from another problem. Practitioners consider it less of a science than more basic disciplines such as psychology or sciences associated with either complex mathematical modeling or an orientation toward biological-physiological phenomena. *Account Manager 2*, for example, suggested that it was not

academic advertising researchers or even advertising practitioners who should be the arbiters of how advertising works, rather basic psychologists: “How you get it to happen [how advertising influences consumers] is, you know, almost unknown, maybe some psychologists know, I don’t know it, you know.” Advertising-relevant science was also associated with basic disciplines and not with academic advertising research in *Account Planner 3*’s view: “As you can kind of tell like, you know, just from my office and all the stuff around. I mean, I’ll read stuff like Diane Ackerman’s *An Alchemy of Mind* to understand how the mind is working. And so I’ll read about, you know, science and how the mind works.” Similarly, complex methods such as econometric modeling are perceived as more scientific by practitioners: “In our experience, most recently, especially, now probably the most emerging trends is an attempt to try and define the science behind it, the Hudson River people and so many others...” (*Account Manager 11*).

Commercial market research. Practitioners also have an ambiguous relationship with applied market research. While most of them acknowledge the importance of backing up agency work with market research, some of them are less than enthusiastic about the underlying epistemological assumptions and methods of such research.

Agencies use different forms of market research as support for their main activity, the production of persuasive communication messages. Before these messages themselves are created by the creative team, there is usually some form of “strategic development research” that helps define either the particular message the communication will be about or provides information about the target consumer audience. There is usually information available from the advertiser clients as well; agencies nevertheless provide further research that either offers more detail or deeper insights into the situation at hand. Agencies sometimes also commission copytests (usually on the advertiser clients’ demand), a form of research that assesses the

persuasive potential of the advertising message to be distributed, before this distribution in media actually takes place. Finally, agencies use research after the campaign has launched to track the effectiveness of the communications (hence the name “tracking studies”), either in a pre-post fashion (one wave of research before the campaign to establish benchmarks and one right after the conclusion of the campaign) or continuously (throughout periods of activity and inactivity).

Most agency practitioners acknowledge the importance of these different kinds of research conducted. *Account Manager 4* explained the importance of tracking: “You know, you just spent a bunch of money on a campaign, and the consumer doesn’t understand it, so it’s the post-creative testing that’s extremely important, as well”; while *Account Manager 5* emphasized the role of copytesting: “I’ve always been a big believer in communications testing for advertising, which is a much broader concept to me than is, you know, scoring it on specific criteria.” *Account Planner 5* also underscored the relevance of strategic development research: “Well, typically, what we will do is use research for strategy development, understanding how to position our product or our service. Understanding the disposition of the target audience to our product or service and anybody else’s.”

While most practitioners would accept or even argue for the use of such research, they also voice epistemological concerns about the ways in which this research actually is conducted. For instance, *Creative Director 3* argued for the legitimacy of research: “When you’re going to invest a 100 million dollars in an ad campaign, you know, you want some kind of semblance of knowing that it works and I understand that. And it’s just, you know... make everybody feel good, and that’s good, that’s cool.” However, the same respondent aggressively attacked the way in which this research was normally done:

Now, I hate testing. I think testing is the biggest crock that there’s ever been. And all that is is a CYA technique for somebody who doesn’t have the balls to go out

and do it. And great work... great work is great work and sometimes it can't be tested. And I mean the greatest example of that is the Macintosh commercial that tested bad and the guy was told not to run the commercial and the guy ran it anyway. The brand manager from Macintosh ran it anyway. Well, guess what, the whole personal computing experience has been revolutionized after that, because of that, and it tested terrible. You can't, you know... testing is just bull.

Creative Director 9 offered a similar argument: "Well, here's what I would say about research. I think that research has a role and an important role, but I think that it's almost universally mishandled." *Account Manager 10* also emphasized the point that it was methodological concerns that made practitioners weary of research in advertising: "If the research kind of sucks, which it does a lot of times... Yeah, that's a problem. A lot of research is done unintelligently. [...] People do things with research that they shouldn't do and that causes problems."

Copytesting, particularly, of all research types, upsets practitioners the most. The biggest concern is that copytesting "kills good advertising" and results in mediocre work. *Account Manager 12* argued: "You know, many advertisers want to do that to limit their risk. There is some concern that in doing that you kind of... you may eliminate the lows, but you eliminate the highs at the same time, so you get this kind of homogenous kind of advertising." *Creative Director 2* noted that this "detrimental effect" of copytesting on the creative product was very common: "But this idea that having a great idea that we feel intuitively is a great idea and would really reach people, and then it doesn't make it through the structure of either the agency or on the client side, happens every week. Happens all day long, every day." *Creative Director 8* asserted that copytesting often resulted in the very thing it tried to avoid: "Research can result in strange things, where good ideas die and bad ideas are born. [...] I think it's hard to get a good idea through focus groups."

Creative Director 9 offered a detailed example illustrating that copytesting is an inadequate tool for selecting the most effective ad, defying its very purpose:

Because what it does is... I could create an ad in thirty seconds that would win in every focus group, you know. It's like, you know, here's a towel with grass stains on it, here's a towel with grass stains on it, we are going to wash these towels side by side, you know, this grass stain come out, this one didn't come out. You know, which one is more effective? This one, I'll buy that, that's... that's what wins in focus groups. But that's... but the problem is people see that, in the real world, and they... they scan past it on TiVo and see what's on HBO2, you know.

But why is this the case? Why is copytesting so much resisted by ad practitioners? The answer lies in ad practitioners' epistemological meta-theories. Ad practitioners have serious doubts about the external validity of copytesting research. First, they believe that the conditions under which the tests are conducted are artificial and do not match the way in which consumers encounter advertising messages in the real world. *Account Manager 7* stated: "I don't think you should test creative, because you're not going to do it in a way how people would consume your message. You're never going to do it right." *Account Manager 10* also noted: "That's totally artificial, because that's not the way... There's the element of being able to break through and getting someone's attention in the mass media world, which most creative research doesn't take into account, you know. And therefore, you know, good ideas are left in the focus group." Creatives also claimed that artificiality was one of the main reason they did not believe copytesting: " 'Cause it's not, it's not... it's not real world. It's based on what people are thinking in a laboratory situation as opposed to how they're thinking in a real world situation" (*Creative Director 3*); "You walk in with boards in a room full of people. Well, they are forced to look at it. So it's just not a realistic [situation]" (*Creative Director 5*); "And in the real world, that'd be driving a car to work or some place, or to a store, and they would hear it come on their

radio in their car. And they're not sitting in their drive-way listening to the radio, waiting to pass judgment on it" (*Creative Director 8*).

Another source of artificiality, in practitioners' view, is that the response to advertising stimulus is collected immediately after exposure, whereas in real life there may be a delay between (repeated) exposure(s) and advertising effect: "And a lot of times brand advertising converts a few people for twenty years. Man, how are you going to measure that?" *Account Manager 10* claimed:

And longer term, you want that to change not only how you feel, but how you think about the brand or about the product. Which could take four five exposures or it could take five or six weeks to think it through. And if you do a pre-testing thing, it's an instantaneous snapshot, you know, you saw it once or twice in a ten-minute period of time, now, tell me everything about how you think, how you feel, etc. That's just unrealistic...

Practitioners also believe that respondents are forced to react rationally and are researched rationally in copytests, whereas in real life, the effects of advertising are more emotional in nature: "I have no problem with testing advertising, but what I want to do is I want to know whether the person is pumped" (*Account Planner 1*); "That's the biggest problem with our evaluative systems for measuring effectiveness, because they are all rationally based systems" (*Account Planner 7*); "Nobody will ever admit that advertising affects them emotionally. Nobody will ever say, 'You know, I don't know why I like that,' if you ask them. They'll say, 'Well, you know, I like it because of something...' And that because of thing is typically some over-logical answer that they spent too much time thinking about" (*Creative Director 9*).

Self-report is yet another concern. Practitioners believe that respondents in copytests are susceptible to social desirability bias: "Plus that one of the biggest variables is that there is no way to tell whether the people are telling you the truth. [...] But even in quantitative, I'm sure

there are people who check the box that they think they should check, because it's a good reflection of the way they think or the kind of person they are, even though they may not feel that way" (*Account Manager 9*); "People tell lies in research all the time. And you just need to kind of be able to separate the true... say, from the observed behavior from stated behavior. It's often very-very difficult. Some researchers don't understand that" (*Account Planner 5*). Another reason why practitioners may find self-report inefficient is because of respondents' perceived inability to give an accurate account of their own mental responses and processes: "People can't tell you why they like or dislike something" (*Account Manager 7*); "We have a bread account and people in their focus groups are always talking about things being fresh and we learn from listening that when they say fresh they don't mean just that, they mean taste good" (*Creative Director 4*).

In the case of focus groups, there is also a social biasing factor present. Some respondents' opinions may unduly influence those of others therefore biasing the results. Practitioners are very aware of the possibility of such a bias. *Creative Director 6* depicted a typical scenario:

And inevitably what happens in the focus group setting where there's more than one person in the room is, maybe after the first five minutes people have responded to you from their own human nature, but sooner or later somebody in the room make somebody else feel kind of stupid, so the next guy's got to say something smarter than that and before they know they are telling you how to make the ad, when they really don't know... And then credibility goes away.

Finally, the measurement of the advertisement's effects in copytesting may be inadequate because of the way in which advertising stimulus is used. Stimulus is often presented to respondents in an unfinished format: in the form of storyboards, animatics (moving animation created from storyboard stills). Practitioners believe that this, again, renders copytesting epistemologically dubious: "We realize that there are absolutely limits to testing. For one thing,

with this [proprietary research tool] that we do, we are using storyboards. Or we're using animatics. Or we are using something that doesn't really tell you how great it's going to be in the end or how bad it's going to be in the end" (*Account Planner 3*). *Creative Director 2* offered the following example:

Budweiser frogs. Bud. Wei. Ser. You go to a focus group, you show it to a focus group, right? And then you show them another storyboard that has women in bikinis running on the beach playing volleyball, bouncing up and down in slow motion. In a focus group which commercial are they going to gravitate to? Right? But look at the finished product, the commercial, which commercial are they going to be able to remember? Even though they haven't seen it in ten years. Everybody knows Budweiser frogs. You know what I'm talking about, right? [...] You can take any great movie that's really weird, and bizarre, like, you know, *Pulp Fiction*. Is that going to focus group well? I don't think so. "You know, we're going to have these junkies, and these [inc], but they are junkies, and they are going to go and shoot everybody, quoting the Bible." Isn't that a great movie?

Summary and discussion

In this chapter, practitioners' meta-theories were presented. Meta-theories are theoretical concepts not about some phenomena observed in nature, rather theories about theoretical notions and ways of knowing about these phenomena. The findings presented here indicate that not only do advertising practitioners have theoretical ideas about how advertising works, but they also evaluate them and theorize about them. They question whether the very nature of advertising allows a scientific approach (they are ontologically skeptical), and they also doubt if the methods of knowing in science are adequate for researching advertising (they are epistemologically skeptical).

The finding that uncertainty and problems of knowing in advertising are paramount corresponds to those of previous studies. Kover (1995) testifies about practitioners' epistemological concerns just as some of the practitioner polls reviewed (Boyd and Ray 1971; Moore 1985; Szybillo and Berger 1979). Ethnographic studies also point to practitioners' meta-

theories, especially epistemological skepticism (Cronin 2004a; Martin 1992; Schudson 1984; Soar 2000; Tunstall 1964).

Most importantly, advertising practitioners deny the possibility of moderator-focused theories in advertising for ontological reasons. They claim that the only rule is that there are no rules on this level. This finding may seem somewhat contradictory to those of Chapter 4, where a number of moderator-focused theories were found. However, as the discussion in Chapter 4 showed, the “ideology of creativity” is such a strong force that it suppresses the legitimacy of any other moderator variables. The finding that practitioners explicitly state that the very nature of advertising undermines moderator-focused theories supports this argument. Practitioners’ strong belief in the Persuasion Knowledge Model also works against moderator-focused theories. If consumers do develop mental schemas about typical persuasive scenarios, it is imperative that practitioners continually renew them, changing moderator-focused ideas all the time.

It is also possible, however, that the existence of moderators on the one hand and their denial on the other is a true ambiguity in advertising practitioners’ thinking. It is possible that knowledge of certain moderator-focused rules constitute what we can call “shameful knowledge” in advertising. It may be that while practitioners do believe in some moderator-focused-type regularities and even use them, at the same time, they deny the legitimacy or indeed even the existence of such moderators for social desirability reasons. It may be that the “ideology of creativity” is such a strong occupational norm that it would actively suppress the open admittance of the belief in rules. Such a contradiction is particularly plausible with aesthetic rules, which respondents both alluded to and actively denied. The social milieu of the advertising agency (or even more broadly: that of the advertising industry) might strongly interfere with individual convictions in this case. It is also possible that under some circumstances the no-

moderator belief comes to the foreground, while in other cases practitioners simply deny their shameful knowledge. The extraneous variables that could account for these two potential paths should be further researched.

It is important to note that while ad practitioners deny the legitimacy of moderator-focused theories, they do allow for basic-level theories such as the Truncated Hierarchy Model or the practitioner version of the Persuasion Knowledge Model – at least on an ontological level. In fact, as Chapter 4 suggested they did firmly believe in these theories. This finding might partly explain the commonly held lay notion that advertising practitioners are “atheoretical.” Casual observers may equate the “denial of moderator-focused theories” meta-theory (i.e., “no rules in advertising”) with a blanket denial of any observable regularity in advertising by practitioners. In reality, advertising practitioners do not deny the possibility of regularity in such a blanket fashion. They make the important distinction that moderator-focused rules are impossible for the creative part of the business, but a basic understanding is still plausible. They have a “layered view” of advertising: for strategy and consumer research there are rules, for creative there are not. For phenomena that are believed to be non-artistic, a-aesthetic and therefore more regularly describable, such as consumer behavior and strategy, the search for scientific regularities is legitimate. It is only in the case of the creative product that ad practitioners’ “ontological skepticism” kicks in. The ontological autonomy of art in advertising is one of the most strongly held beliefs of ad practitioners. It is not surprising that this meta-theory results in a very strong rejection of any scientific moderator-focused theories that would interfere with creative autonomy.

Ironically, however, the creative product in advertising cannot be compartmentalized into an isolated territory of advertising work. Respondents argued that creativity was the essence of

the advertising occupation. The serious corollary of such an assessment is that the denial of moderators is of paramount importance, much larger than the “layered view” in itself would suggest. If creative work is the essence of advertising work, then the knowledge of basic psychological processes such as the Truncated Hierarchy Model (even if true) are of much lesser importance than the fact that there are no true scientific moderators for creative content that practitioners would accept. Lay observers may – ironically – be right in that ad practitioners are atheoretical after all, as their “theoreticalness” is so circumscribed that it is of little practical significance. Although in the author’s view, this would be pushing the argument too far, the primacy of creative do represent serious problems, most importantly for professionalization theory, as the next section will show.

A further challenge to the legitimacy of basic-level and mid-level theories presented in Chapter 4 is ad practitioners’ epistemological skepticism. Unlike ontological skepticism which addressed rules-in-creative in particular, epistemological skepticism relates to any type of knowing about advertising in general. Ad practitioners have a skeptical view about whether organized, systematic, scholarly knowledge is possible about advertising because (a) they are overwhelmed by the complexity of causes that can contribute to the most important explanandum of all: purchase behavior, (b) they do not believe that their own beliefs (even such strongly held ones as the Truncated Hierarchy Model) are more than common sense, (c) they have specific concerns about the validity of academic advertising research, as well as, (d) applied commercial market research (copytesting in particular).

To summarize, ad practitioner meta-theories do require a reassessment of the findings presented in Chapter 4. Practitioner meta-theories do underline the fact that creativity is more important than any other guiding principle in advertising work. Not only does the primacy of

creativity deny the possibility of any moderator-focused theories that would prescribe “rules” for creative content, but it also relegates lower importance to real beliefs in a basic-level regularities of how advertising works. While practitioners acknowledge that knowledge about advertising is “layered”: certain aspects of it are more modellable and explainable by the legitimization system of science, they also insist that the creative “layer” is much thicker than any others. A further qualifying factor is practitioners’ epistemological skepticism, which (among other things) questions the validity of both academic and commercial social research as applied to advertising. All these observations have fundamental consequences for the professional aspirations of the advertising industry.

In the light of the findings about practitioners’ theories and meta-theories, what can we conclude about the professional status of the advertising industry? Is advertising an occupation that can be characterized as an occupation?

Based on the evidence uncovered in this dissertation and the requirement ‘esoteric theoretical knowledge base’ discussed in Chapter 2, the answer should be negative. Even though practitioners do possess theories about how advertising works and even if these are not “too dissimilar” from the prevailing theoretical knowledge base, there are problems with this basic knowledge. First, its actual content (the basic and mid-level understanding of how advertising works) is rather thin. It hardly meets the expectation that a profession should have a sufficiently and esoterically “complex” body of knowledge. Indeed, it would not take too much time to explain and teach how advertising works on this basic level (even if some domain-specific boundary conditions are taken into account). Even if there is theoretical knowledge practitioners accept about advertising, it is not much in volume and complexity. Practitioners’ basic theoretical knowledge about advertising is not esoteric, rather common-sensically simple. As

shown above, practitioners also have epistemological concerns about the status of basic-level knowledge. This epistemological skepticism further weakens the knowledge base of advertising.

Second, and even more significantly, practitioners do not believe in the possibility of knowledge in the exact area where knowledge is the most needed: the territory of moderator-focused theories. It is precisely moderator-focused theories that would help practitioners know what to do; knowing how to generate creative persuasive messages with a certainty of effectiveness would be the essence of the professional power of the advertising industry. Practitioners, however, as the above discussion showed, do not think moderator-focused theories are possible – and they have very strong ontological and epistemological reasons to believe so. They do not think the very nature of advertising makes it possible (ideology of creativity at work), nor do they think our ways of scientific knowing are refined enough to create such knowledge – even if it was ontologically desirable or possible.

The paradox of the advertising industry is therefore this: its theoretical knowledge base is not esoteric enough (since it is on a basic theoretical level and does not deal with moderators), and its esoteric practices are not theorizable (because of the primacy and “ideology” of creativity). Esoteric richness of knowledge and a theoretical character are two conditions that cannot be met at the same in advertising – because of the very essence of the occupation: creativity.

This is a rather damning assessment of the professional prospects of advertising. If advertising practitioners themselves do not believe in the basis of the industry’s professionalization project; moreover, if they supply fundamental criticism of this basis, the prospects of professionalism look grim. As the author of this dissertation argued in Chapter 2, the work-based, knowledge-based approach to professionalization focuses on the internal

knowledge structure (as accepted by professionals themselves) and not external markers of professionalism (associations, education, code of ethics, and the other traits). The corollary of this way of approaching professionalism is that if there are serious deficiencies in the possible theoretical knowledge base of an occupation (as possessed by practitioners themselves), its professional status is undermined. Since our data show that this is in fact the case, we must conclude that the chances of professionalism in advertising are very limited.

CHAPTER 6

FINDINGS: PRACTITIONER THEORIES AND ADVERTISER CLIENTS: PSEUDO-PROFESSIONALIZATION TACTICS

As the previous chapter concluded, the prospects of professionalism in advertising are very slim. As the analysis of practitioners' theories and meta-theories showed, the possibility of having a firm knowledge base that is both theoretical and specific (esoteric) enough is very limited in practitioners' view. So how does a knowledge-based occupation such as advertising deal with such a situation? How does advertising as an occupation deal with the extreme levels of uncertainty it has to face daily? Do the dynamics of professionalization still apply, despite the fact that practitioners do not believe true professionalization is even theoretically possible?

The findings in this chapter suggest that despite the fact that practitioners do not believe in the possibility of an esoteric theoretical knowledge base for advertising, a necessary condition for its professionalization project's success, practitioners do live with the dynamics of professionalization. They do feel the need for legitimating their work in front of their advertiser clients and there is a need for certainty manifested in their interactions with their clients. Practitioners also respond to some legitimization needs in ways that are both similar and dissimilar to a true professionalization project. They do have tactics to offer the semblance of certainty for legitimating their work. These tactics, while similar to professionalization in legitimating intent, are dissimilar in that they do not refer to academic, theoretical knowledge bases. As the previous chapters showed, practitioners do not believe that it is possible and their

beliefs about the basic workings about advertising are also different from those of academia. Ad practitioners' tactics to overcome and circumvent the need for certainty – the fuel of the professionalization logic – will be referred to as 'pseudo-professionalization' tactics. Pseudo-professionalization tactics discussed in this chapter will conclude our discussion of practitioner knowledge and will provide insights for the final conclusions for this dissertation.

Need for certainty

Ad practitioners acknowledge that, despite their disbelief in academic theories as knowledge bases for the advertising occupation, the engine of professionalization theory still applies to their work: advertiser clients do express a strong need for certainty. The need to prove that ad practitioners "know what they are talking about" permeates the industry. Advertiser clients want to know that their advertising dollars are well spent and what they are paying for helps achieving their business objectives.

Need for the theoretical. Interviewees unanimously admitted to this client need. *Account Manager 1*, for instance, argued that clients' main concern was proving return on investment: "They always want to know what I'm getting, what's my return on investment. And I don't care how much you try, you cannot specifically quantify, and do an exact return on investment of if I spend 200,000 dollars, how much am I going to sell, if I spend 200,000 dollars. Can't do it."

Proving that there is a relationship between advertising expenditure and sales results is advertisers' primary concern according to *Account Manager 2*, as well: "Yeah, most people are, there are some people that'd like to say, you know, we spent 15 million dollars, and our business went up 10 percent, so if we spend a 100 million dollars, does that mean that we go up 20%, you know, or what do we have to spend per unit sale, can we make that a scientific type of thing."

Account Manager 5 also suggested that there was a strong need for proof in ROI terms: “But certainly, there’s... there’s demand for a proof of return on investment for virtually everything in most businesses, and advertising is no... does not get an exception that very often.” *Account Manager 10* offered a hyperbole, jokingly, about how insistent clients can be on proofs about return on investment: “It used to be half of my advertising is wasted. Now if you say, ‘Well, I think we’ll come up next week and talk about the program.’ ‘Well, prove to me that this trip is going to pay out. Am I going to get a return on my investment?’ You can’t do anything, you can’t make a phone call... ‘Prove to me this phone call is going to work.’ ”

Advertiser clients do express the need for what professionalization theory describes as ‘theoretical knowledge base’: scientific theories that would predict the outcome of the advertising effort: “Certainly, there’s a huge portion of the advertiser universe that does try to make it a science. The bigger the company the more that’s likely to happen” (*Account Manager 5*); “Actually what clients want is a front-end predictive model, where if I do this, this is going to happen” (*Account Manager 9*); “Well, I think they’d all like to have one [predictive theory]. I’d like to have one, it’d make my job a lot easier but, you know, there are... Once you move away from the hard sciences there are very few formulas that exist that, you know, would run a business successfully” (*Account Manager 12*).

Account Planner 4 summed up the paradox of the advertising business: the fact that it is just as much characterized by the yearning for models, as it is predestined for living without them:

Certainly. We all do. And we do... Everybody wants order, we don’t want chaos. We don’t want the idea that there is no order to the universe. And I’m not even saying that. [...] Yes, in order to understand, and appreciate, and plan, and budget, and forecast, clients and agencies both need some sort of order and expectation of what... I’m going to spend this money here, and I’m not spending that in order to, you know, satisfy some prurient interest, I’m spending that

because I expect at some point in the future to get that back in a much higher number than what I spent. So how does that work, what's the progression, all of that's very important to ad agencies, to clients... It's just hard to put... to say there's a rule. Because rules, they're just hard to come by. [...] I mean, if you just get honest about it, which is hard for people to do... I want to be honest about it, but they want to be... because they want to have rules. And they want to have a map. "I want a decision tree..." "But what if I tell you that you can have a decision tree but the market doesn't give a shit about your decision tree. They don't care. They are not going to follow your decision tree." "I don't care, I just need a decision tree because it helps me to know what to do next." "Okay. But just remember that's not necessarily what happens." [Laughs.] You know?

The paradox is that while practitioners know that there are no predictive models (that is moderator-focused theories, as discussed in the previous chapters) and the ideology of creativity would prevent them from even postulating such a thing, they have to deal with advertiser clients that – according to the logic of professionalization – yearn for such models. As *Creative Director I* explained: "I think clients would be delighted if there were hard and fast rules. I think they yearn for it, because they walk into a situation, they allocate a certain amount of money, they want to see results." Clients want rules, and it would make advertising practitioners' lives a lot easier if there were ones: "Rules make things easier [...] Clients demand accountability." (*Account Manager 8*); "They buy into the charade that agency A has figured all the rules out, it's got all the answers, it's got all the... Point of fact, nobody has figured all that stuff out [...] No one's got the answer to all those kinds of things. It's very difficult. There's an inherent long... wish to believe on the part of certain customers of agencies" (*Account Planner 5*).

Advertiser clients also express their need for theoretical knowledge in its empirical manifestation: a measurement system. They need data that correspond to the underlying theory: "They probably want to see data, they probably want to see sales numbers, I mean, all of that stuff is probably going to have to be shown to them in order for them to believe it or buy it. Because nowadays, you don't have a lot of clients who are just going to take your opinion or

your advice. They want to see data” (*Account Planner 6*); “I think they like the evidence if you have it” (*Creative Director 4*); “Clients and marketing people have, you know, they are taking our word on stuff, and so they need to, they need something that they can go to people who... And say, ‘Look, we did our due diligence, and that’s right, and it’s going to work, or we believe it’s going to work based on a, you know, a testing plan’ ” (*Creative Director 9*).

Need for the esoteric. The need for “esoteric” knowledge – as predicted by professionalization theory – is a dynamic that is also present in advertising. It is not enough to have a theory of how something works; it has to be complex and difficult enough so that an exclusive profession could be built on it. The problem is, as the discussion at the end of the previous chapter showed, that the basic-level theory that ad practitioners believe in is not esoteric enough, while the esoteric practice of crafting creative concepts and executions is not theoretical enough. Regardless, just as there is a need for the theoretical among advertiser clients, there is a need for the esoteric. In other words, the professionalization logic works in advertising – at least in terms of the needs of clients. Whether the advertising industry can deliver on those needs is another question.

Ad practitioners are very aware of the uniqueness of their product and clients’ need for the esoteric nature of creative communication messages – something they cannot produce in house. As *Account Manager 1* argued: “Well, I think they are hiring an advertising ag... If they could do it, they would do it themselves.” Similarly, *Account Planner 1* suggested, the creative product is a unique, esoteric one: “Why the hell do they hire an advertising agency, defined creative, if it’s a template, and it’s this type of a type font, you know, they can go out and for, you know, for 139.95, they can buy a computer program that can do that.”

Advertiser clients need the services of ad agencies because agencies provide something they do not have: “I think he wants the parts that he doesn’t have, and it doesn’t matter how sophisticated the client might be. [...] It’s ideas” (*Creative Director 1*); “Because all these people recognize that it takes a certain something, a *je ne sais quoi* to do it” (*Creative Director 7*). What clients do not know how to “manufacture” is creative communication ideas: “Well, it’s interesting because I think most clients appreciate the creative mind, and they appreciate it because they can’t do it. And they don’t totally understand it” (*Creative Director 2*); “I mean, that’s what we have to sell is talent. And talent is kind of ambiguous. You know, it’s not something you can pull off a shelf. It’s not a widget that you can sell... You know, talent is a soft commodity... if that’s the way to put it. It’s intangible in a lot of ways... And they have to respect that, and want it, and appreciate it” (*Creative Director 4*).

Creativity is scary. Even though clients appreciate creativity as an esoteric form of service advertising agencies provide them with, ad practitioners suggest that they are rather “scared” of it and feel uncomfortable with it. *Account Manager 5*, for instance, suggested: “You know, there’s the old adage that if it’s... that you know, that many agencies take, less clients take... that if we’re not a little bit nervous about this, we are probably not pushing it far enough. We are probably not trying to break the mold enough and... But it’s much harder for clients to do that than it is for agencies to do that.” *Creative Director 3* also described clients’ typical reactions to the creative product: “I think they say they want a big idea, then when they see it, it kind of scares them. But in our opinion, if it doesn’t scare them, it’s not a very big idea. So if it doesn’t make them a little bit uncomfortable [it is not right].”

Many respondents expressed the imperative, on the part of the agency, not to be set back by such client fears, but rather to push clients as much as possible, as according to the ideology

of creativity, this is what is going to yield the best results: “We always want to make them uncomfortable, we always want to push it. We want to push them to the limit. But at the same time, we are shooting for the appropriate. They should look at it and say, ‘That scares me to death but that’s dead on. Let’s give it a shot’ ” (*Creative Director 5*); “They know that you understand them and their culture, and what’s acceptable, and I think you should always bring stuff that stretches them and scares them a little bit” (*Account Manager 7*). *Creative Director 6* offered the following parable to illustrate the dynamics between the need for certainty and fear of creativity:

And a good example, last year we went to present and [colleague at the agency] and I... They are sitting there and they were smiling, before [colleague] and I were going to present. “So what are you guys laughing at? Are you going to play a joke on us or something.” And they said, “No. It’s just we look forward to this every year because you’re going to show us stuff that’s going to scare the crap out of us. And we’re going to sit here and tell you, ‘No, no, no, we can’t do that.’ And we’ll end up doing it and here we are again.” And so we just took advantage of that, I looked over [colleague] and I said, “Oh, forget the... just show them the first ad.” Because it was one of those that would make them go, ‘Ugh, god.’ And they got it and they just cracked up laughing, “Oh, no, you’re going to make us do that, aren’t you?” And we said, “Yeah, we are.”

The fact that creativity scares clients is by no means surprising. In fact, according to the logic of professionalization, this is explained by the fact that there is an inherent need for theoretical knowing in the case of using the services of any occupation, and advertisers may realize that it is impossible in the case of creativity, just by definition. Creativity scares advertiser clients because it is the very denial of certainty provided by theoretical knowledge bases. It challenges even the possibility of certainty because creativity is by its nature uncertain. The fact that clients are scared by creativity, again, proves that the dynamics of professionalization are at place in advertising, but it also proves that these dynamics are at jeopardy by the very nature of work in the industry.

Commercial market research as a professionalization agent

There is a tool that is very much in line with the classic professionalization process and which the advertising industry uses to meet advertiser clients' need for certainty. This tool is commercial market research. The use of research would be the perfect tool for proving the professional status of advertising, because – in theory at least – it represents the operationalized measurement system of theoretical knowledge bases and it can actually provide empirical proof that – based on basic theory – the advertising program works in the specific case.

There seems to be support in the data that ad practitioners indeed use research this way. They use it in accordance with the logic of professionalization; they use it to sell work: “I think that [research] is very interesting information. That, much like brand planning in general. A major role, in my opinion, of brand planning is to help sell the work” (*Account Manager 4*); “And what we’re finding is that even though the creatives don’t necessarily want that, they realize that it puts them in a much better position when they go to a presentation in terms of saying, ‘We talked to 600 consumers,’ or whatever, ‘and here’s the feedback that we got on this’ ” (*Account Planner 3*); “I think almost all the planning tools we use are geared towards selling the idea. Or to actually help sell the client on what we are trying to do for their brand” (*Account Planner 5*); “I think the reason that the stuff ahead of time [research] counts... is that it does help to sell it to the client and build a little more faith from them. They realize we do know what we are doing” (*Creative Director 6*); “Now, you’ve got proof, and really, really it’s an issue of covering your asses. I mean, I understand it completely. Clients and marketing people have, you know, they are taking our word on stuff, and so they need to, they need something that they can go to people [with]” (*Creative Director 9*).

Some respondents even suggested that there was no *other* use for research than its persuasive value; the only use is opportunistic use: “Research is a mean to an end, it’s not, you know, we don’t... We’ll bastardize research to get where we think that is a good place to be.” (*Account Planner 2*); “In some cases the creative would come up with the idea and say, ‘You guys make it fit so that it seems like it’s going to fit the client’s brief.’ And it’s post-justification going on” (*Account Planner 5*); “I will use the research if it’s... Because I don’t believe in it. I do believe in it from the standpoint, it can help sell work, if you have numbers” (*Creative Director 7*).

No research on moderators. Even if it seems commercial market research is the best professionalization agent the advertising industry can use, there are a number of problems that make it a less than ideal professionalization tool. First, even though the best applied commercial research is based on theory, ad practitioners only believe in basic level theories, a point argued in the previous chapters. Therefore what research based on these theories can prove will always be on this basic level and not in the area of moderators, arguably the key to ad practitioners’ work.

There are many points during the advertising work process when research is used, but it is never used for the most crucial part of the work: coming up with the creative concept. That would be contrary to the ideology of creativity and ad practitioners’ meta-theory that there are no knowable moderators for the creative content of advertising. Strategic development research (i.e., segmentation, strategic positioning research, qualitative consumer insight generation, etc.) is not esoteric enough, nor is it done uniquely by advertising agencies. Building a strategic base from which to launch the creative idea is often done by clients’ marketing departments and it is not perceived to be unique enough to be “owned” by advertising agencies as a core capacity.

Copytesting and tracking research are “too late” in the process to be an effective professionalization agent; it is after the creative conceptualization has already happened, and therefore it cannot be argued that it has served as professional basis for the creative process. The deadly logic of copytesting is that it does help the agency to legitimate its work, *if* the results are positive; if they are negative, however, the agency supplies quasi-scientific evidence that they do *not know* what they are talking about. Copytesting is a gamble: since moderators of the basic models are not known, nor are scientifically manipulated, there is always a good chance that the levels of the outcome variables will not move in the positive direction or they do not move at all. For research to be able to serve a full-blown professionalization project, it should be able to predict the impact of scientifically operationalized moderators – clearly not a possibility in the case of advertising. In the absence of such predictability, the agency risks a huge “professionalization failure,” or breakdown in legitimation, every time it runs a copytest. The existence of the possibility of such failures is why ad practitioners hate copytesting: it can very easily undermine their semblance of professional credibility.

The logic of copytesting also underlines the fact that it *is* a problem that ad practitioners cannot quantify moderators for the basic model of how advertising works. It is equal to saying: “I do not know what will work. But let’s test it to see if it does.” Copytesting therefore underscores the hiatus in the theoretical knowledge base, the absence of scientific knowledge about moderators in the stated basic model – variables that would be the most important knowledge of all. It underscores the fact (as discussed in the previous chapter) that advertising is not a profession, because it cannot provide knowledge that is both scientific and esoteric. Again, agencies have every reason to hate copytesting: not only does it carry a risk of undermining their professional credibility if the results are negative, but it cannot ever fully prove it either, even if

the results are positive. Tracking research carries the same problems as copytesting in terms of the above.

Agencies sometimes use “creative development research” (i.e., research used to improve the creative concept/executions) or roll back copytests results into the final creative product. This process, however, as the previous chapter showed, is violently resisted by ad practitioners. There are a number of reasons why this is the case; such a process violates the ideology of creativity; it does not in fact generate ideas, rather just tweaks them; and as respondents testified, might result in inferior rather than superior results.

In short, despite the fact that research is used throughout the development of advertising, it is never used (and, in fact, it is not possible to be used) for the key element of advertising work: the generation of creative concepts.

Financial burden of proof. The second reason why commercial market research is a less than perfect professionalization agent for the advertising industry is that it is often paid for by clients. As *Account Manager 3* argued: “Because no agency pays for anything [any research]. I’m just saying that the client pays for everything. And if an agency went out and did that on their own, you know, I don’t think it would stay in business very long.” *Account Manager 9* stated that it was in fact a large investment to be able to research the agency’s own claims, an investment the client has to make: “Because measuring stuff to the degree that a lot of people would like to is not an inexpensive proposition.” This is the reason why only larger clients can afford to measure the effectiveness of their advertising: “That’s probably true [that larger clients are more likely to do research], only because the budgets don’t allow it. You know, you could theoretically spend all the client’s money and have no advertising” (*Account Manager 12*).

The irony of the situation is obvious: the tool that could potentially serve the ad industry's professionalization interests is subsidized by the very actors for whom this argument should be made. If advertiser clients have to pay themselves for the proof that the service that they purchase is in fact reliable, it makes it very questionable that this proof will be perceived as inherent in and "owned by" the advertising business. A component of the professionalization logic displaced in such a way leads to more client control rather than less – quite contrary to what professionalization wants to achieve. If research, particularly of the evaluative kind, were offered as part of the overall service the agency provides, it would be more likely to be perceived as a professionalization tool. This, however, is unrealistic.

Epistemological concerns. Finally, as the previous chapter discussed it in detail, ad practitioners have serious epistemological concerns about the validity of research applied to advertising. They may accept it as an opportunistic tool to sell work to clients, but they have very strong doubts if it ever is as valid as it is presented to be. Such disbelief, from a professionalization perspective is devastating. Both the theoretical knowledge base and its operationalized research manifestations need to be accepted as sufficiently valid by an occupation for a successful professionalization project.

According to ad practitioners, the best role that research can play is to create an 'air of science' around advertising without in any ways curtailing practitioners' autonomy to produce work, which they ontologically equate with art. As *Creative Director 8* explained, the deterministic nature of scientific research (especially in the case of certain uses of it) is to be resisted because it defies creative freedom and results in an average creative product: "You want the base of science, but you don't want the science to dictate the execution. To the point where it becomes more of the same." *Account Planner 4*, similarly, asserted:

I think if you're saying applying the discipline of science to advertising, does that have value, I would say yes. But converting advertising to science, I would say that's got limited value. Do you understand the difference? [...] I respect and appreciate the application of science... the approaching of advertising as if it was a science in order to analyze it and so forth... What I don't appreciate is reducing advertising purely to a science, because I feel like you're taking away the leverage.

To summarize the argument so far, based on practitioners' remarks, the professionalization logic still applies to advertising, even if practitioners do not perceive that to be a realistic status to achieve. Advertiser clients do have a need for advertising knowledge that is both scientifically predictive and esoteric enough so that they need to turn to an outside provider. One tool that may be used to provide an operationalized version of this knowledge is commercial market research, but as the argument showed, it has proved to be a less than ideal professionalization tool.

What can the advertising industry do in such a situation? Amidst acute uncertainty and expressed client need to legitimate its status, how does the advertising industry cope? How can it try and save the day and prove the improvable and substantiate the unsubstantiable?

Pseudo-professionalization tactics

The solution: ad practitioners use what we will call 'pseudo-professionalization tactics.' Pseudo-professionalization tactics are knowledge-related actions that, while they do not fulfill the requirements of true professionalization (i.e., they do not provide an esoteric and theoretical knowledge base to substantiate advertising work), they do offer ad hoc solutions in response to advertiser clients' need for legitimation. Pseudo-professionalization tactics are 'pseudo,' because they do not replace true professionalization, nor can they lead to building up a profession's organizational formations. They are quick-fixes: local and fuzzy resolutions to avert immediate

legitimation crises caused by the impossibility of providing esoteric theoretical knowledge base for the substantiation of advertising work. We can still call these actions “professional” as they are responses to professionalization demands from clients and they all have to do with knowledge – some more directly, than others. Let us consider these tactics one by one.

Selling creative with strategy. One of the ways in which agencies provide justification for their creative product is claiming that it corresponds to ‘strategy.’ Strategy, as we defined it in Chapter 4, is a set of idiographic presuppositions about the nature of the advertised product and its consumer. Strategy lays the groundwork for the creation of advertising messages, but it does not dictate what the creative concept or the resulting advertising executions should be. It is a necessary but not sufficient condition for the generation of creative concepts. The professionalization problem of the advertising industry is precisely this: while it is possible to justify strategy, there is no theory, and therefore no professional legitimation for creative. The “selling creative with strategy” tactic tries to resolve this by pretending that the link between strategy and creative is a sufficient explanation for the decision why the selected creative route was chosen. In reality, there are an infinite number of ways in which the strategy can be expressed in diverse creative concepts, all of them still being “on brief.” It is precisely the choice between these infinite creative paths that is impossible to professionally/theoretically legitimate. Nevertheless, it seems “selling creative with strategy” effectively masks this problem and agency people are successful with this pseudo-professionalization technique.

Creative Director 5 described how the tactic worked in action:

When we sell the creative then we are going to show... we are going to reiterate, here's what we learned from our research, here's what it told us about your market, here's the insight we drew from that, and then here's what we created that speaks directly to that. What you try to do is... is to set it up so that when they get to the ad, they are like, “Of course that's what you would do. That's... that, that, that... Yeah! That's great. We love it.”

Account Planner 6 gave a similar account, pointing out that it was presentations to clients where the tactic was most commonly used: “Well, a lot of times, we’ll set it up to get to the strategy. So we’ll say here’s the consumer, here’s their mindset, here’s the message that’s going to be most relevant. And then they’ll present the creative, and then we’ll go back, since we’ll have done work, and say this is how the consumers, or the target consumer responded to this.” As *Creative Director 7* suggested as long as the link between strategy and creative was established, it did not matter how far out the creative concept was: “Well, a good strategy will help the creative sell, even, no matter how wacky it is, it’ll help the creative sell.” Clearly marked correspondence seemed to eliminate any worries about whether the creative is the best possible expression of the strategy: “But I mean, the standard would be: here’s the strategy, here’s how it from a pure string of logic manifests that strategy” (*Account Manager 5*).

Advertising agencies use another variation of this technique by insisting that clients “buy into” an agreed-upon strategy first, and only after this step should creative development begin. Agencies use this “foot in the door” sales technique, because this “step-wise” legitimization process seems to work better. As *Account Planner 3* explained: “And so we want to buy off on strategy of what is it that we are going to say. [...] And we insist on that as an agency, it’s one of our processes, we insist on that as agency that we get buy-in from the client on the strategy before we brief creatives.” This layered approach to the substantiation of creative masks the fact that there is a fundamental rift between rationally conceived and researched (in the strict sociological sense: more professional) strategy and the ultimately unsubstantiatable creative. By making the client partially committed to the project upfront (achieving “buy-in”), selling the creative seems easier. *Creative Director 8* concurred:

And then, of course, when we go back to the client with the concepts, you start by going first of all through the creative focus and reviewing that with the client, so, okay, this is what we agreed to, and this is what the ads intended to accomplish. And this is the target and so on. Then you're measuring the creative against the criteria that we previously agreed to otherwise you just flap around endlessly.

As if creative were logical. A similar pseudo-professionalization tool is to refer to the genesis of creative concepts and suggest that there is a logical conception procedure. This tactic differs from the previous in that it ventures into the unstable territory of advertising creative, while “selling creative with strategy” attempts to avoid it. The “as if creative were logical” tactic makes claims about the creative process and intentionally misrepresents it. Presenting creative as if it were logical is a useful tool, because despite the fact that ad practitioners do not believe that advertising creativity is rationally-logically modellable (as we saw in the previous chapters), pretending that it is, takes away some of the anxiety clients have about the unpredictable nature of creativity. “As if creative were logical” still cannot replace true professionalization since it does not provide theory for the conception of the creative product, it only offers the semblance of one (and only for the case at hand, not generally). As discussed in the previous chapters, creatives do not believe the theorization of creative is possible; however, they are willing to pretend to be able to sell the work.

Account Planner 4 explained the somewhat mischievous tactic of depicting the conception of creative as if it were a logical progression from processing information to rational decision-making: “Because people want the world to be like that [draws linear line]. [...] But you always do that on the back end, that's not how you did it. That's just how you present it. [Laughs.] But that's not how you did it. This is how you do it. This is how you present it because people will buy this.” *Creative Director 2* explicitly stated that an intentional misrepresentation of the creative process and product is necessary for successfully selling the idea to clients:

Well, it's interesting because I think most clients appreciate the creative mind, and they appreciate it because they can't do it. And they don't totally understand it. But at the same time the more you can present it as though there is a formula, the easier it is for them to buy it. The more you can remove subjectivity, the easier it is for them to not only buy into it but sell it up the ladder at their corporation or whatever.

Similarly, *Creative Director 6* asserted that the agency always needed to represent creative work as if it were conceived as a rational tool for solving business problems: "I've watched a lot of young creative people come in, 'This is going to be really cool and people would really love this.' Clients don't care. [...] Alright, so you appeal to them, for the business reasons."

Partners not vendors. Advertising agencies often resolve the conflict arising from the impossibility of professionalization in another ingenious way: they reposition themselves as "strategic partners" of the commissioning advertiser client organization instead of being vendors of a service. By doing this, agencies reduce the need for proof, certainty or an underlying theoretical knowledge base because they are no longer perceived as a service provider that needs such proofs.

Professionalization theory is best applicable to service categories, occupations that provide some form of immaterial service to clients and makes predictions based on the dynamics between these two parties: the users of the services and the professionalizing occupation providing them. Occupations that are capable of professionalizing command higher levels of respect and status from those using their services and ultimately from society as a whole. However, if there are no two separate entities of service providers and service commissioners, there is no need for professional proofs; the service is not perceived as "provided" by anybody, but rather as part of the commissioner's own actions. Advertising agencies, by attempting to be

partners instead of service providers, are taking advantage of this logic, and possibly eradicating the need for professionalization altogether.

Most respondents expressed their agency's objective to be perceived as partners and not as service providers: "But that's not the purpose of an ad agency, you're supposed to be a partnership, and an adjunct to understand the client [...] And that's what ad agencies should think of themselves as, business partners, instead of just creative vendors" (*Account Manager 1*); "We exist to become indispensable to our clients. [...] We try to be incredibly collaborative, we don't like to be in an environment where the client says, 'I don't know what I want, but when I see it I'll know.' That's usually where you've got a very arm's length relationship" (*Account Manager 11*); "As much as possible, you want to stay in touch with the client, exchange... I mentioned earlier about marketing partner, if you can take an ad agency and put it as part of the company..." (*Creative Director 1*); "And that's the mark of a great client, is that they include the agency as a strategic team member as opposed to the vendor and goes 'go and make some ads' " (*Creative Director 3*).

As discussed above, the role of the "partners not vendors" technique is to reduce the conflicts following from the advertising industry's incapability of professionalization. As *Account Manager 6* explained "Again, it's back to the vendor-partnership role. I mean, if you have a vendor role, instead of a partnership role, then yes, they're going to expect to see a lot more proof statements." Being partners, being less separate of a player effectively decreases the need for certainty and thus agencies' professionalization problems. If such a partnership role is achieved, it results in a higher level of status, the characteristic of more professionalized occupations. *Account Planner 2* suggested: "You know, the whole issue of mutual respect is a big deal to us. We want to be considered a partner, and therefore we also want to treat our clients

as such instead of, to have sort of condescending, demeaning attitudes, you know. [...] We want to be more of a consultant and less of an execution.” As *Creative Director 1* added, advertising agencies might not even be able to do their best work unless a partnership role were assumed: “But look... it’s not a war between us, it’s marketing partners again, if we’re not working together in this kind of thing, we can’t do our jobs as well, you can’t profit from us.”

Many respondents argued that the best way to achieve such a partner status was working directly with the CEO of the advertiser company. The reason is the perception that CEOs have the position and authority to be less risk averse. They might also be susceptible to persuasion that advertising is less of a professional service rather an integral part of the brand vision they are responsible for. *Account Manager 5*, for instance, argued: “It’s also true that if... the higher up you can work in an organization, if you can work at the CEO level, and if that person is willing to take some risks, then you’re much better off than if somebody is four levels down.” Similarly, *Account Planner 2* described the pseudo-professional utility of connecting with the CEO directly:

Anything we’ve done recently is really focused on something that some of the larger agencies do very well, which is we’ve really made it a point that we don’t take on a business without having direct contact at some point with the CEO. Because they really control what the brand is. Where do they want that brand to go, so rather than have people down the line playing gate-keeper, and trying to defend and describe what this guy is looking for. “Oh, lady...”

Agency philosophies. A fourth tool agencies use is the branding of aspects of their activities. Making knowledge “proprietary” and uniquely “owned by” a single organization seem to elevate it to a higher status-level, one that demands more respect and less professionalization scrutiny. The semblance of the agency having a unique way to approach advertising seems to give credibility and substantiation to the agency’s work, irrespective of the validity of that knowledge. The mere fact that the agency can claim to have *any* unique knowledge seems to

overcome perceived deficiencies in the general theoretical knowledge base as well as, to some extent, clients' need for scientific-professional justification. Having a "philosophy" serves as a "second" knowledge base replacing true general theoretical knowledge about how advertising works. This "second" knowledge is clearly incomplete and insufficient to replace a true theoretical knowledge base; nevertheless, its sheer existence fills a very real gap. The simple fact that there seems to be any kind of a knowledge base has an effect according to practitioners.

Creative Director 9 stated that the reason for branded agency philosophies is the need for justification against clients' expressed need for certainty: "I think that every agency that's ever been created has tried to do that [professionalize]. That's why you'll see every single agency in the world will have a proprietary tool, or a set of tools. And that will be MindScaping or BrandVision or, you know, AdMonitor, or there will be... Everyone of them would have a catchy phrase, and there would be a gazillion of them." *Account Planner 4*, similarly, explained that agency philosophies serve this purpose and not much else: "But a standardized approach or a more deliberate approach... not so much for necessarily for our creative people to have it, it's more for the benefit of our clients, the same reason they like the decision tree."

Most respondents defined agency philosophies in terms of the process of arriving at idiographic theories that constitute strategy. Most of these philosophies are thus mechanisms and accompanying directives about how to carry out upfront market research and turn it into idiographic bases for ensuing creative work. *Account Manager 1*, for instance, described her agency's process in such a context: "You know, we do a process that's called [name of proprietary tool], we go and talk to a lot of different people, we go and talk to the... inside the company, outside the company, their clients, you know, my client's clients, talk to a lot of people, and kind of get an overall impression, and then we direct... and from a strategic area, we

formulate what the strategy's going to be." *Account Planner 1* trademarked his understanding of how advertising worked on an emotional level and used it as a selling tool for his company: "But I venture to say that if... that what challenges that model is that truly if you translate the communication context to a level deeper within the mindset of the consumer, to what I refer to as the [proprietary concept] of the brand experience." As shown in Chapter 4 (see **Figure 4.8**), *Account Planner 2* successfully introduced a customized, proprietary version of the FCB-grid (a branded theory itself) and had a lot of success with using it with the agency's clients.

Most respondents also acknowledged that such agency philosophies were hardly unique. They still characterized them as useful tools for selling the work to clients. *Account Planner 2*, for example, had caustic remarks about the use of branded agency philosophies despite the fact, as mentioned earlier, he used one himself with his clients: "A lot of agencies will brand aspects of their business. So there was a real push a few years ago to make your strategic planning process a brand identity. I think it's a joke." *Creative Director 3* also asserted that it was only the semblance of uniqueness that such models had, in reality, they were very similar to each other: "We've got a chart. I get you one before you leave here. [...] And you know, everybody, every ad agency has got a process. Everybody's got a process and they all think theirs is unique. And trust me, 99% of all of them are exactly the same." *Account Manager 12*, similarly, argued that all big agencies have such proprietary models, which were in essence all identical:

Yeah, we have a, you know, kind of a company model that is a multi-stage approach to how you should plan and practice advertising. It is a series of questions that are then repeated where you do... If you look at [agency network2]'s, or [agency network3]'s or [agency network4]'s or [agency network5]'s, they all bear similarities in the sense that, you know, they start out with some kind of an investigation of the status quo, you're looking for leverageable little pieces of information, or product-specifics or something that can then be used.

Practical authority source. In the absence of what they perceive as a reliable and valid theoretical knowledge base, ad practitioners often use other knowledge sources for legitimation. Practitioners often turn to the writings of other practitioners who have a lot of perceived experience, advertising trade publications and business books, or conference presentations. These sources, which arguably constitute a “second” knowledge base for the advertising occupation, are perceived as more valid because they come from “real life.” In this situation, “real life” is defined as the actual practice of advertising work and not academic research, which ad practitioners, as Chapter 5 showed, handled with high levels of epistemological skepticism. This perceived abundance of external validity is what commands high levels of “practical authority” for practitioners’ second knowledge, with which the academic theoretical knowledge base cannot compete. While the higher validity and reliability of practitioners’ second knowledge is never tested, the fact that such knowledge exists and can be referred to makes it a useful pseudo-professionalization tool.

The utility of the second knowledge base is more indirect, however, than the previously described pseudo-professionalization tools. Practitioners’ second knowledge is only scarcely referenced *in front of advertiser clients*. It serves more of an internal reassurance role; it helps ad practitioners believe in their own professionalism. This professional confidence, however, in turn permeates agency-client relationships and does operate as a pseudo-professionalization agent. At the same time, practical authority shows the limitations of any pseudo-professionalization tactic: it cannot fully replace the legitimating force of academic knowledge bases. There is also a limit to the extent to which they are adhered to, as practitioners – according to our findings in Chapter 5 – are ontologically very skeptical if any rules can be applied to advertising. Practical authority

and practitioners' second knowledge still have a strong effect on the ad industry's internal and subjective perception of professionalism.

Account Manager 2 stated, for example, that the influence of practical authority can be enormous in the advertising industry: "Or it could be in the form of a person, too. I mean, when David Ogilvy was still alive, you know, almost anything that he said was taken as gospel, you know, even though he would be the first to admit that he violated some of his own rules, too" (*Account Manager 2*). *Creative Director 1* also referenced the famous ad man: "I noticed, over the years, at one point when I was first breaking in this business, David Ogilvy was still a very strong influence, especially in print. And some of the things he said we didn't agree with, it was more of, let's break David Ogilvy's rules and still make this thing work." Respondents also frequently referred to trade publications such *Advertising Age*, *Adweek* or *Communication Arts*, trade books and conferences of advertising-related associations such as the AAAA or ARF as sources where some of this second knowledge base can be found. As *Creative Director 9* summed up: "You know, there are a lot of books that are written about advertising, and there's a lot of competitions that go on, and I think a lot of folks, you know... You'd be a fool not to keep abreast of that stuff."

Social construction of ad reality. The ways in which practitioners' second knowledge base is created and circulated are not limited to explicit sources such as practitioners' writings and stated agency philosophies. Practitioners' second knowledge is omnipresent and surround them not unlike everyday knowledge surrounds all of us. Practitioners' second knowledge is not unlike Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social construction of reality. Practitioners challenge the possibility of positivistic knowledge about how advertising works. Instead they accept (although mostly unselfconsciously) the fact that knowledge is constituted and negotiated in a social

environment. In short, if it is impossible to know about advertising in a positive way, it is best to rely on the socially constructed knowledge of other ad professionals or the community constituted by the advertising industry as a whole.

This socially constructed ad knowledge surrounds practitioners every day, everywhere – through the practice of their work, through their interactions with their peers and through special sites for negotiation, such as advertising awards, which are prime venues for the social creation of what is acceptable and not acceptable advertising. While philosophically ad practitioners are not reflexive about their own social constructivism, their accounts of certain parts of their knowledge are telltale signs of this idea.

Ad practitioners acknowledge, for example, that what is defined as good advertising is, to a large extent, dictated by trends: “And then you have executional techniques and those just come and go with their trends. It’s types of music, is the person in the center of the camera or off-center, or is it dark or bright. Those will always change, that’s style” (*Account Manager 8*); “There are certainly styles that get popular. Right now a lot of advertising that wins awards, it’s viewed as popular in the industry is what we call ‘gag and tag.’ So that there’s some entertaining, humorous, often humorous part of the commercial that takes up most of the time and then is followed by a ‘brought to you by,’ almost” (*Account Manager 12*); “It’s like advertising falls into styles like that, periodically and you can watch things just... it’s like a pendulum. Things become very graphic-driven concepts, then they swing over and they become very word-driven concepts and then they, you know, down in the middle there are the two just work, you know, hand and glove together” (*Creative Director 6*).

As *Creative Director 5* testified, the observation of trends and countertrends did constitute a large portion of creatives thinking about what makes good advertising. A clear

dialectic is created by the following and resisting of trends (i.e., socially constructed ideas about how to create advertising) that permeate advertising practice. It is worthwhile to cite a longer passage, because his account provides deep insights into the dynamics of social construction of ad reality – as well as the resistance to open acknowledgement of being under the influence of such social constructivism, a sign of ‘ideology of creativity’ (Chapter 4) at work:

For instance, with the copywriters, there’s, you know, there was a time when copywriters wrote puns in the 70s... That’s like a no-no. And it evolved... There was a time when the big thing was, it’s a two-sentence headline, and you’ll sort of say... it’s kind of a straightforward product message... Okay, we’ve got a client that makes [sports equipment]. So you would say, “Introducing the [product name] by [company],” and then you tack on this funny little, “... it would give your... now your friends all have even more reason to cheat when they are playing.” You know, you’ll take, okay, I state the product fact and I’ll tack on something, that’s kind of... You’ll see little trends pick up. Okay, that’s an easy crutch, you know. I’ve got an hour to turn that ad around. I’ll do the old formulaic... Bamm, bamm. It’ll be a decent ad, and people see it in the magazine thinking, not bad. But it’s really not pushing the limits of creativity. [...] Last five or ten... last five years the industry has been going through a real visual-dominated period. And the pendulum will swing back when the writing will dominate. If you’ve noticed the trends over the years, we’ll go back and forth from where there’s more writing-dominated advertising and there’s more visual kind of trick dominate there... We were guilty... There was a period where there was a visual trick that a lot of... and if you keep your eyes open now you’ll notice a lot of it, it’s kind of a crutch. If you’ve got a product that... its feature or its beauty or something like that... I was so enamored with the beauty of this product I didn’t realize this was going all around me. [Laughs.] It’s a formula. And if you start looking at ads, you’ll see it everywhere. [...] So people follow trends and... so that’s one that’s... that’s a trend going around I just despise. The thing is, when you’re creative, you’re trying not to do something that somebody will look at and say, “Oh, that’s that formula or oh, that’s that formula.” So there are little formulas that we kind of know about, but you do everything in your power. Even if you think it falls into it, you disguise it, so that people don’t know that it falls into it.

While ad practitioners wholeheartedly support the ideology of creativity, the idea that advertising is, first and foremost, a creative art form, and the most important directive (at the expense of any other possible moderators) is to be creative, they also admit that sometimes they copy each other or copy the masters: “You know, it’s like when Van Gogh was training himself

to be a painter, he would take a piece of canvas, and copy the masters. Just copy it exactly” (*Creative Director 2*); “You know, when you write headlines, it’s very much like telling a joke. So you want to study the masters. You want to study the Caytons, the way sentences begin and end, and the way, you know, word economy. The best joke goes this way... Awesome” (*Creative Director 7*). Copying other members of the ad community is another manifestation form of the “social construction of ad reality” idea.

Practitioners also discuss what good advertising is in informal social ways; there is a community, a peer group that admittedly takes part in the social construction of what is good advertising. *Creative Director 3* described an instance where this informal process was conducted very formally:

And so I was talking to this guy, the one named [advertising professional], and I mentioned Bernbach being my hero. And he said, “I was trained under Bernbach.” I said, “You’re kidding.” “No. I was a copywriter, Bernbach was my creative director.” So I got to talking to him. And so not long after that, [advertising professional]... obviously has done some great work and he’s one of the icons of creativity in this country, you know, and I said, “Will you take a look at our work and tell me where we are creatively?” And so he said, “Sure.” So my creative director and I flew to New York to sit down with this guy, and have him to look at our work and tell us where he thought we were. What we needed to do to improve. And so... you know, it’s a matter of constantly challenging yourself to be better.

Negotiation of ad reality through peer discussions, however, also takes place on a much more mundane, everyday way, in simple conversations among working ad people about what is acceptable and not acceptable in advertising: “I think there’s a little community and... You just talk about pop culture in general, what’s cool and what’s not. We are always commenting on each other’s work. And what we’re seeing in television, what we like, what we don’t like” (*Creative Director 5*).

The most grandiose way the ad industry creates ad reality is through advertising awards. Most of these awards evaluate advertising not based on market results, but rather based on aesthetic merit as assessed by an “expert panel” of practicing ad people. This is probably the clearest indication of social constructivism at work in the ad industry: knowledge is explicitly defined by a social group, the elite of ad practitioners judging the work of other practitioners. Therefore, ad practitioners are very aware of the value and importance of advertising awards as well as its role in the social construction in ad reality. As *Creative Director 7* explained: “It’s really how you differentiate yourself in this business. It’s to have that, to have a little shelf with some medallion on it. And otherwise, you know, how do we know it’s good?” Similarly, *Creative Director 3* underlined the communal aspect of awards shows and their impact on ad practice: “Oh, yeah. We get all the reels. We get the reels and the books from all the award shows. And we show them, and we look at them, and we critique them and we say... You know, and we looked at last year’s One Show and we said, you know, that stuff sucks, that’s... I mean, I don’t know who judged this.”

The downside of the ‘social construction of ad reality’ pseudo-professionalization tactic is that it cannot directly be used in discussions with clients to legitimate ad work, even if it adheres to the socially constructed knowledge of what is good advertising. The reason is the same reason why social constructivism has been resisted by the mainstream of post-positivist academia: it contradicts the dominant form of legitimation in our world, post-positivist science. The admittance that practitioner beliefs are “only” socially constructed would actually undermine professional credibility, instead of building it. For this reason, practitioners never reference the socially constructed nature of their second knowledge with clients directly. Still, the social construction of what good advertising is permeates the advertising world, and

indirectly even clients are affected by it. In this sense, the social construction of ad reality is an effective pseudo-professionalization tool.

Worked for others. Agencies often use examples to show that past advertising programs that are similar to the proposed project have “worked” for others, either other clients of the same agency or other brands. The essential component of such “case studies” (whether they are presented formally or referred to informally) is that there is a link or similarity between what is proposed and the other brand’s advertising. The assumption is that if the referenced (and in some ways similar) campaign worked, the proposed one should as well. If put to closer scrutiny, it becomes obvious that the argument that past successes – even under “similar” circumstances – predict future success, is a false one. There can be an infinite number of extraneous variables that differ between the compared cases, and these can greatly influence the outcome variables. A simple similarity cannot control for all these unaccounted-for factors. Nevertheless, it seems that the “worked for others” tactic is yet another less-than-perfect professionalization tool that “works” for agencies.

Creative Director 4, for example, explained the utility of case histories put together by the agency: “I mean, usually we use case studies for that or you show examples of how it’s worked for other clients. And there are no guarantees in our business, but I think if we can show how... ‘Look, we did this six times for different clients and it always worked.’ ” Similarly, *Creative Director 5* suggested that using examples that are in some ways similar to the proposed advertising plan could help substantiate work: “I think sometimes you can go outside the category and show, you know, here’s what this client did, it was a huge risk, and here’s a case that, you know... here’s what happened afterwards. You can do it with your own, you know, we had this client, here’s what we did for them.” *Creative Director 8* also stated that this tool could

be used with both internal cases or referencing work of other agencies – as long as there is an analogy between the two cases: “Well, you can review analogous cases where, you know, ‘Here’s situation, this is what they did, creatively, and here are the results, and so this was a...’ And we will do that with our own cases, we’ll talk about the [casual dining chain] story [...] And eventually the creation of the spokesperson, all that. So we use those as examples.” Some agencies even have formularized procedures of generating case studies: “We create our own case histories, it’s a very private process before... based on, we were doing these things... we are trying to pull the commonalities” (*Account Planner 2*).

Another way this pseudo-professionalization tool is used is more indirect. The track-record of the agency serves as a form of legitimation. The underlying logic is, however, the same as in the case of using analogous examples: if it worked in the past, it will also be effective in the future. Success, however it is defined, seems to mute concerns about the knowledge base, at least temporarily. Needless to say, the track record argument is just as tenuous as the use of campaign analogies; nevertheless, it seems to have a positive effect on advertiser clients. *Creative Director 8* asserted that the agency’s past successes were one of the best source of justification for future work: “You know, I think that there is a sorting out that clients go through if they wind up with an agency that does work that stands out, they are there because of the agency’s track record and doing work that stands out. [...] A lot of times clients will go to an agency because they like the work of the agency.” *Creative Director 4* also suggested that referencing the agency’s track record was a common part of their new business pitching practices:

You know, one thing that has worked really well for us when we were in a new business pitch is to... is we take a telephone that speed-dials, it’s already been programmed to speed-dial six of clients and we hand it to the prospective client and say, “You want to know how this worked with these people? Call any of these six people and find out.” And I think that has been a real good tool for us because

clients like to talk to other clients and they like the security of knowing that we've been successful for other people.

To summarize, even if using analogous examples or the agency's track record is epistemologically questionable tool for justification, it seems to have a positive pseudo-professionalization effect.

Summary and discussion

This chapter has argued that, despite the fact that advertising cannot be considered a full-fledged profession because of the inadequacies in its theoretical knowledge base and its meta-theoretical presuppositions, the industry still operates in a professionalization context. Advertising is a knowledge-based service industry that has to handle knowledge claims even if it is skeptical and cynical about the validity of such claims.

It has been shown that advertiser clients do express professionalization needs. Advertisers have needs for certainty in the form of esoteric and theoretical knowledge as well as its empirical manifestation: a measurement system. In other words, the dynamics of professionalization still apply to advertising and the industry has to adapt and respond to these pressures in the lack of a classic theoretical base.

One professionalization agent, the use of commercial market research, has been considered a potential solution. In the opinion of ad practitioners, however, the use of market research to validate advertising claims is a less than perfect tool. Reasons include the perception that market research is only used on a basic theoretical level, that copytesting underlines the ad business' professional vulnerability and is paid for by clients, and that ad practitioners have serious epistemological concerns about the validity of research.

The value of market research tools for advertising agencies lies in its tactical, utilitarian use, not its inherent characteristics. Ad practitioners use research opportunistically, if and when it supports the claims to be made about proposed projects. The use of market research lends an ‘air of science’ to agency practice, but whenever it interferes with the autonomy of advertising work, it is vehemently rejected. These findings correspond to those of Cronin (2004a), who suggests that “practitioners engagement in research is directed less at unveiling the ‘truths’ of the consumer – most practitioners (and indeed clients) are dubious about the possibilities of achieving this and freely admit their own ignorance. [...] Most research is thus directed by pragmatic, short-term aims of producing acceptable material that can be used to pitch a campaign” (p. 350).

Agencies are not always in a position to be able to control how market research is used; and what they perceive as “misuses” of research are the prime sources of knowledge conflicts with clients and within the agency. Such a situation and the fact that agencies themselves fundamentally question the legitimacy of certain market research tools (copytesting, in particular) make it a less than perfect professionalization agent.

In order to avert immediate crises in professional legitimation, ad practitioners have developed other tools besides the use of market research. All these attempts are rhetorical/impression management tools to overcome the fundamental difficulty ad agencies have with professional legitimation. Some precursors of this idea in the literature are Baur’s (1949) concept of “ceremonialism” and “pseudo-science” (p. 359) and Alvesson’s (1994) “impressions of professionalism” (p. 545).

Seven pseudo-professionalization tactics have been identified:

1. Selling creative strategy
2. As if creative were logical
3. Partners not vendors
4. Agency philosophies
5. Practical authority source
6. Social construction of ad reality
7. Worked for others

Pseudo-professionalization techniques are “professionalization” tools because they deal with knowledge and are deployed in response to clients’ professionalization needs. They are “pseudo” because they are epistemologically insufficient solutions to the professionalization problem of the advertising industry. They represent “mutations” of a semi-profession, which as the results of the previous chapters have shown, cannot fully realize a professionalization project.

Can these pseudo-professionalization tactics last? Can they resolve the ad industry’s pressing professionalization problems? The answer is likely no. Pseudo-professionalization tactics are fuzzy and local solutions, which resolve acute problems in legitimation. They are incapable of establishing and supporting institutional markers of professionalism; nor do they have the support of academic science, arguably the most authoritative source of legitimation in our modern world.

The social construction of ad reality, the development of a “pseudo-science,” a second knowledge-base cobbled together by consultant gurus, agency theoreticians and business book writers are the most likely candidates for longer term survival. The questionable validity of this “second knowledge” in advertising and marketing, however, may ultimately undermine this

pseudo-professionalization tool as a source for professionalism. Although this current dissertation has only scratched the surface of the social construction of ad reality, following the footsteps of former descriptions of the importance of inter-occupational social norms (Hirota 1995; Soar 2000), future research is needed to explore its diverse manifestations (e.g., business books, conference presentations, consultant philosophies, advertising awards judging sessions, informal communications).

In short, the advertising industry remains a semi-profession, which despite the opportunistic use of market research applications and knowledge-like tools of impression management ('pseudo-professionalization tactics'), cannot compensate for the lack of theoretical and esoteric knowledge base needed for classic professional status. The example of advertising shows that the dynamics of professionalization apply to occupations that may never reach such a status and result in interesting "mutations" of the professionalization project – to be further discovered and described by the sociology of occupations.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION

Summary of findings

This dissertation has investigated practitioner theories of advertising. It has sought to answer three research questions: (1) what advertising practitioners know about how advertising works, (2) what practitioners think about the possibility and nature of knowledge about advertising, and (3) how they use their knowledge to cope with their clients' professional needs. The study has used the most influential theory on occupational knowledge in the sociology of occupations: the theory of professions – as well as grounded theory for theory discovery. The motivation behind the investigation has been to understand the growing disjuncture between academia and practice in advertising. The objective was to situate this discrepancy in the context of practitioner knowledge rather than the traditional understanding of communication problems, personal attitudes and organizational structures.

The study has uncovered the content of practitioner theories and concluded that ad practitioners' general theory of advertising is a "Truncated Hierarchy Model," a theory that involves two steps of communication: (Step 1) an initial break-through and (Step 2) a subsequent persuasion stage. Ad practitioners also believe in a mid-level theory that is closely aligned with the Persuasion Knowledge Model (Friestad and Wright 1994): they believe that consumers build up mental schemas about how advertising practitioners attempt to persuade them and these mental schemas, in turn, function as effective barriers to advertising effectiveness. Further,

respondents described the boundary conditions influencing their basic theories and explained that “domains” – strategic objective, product category, medium used, historical time period – influence what paths get activated in the basic model.

Ad practitioners also have mental constructs about what types of advertising work better than others. The key moderator is creativity. As argued, creativity is such a powerful directive effectively suppressing any other potential “rule” in advertising that it can be conceptualized as ideological. Although there are many other “rules” about the generation of creative content in advertising, ad practitioners only accept ones (such as entertainment, humor, simplicity, and relevance, etc.) that do not interfere with the ideology of creativity. Moderators that are in conflict with creativity (and cause what ad practitioners call “formulaicness”) are vehemently rejected.

Practitioners also have strong beliefs about the nature and preconditions of knowledge in advertising (practitioner meta-theories). In accord with the ideology of creativity, they believe that the “only rule is: there are no rules.” Respondents enumerated ontological and epistemological reasons why this is the case.

In their view, on a moderator level there should be no rules because advertising is by its ontological nature an innovative, artful and skillful activity and therefore not modellable by science (practitioners do allow for basic level theories, however). Ad practitioners are also skeptical epistemologically: they have doubts about the reliability and validity of our modes of knowing about advertising. They are frustrated by the fact that the most important explanandum of all, purchase response is very difficult to link to advertising; they believe that knowledge about advertising is more similar to common sense than scientific understanding, which in turn (in both its academic and commercial market research variants) suffers from serious external

validity problems. In short, practitioners are skeptical about the status of knowledge in advertising, especially when it comes to “moderator-focused theories.”

These findings led to the conclusion that the advertising industry had a professionalization problem. According to the sociological theory of professions, occupations that aspire for a professional status should have an esoteric and theoretical knowledge base. As this study has shown, ad practitioners do not believe this is possible. Even though there seems to be a practitioner consensus in terms of how advertising works on a basic level, this knowledge is not sufficiently extensive and complicated (esoteric) to be the basis of a profession. What would allow for this complexity (the esoteric practice of the actual production of ads), on the other hand, cannot be modeled by predictive theories (“the only rule is: there are no rules”). This professional paradox of the advertising industry forces ad “professionals” to develop pseudo-professionalization tactics that satisfy immediate knowledge needs of clients, even though they do not represent a permanent solution. In the case of advertising, because of the industry’s fundamental legitimation problems, professionalization dynamics have resulted in a mutated semi-professional formation.

Where do these findings leave us with regards to the academician-practitioner gap, our original starting point? While the implications of this study’s findings have to be couched in modest terms, this dissertation has advanced our understanding of the gap. Traditional recommendations for the narrowing of the academician-practitioner gap implicitly assume that advertising is a full-fledged profession. The most important insight of professionalism for the present study is that it is only professions that have seamless knowledge flows from the academic knowledge base to practice. This is precisely what distinguishes professions from occupations: they have an esoterically complex and academically validated theoretical

knowledge base (Abbott 1988; MacDonald 1995). It is the most significant corollary of the findings of this dissertation that the implicit assumption that advertising is (or can become) a full-fledged profession is erroneous. Advertising (as ad practitioners have testified) cannot launch a professionalization project the same way medicine, law, or theology can – it lacks firm knowledge bases of legitimation.

The reason why this is the case, according to practitioners, is not because of some extraneous circumstance such as problems with the organizational structures of the academic establishment or personal attitudes. The main problem is with advertising knowledge *itself*. Practitioners do not believe that what would be the most important to know (moderators in the basic theory of advertising effectiveness) is not possible to know theoretically. It is perceived to be ideologically damaging and *counterproductive* in terms of market effectiveness to assume moderator-focused theories in advertising. The underlying reason is the creative nature and the ensuing creative ideology of advertising as well as epistemological concerns of arriving at this knowledge.

The academician-practitioner gap is therefore natural. Advertising is not a profession and we are probably better off not expecting to act professional-like knowledge flows if that is the case.

This somewhat negative conclusion raises the question: if advertising by definition is unprofessionalizable, what possible implications can be drawn for academic research or advertising practice. After all, if the gap is natural because of problems *inherent* in advertising knowledge, there is very little to do about it. Such a conclusion, however, would be pushing the argument too far. Ad practitioners do use basic and mid-level theories that are influenced by academic thinking (even if this link is not acknowledged by them). Commercial market research

also relies on such theories when developing measurement systems, which in turn do function as proofs in client negotiations (even if they cannot fully professionalize advertising). Ad practitioners also seem to have some level of naiveté and confusion in their meta-theories about what the knowledge status of advertising academia (or any academia for that matter) is. Implications therefore should be couched in terms of a mutual “re-alignment” instead of imperatives of redirection for a single party (either practitioners or academics). Both practitioners and academic researchers may want to realign some of the emphases in their thinking about advertising knowledge, to be able to develop the best possible and admittedly only semi-professional relationship.

Implications of the research

The findings of this study offer implication for both academic researchers and ad practitioners.

Implications for academic researchers. Academic research, if willing to be relevant for advertising practitioners (Hunt 2002a), should focus less on moderator-focused theories involving advertising content and more on basic or mid-level theories of how advertising works. Because of practitioners’ strongly held belief that the essence of advertising is creativity and that that is the only moderator that matters (“ideology of creativity”), any moderator-focused theories will be resisted on external validity or ideological grounds. The focus on the basic-level is also important because it helps commercial market research companies to provide improved semi-professional measurement systems as important sources of legitimation for the industry.

Academic research should explore topics within the basic and mid-level realm that have higher priorities among practitioners. The realignment of topical interests (e. g. more focus on

emotions in advertising, not simply cognitive processing; extended research in the Persuasion Knowledge Model area) would certainly be of great value.

Domain-specific boundary conditions are recommended to be outlined in research. As our findings have shown, practitioners strongly believe in the variability of the basic models based on typical domain-driven scenarios. More domain-specific theorizing is needed in academic research as well. Academic research has to pay special attention to the domain of time. Timeliness, and the idea that the workings of advertising may differ over historical time periods needs to be considered by academic researchers. The eternally valid, time-independent mother-science of psychology need to be adjusted and complemented by the time-sensitivity of the historian.

Academic researchers need to carefully investigate the guarantees of external validity in their studies. As practitioners' epistemological meta-theories have suggested, external validity is one of the industry's main concerns. This should come as no surprise, accepting the fact that advertising research is an applied field. The specifications of external validity (even if they need to be intentionally jeopardized for the purposes of internal validity or reliability) need to be clear.

As many others pointed out in the past, academic researchers need to make relevant academic research findings more available for ad practitioners. The recent developments of information technology should be the newest frontier on the rediscovery of relevance.

While academicians need to remain practitioner-focused and conduct problem-oriented research (Hunt 2002a), they need to consider other constituencies such as the government and policy makers. It is a straightforward corollary of the argument that advertising is only a semi-profession that it needs only to be semi-practitioner focused. Research made relevant for

audiences other than ad practitioners should serve advertising academia's own professionalization efforts.

Implications for advertising practitioners. Ad practitioners need to be more aware what the limits of their creative ideology are. The “only rule is no rule” argument is only applicable to moderator-focused theories in practitioner thinking, but it tends to “overflow” its natural boundaries and may result in a blanket denial of any regularities in advertising. As the data have shown, practitioners do believe in basic level theories but even these may become “under denial” among less discerning members of the ad practitioner community.

In connection with the previous, ad practitioners need to be aware of the benefits of even a semi-professional status. Developments in the basic-, or mid-level understanding of how advertising works should be welcomed by ad professionals as they do not threaten the ideology of creativity and do serve as semi-professional tools, among other things, through the improvements of commercial market research services. Ad practitioners should fight anti-intellectualism in the industry, supported by the realization that basic-level learning does not endanger creativity.

Practitioners need to be more critical of certain pseudo-professionalization tactics, especially, the uncritical acceptance of “second knowledge” sources and “practical authority.” Even though these sources may seem to abound in external validity, the real epistemological status of such knowledge forms is normally unknown. They need to be aware of the rhetorical pseudo-professionalization tactics the generators of these sources themselves may have (fuelled by their own interjurisdictional struggle with academia). It is just as important to scrutinize issues of validity and reliability in the case of the second knowledge base as it is in the case of the first.

Ad practitioners should be more discerning in their claims about the value of academic research. As our results have shown, ad practitioners are very critical of academic knowledge – without actually consulting these sources. Advancements in information technology should facilitate this process.

It is our contention that even though a full-fledged profession-type knowledge flow from advertising academia to practice cannot be achieved, the gap can be narrowed if these semi-professional re-alignments are realized. Ultimately, the gap will never disappear but it may become a lot narrower.

Research limitations and suggestions for future study

Limitations. As suggested above, the findings of this study are only exploratory and limited by the particulars of the methodology. The qualitative nature of this study does not allow for statistical generalizability. As stated by the objectives of this research, the main purpose of this investigation has been theory development and not theory verification. Future studies that use quantitative methodologies can further verify theoretical notions suggested by this study.

Another important limitation of the study is that it focuses on solely the agency-side of the business and reaches its conclusions based on agency-only data. Arguably, advertising agencies represent one of the most important groups in the advertising occupation and their knowledge-dynamics are key to the assessment of its professional status. However, investigations into other constituencies of the advertising occupation (advertising research consultancies, marketers' advertising departments, media planning agencies, television commercial production companies, etc.) might result in slightly different findings. All these

areas are rich sources of future investigation, which could complement the limited scope of this study.

This research was also limited by a single geographical area. Arguably, larger advertising centers such as New York, Chicago, San Francisco or global advertising hubs, such as London, Sao Paolo or Tokyo may add depth and variety to the findings.

This study was also focusing on the in-depth method. As suggested above, especially with regards to the notion of practitioners' "second knowledge base" archival analysis (both qualitative and quantitative) and ethnographic methods can further our knowledge in the area.

Research directions. Future research can advance and complement these exploratory findings.

First, the discovered theories of practitioner cognition (Truncated Hierarchy Model, practitioner meta-theories, pseudo-professionalization tactics) should be complemented by broader-scale research, potentially involving quantitative methodologies. Such an extension is necessary after the initial grounded discovery (Glaser and Strauss 1967) to evaluate and validate the uncovered theories.

Second, comparative differences within the advertising occupation need to be uncovered. A number of potential variables may predict differences in practitioner knowledge and its use. There is reason to hypothesize that practitioner knowledge may differ based on a) agency size, b) agency occupational groups (such as media planners, account managers, planners, creatives, researchers, etc.), c) segments of the ad industry (clients, suppliers) and d) individual attributes of the backgrounds of the informants (such as those with specific academic training in advertising versus those without). Such future extension, best investigated by quantitative survey methods, can add to both the depth and breadth of our understanding of practitioner theories.

Third, the investigation of printed forms of data, in the area of ad practitioners' "second knowledge" base, is another important future research avenue. Although the use of such sources was impractical for the present exploratory study, future studies can aim precisely at such sources.

And lastly, future studies may also wish to extend the topic of investigation and ask practitioners about non-advertising marketingcommunication forms (such as sales promotions, public relations, product placement/branded entertainment etc.) as well as their underlying assumptions about consumer behavior in general. In line with the suggestion under limitations, a methodological extension of the study (including quantitative survey development) can open up new research avenues.

Future research in the area, however, offers a much more important benefit than expanding our knowledge on a single topic. It ensures that academia is aligned with practitioner issues in the advertising and marketing industries. It serves as a gap-bridging exercise in itself. Indeed, the continuous expansion in our understanding of practitioners' knowledge forms is the best guarantee of a rich, relevant and interesting academic research knowledge base.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW GUIDE

[Background and ice-breakers:]

How did you get into advertising? Is it a career or a job for you? Select or drift?
How long have you been working in advertising/at this agency?
What formal or informal preparation had you gone through before you got into advertising? [if planned career choice]
What are the domains of expertise a successful advertising professional [depending on type of position: account executive, account planner/researcher, creative professional] has to have?

[RQ1: What theories do advertising practitioners have about the workings of advertising?]

[concept: content of practitioner theories]

[grand tour question:] **How do you think advertising works?**

[probes:]

What makes a good ad? What makes it work? [If answer is “creative,” ask why and how one knows if a campaign is creative.]
Do you have a personal philosophy of how advertising works? What is it?
Does your agency/company have a particular philosophy of advertising? Does it differ from what your previous agency/company believed in? Are there any company documents explaining this philosophy?
If you had to explain how advertising works briefly to someone inexperienced in advertising, what would be the most important things you would mention?
[If unresponsive:] Do you agree that advertising works this way: [probe specific theory: hierarchy-of-effects, low-involvement, etc.]? Why or why not?
[If unresponsive:] If you compare yourself and someone who is not an advertising professional, how would you say you differ? What makes you a professional in advertising?
Are there different ways in which advertising works? Or does it work basically the same way with most of products/services?
If there are differences in how advertising works, based on some circumstances, what are these, and how does advertising work under these circumstances?
Do you think the ways in which advertising works changed a lot over time? In what ways did (the reception of) advertising change?
What are the tactics that work especially well in your experience? [probe some of these: sex/humor/fear/celebrities/music/shock and other moderators]

[RQ2: How do the formal characteristics of practitioner theories compare to social scientific theories of advertising?]

[concept: formal characteristics of practitioner theories]

[grand tour question:] **How do you know if you are right about how advertising works?**

What is the source of this knowledge?

[probes]

Do you ever discuss what makes a good ad with your colleagues? Is this a topic for discussion at all?

How do you know if a particular campaign is going to be effective? How do you know if your philosophy of advertising [if any] is working?

If you reflect on it for a moment: what are the sources of your personal philosophy about how advertising works? [probe: authorities, trade press, experience, academic research]

How does your agency use copytesting/evaluative research? What is your opinion about research in advertising?

Do you find the trade press/colleagues/academic literature helpful? Do you read them/use them? [If yes:] How do you rate these sources in terms of importance? Can you give an example when you used something from these sources?

[RQ3: How do advertising practitioners use theories in their everyday work?]

[concept: the uses of practitioner theories, the social life of practitioner theories]

[grand tour question:] **Do you ever use your ideas about how advertising works when interacting with others?**

[probes]

Is it ever a problem to convince others about what you believe is right in terms of advertising effectiveness?

Could you give an example of a campaign that caused a lot of internal/external conflict? What were the reasons?

Do people disagree about how advertising works within your agency? [if yes:] What happens in the case of these disagreements?

How do you convince clients that you are right?

Are ideas about how advertising works part of campaign presentations? Are they used to try to convince clients?

APPENDIX B

CONSENT FORM

I agree to take part in a research study titled “Practitioner theories at the advertising agency and client advertising department,” which is being conducted by Gergely Nyilasy (University of Georgia, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, 706-340-3657, nyilasy@uga.edu) under the direction of Dr. Leonard N. Reid (University of Georgia, Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication, 706-542-7833, lnreid@uga.edu.)

My participation is voluntary; I can stop taking part at any time without giving any reason, and without penalty. I can ask to have information related to me returned to me, removed from the research records, or destroyed.

The purpose of this study is to further our understanding of advertising professionals’ knowledge about how advertising works. I will not benefit directly from this research; my participation, however, may contribute to the advancement of advertising education and practices.

If I volunteer to take part in this study, I will be asked to do the following things:

- Answer the questions of researcher.
- Researcher may contact me for a follow-up.

The interview will last 45-60 minutes. No discomforts or stresses are expected. No risks are expected. I understand that the information I provide in this study may be used as part of future published research. The results of this participation will be confidential, and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without my prior consent, unless otherwise required by law.

The interview will be audio taped and transcribed. The audiotapes will be destroyed immediately after transcription but no later than **December 2005**. The transcripts resulting from this study will be kept indefinitely in secure office storage for purposes of data analysis. In the research report, all individual and company names will be replaced by pseudonyms, and all individually identifiable information will be removed.

The researcher will answer any further questions about the research, now or during the course of the project, and can be reached by telephone at 706-340-3657.

My signature below indicates that the researcher has answered all of my questions to my satisfaction and that I consent to volunteer for this study. I have been given a copy of this form.

Gergely Nyilasy

Name of Researcher

Telephone: 706-340-3657

Email: nyilasy@uga.edu

Signature

Date

Name of Participant

Signature

Date

Please sign both copies, keep one and return one to the researcher.

Additional questions or problems regarding your rights as a research participant should be addressed to Chris A. Joseph, Ph.D., Human Subjects Office, University of Georgia, 612 Boyd Graduate Studies Research Center, Athens, Georgia 30602-7411; Telephone (706) 542-3199; E-mail address: IRB@uga.edu.

APPENDIX C

EXHIBIT OF PRACTITIONER'S AESTHETIC THINKING (FROM PRICKEN 2002)

- How can a positive aspect of the product be suggested without words?
- What can be associated with the product to communicate its features on a metaphorical level?
- How can comparative juxtaposition show a problem situation and its solution?
- How can accumulation or repetition depict the product image in an attention grabbing way?
- How can the benefit be shown at a glance by making something radically larger or smaller?
- How can a problem situation be dramatized by switching cause and effect?
- How can attention be attracted through omission in headlines, copy, spoken dialogue or TV spots?
- How can a paradoxical or contradictory statement reinforce the product image?
- How can you use a provocative allusion or double meaning to make the target group think?
- What elements from different historical periods could show the benefit in a positive light?
- How can playing with extreme close-up or extreme distance communicate something about the product or service?
- How can a parody or spoof help to develop an entertaining story round the product?
- How can symbols and signs convey a complete message without word?
- How can you involve the target group in a game that puts the product center-stage?
- How can you stage an everyday situation that makes your product the centre of attention?
- What stylistic conventions can you use to spin the most absurd story possible around the product?
- What slang phrases, metaphors or turns of phrase could be translated literally into a visual image that will get the product or service noticed?
- How can separate parts of the product or packaging be altered to depict the benefit in metaphorical terms?
- In what unusual contexts could the product be used to promote its strengths?
- How can previous statements about the product be given a double meaning?
- How can you play with the typography to represent the USP in an effective visual image?
- Rhymes, sayings or proverbs, quotations, alliteration, triplets, chiasmus, neologism, non sequitur, adapt an existing expression, adapt a proverb, personification, synaesthesia
- What sort of context will make a particular feature or function appear worthwhile and useful, and so show something in a new and positive light?
- How can one thing be expressed in terms of another, so that the connection casts new light on the thing described?
- How can an unusual advertising format be used to integrate the setting and the message?
- How can an outside installation be used to tell a story about a product in the open air or in a large space?