

A new triadic creative role for advertising industry: A study of creatives' role identity in the rise of social media advertising

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Abstract

Within the social networks online, consumers are no longer adopting a passive role in relation to dominant media; they have become a part of the media, constructing and promoting cultural meanings and values for consumption within their consumer culture. In this new era, advertising creatives were having increasingly direct contact with clients rather than depending on account managers. However, the question of how advertising organizations need to change in response to this changing environment has not been discussed extensively. Building upon the key experiences of advertising creatives in this empirical research, a triadic structure of advertising creatives' emergent role that was identified from the analyses of in-depth interview data in different types and levels of current advertising organizations. The contributions to both theory and practice in advertising and organizational studies are examined. The triadic role of advertising creatives identified in this study help to shape contemporary advertising creatives' identities in the social media advertising era, providing insights into employee perspectives on organizational roles. Although this study only offered a micro-level perspective on advertising creatives' practices and advertising organizations, which is still relatively rare in advertising and organizational literature.

Keywords:

Social media advertising; Advertising creatives; Role identity; Change management;
Creative industry

Introduction

The rapid adoption of social media advertising strategies has created challenges and opportunities for consumer culture, the marketplace and the advertising ecology. The use of social media advertising strategy has had notable influences on the advertising industry globally. This study explains these influences as extending beyond technical areas: social media also influences marketing and advertising practices by shaping consumer culture, and changes in consumer culture serve as a catalyst for change in advertising creatives' individual and collective working practices, roles and identities.

Under this new era, advertising creatives were having increasingly direct contact with clients rather than depending on account managers (McLeod et al., 2011). Nicholson and West (1988) suggested the need for role development as well as personal change among advertising creatives. This study attempted to support for their arguments, showing how creative roles appeared to be developing in the social media advertising era and also how individual advertising creatives were taking responsibility for learning new skills and ways of thinking about their work, and also for developing their role identities. Changes involved *'reactive change in the individual, ranging from minor alterations in daily routines and habits, to major developments in relationships and self-image'* (Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 105). Thus, this study was expected to deepen understanding of how social media are influencing marketing and advertising practice (Choi, 2011; Hill & Moran, 2011), offering a detailed examination of their implications for advertising creativity and the advertising development process (Allen, 2009). The study also highlights the importance of networking and collaborative relationships between agencies and clients (Grant & McLeod, 2007) in the social media advertising era. The triadic creative role identified in this study suggests that advertising creatives have to expand their working practices by doing more tasks and collaborating with more experts in the social media advertising era. Likewise, this study was also aiming to inform creative industry practices in general, and advertising and marketing practices in particular. It provides insights for advertising organization managers that could be used in structuring creative departments for effective performance in the social media advertising era.

The emergence of social media

Social media have been integrated into many aspects of people's daily lives, from personal to social and business activities (Ellison et al., 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Muntinga et al., 2011). A phenomenal proliferation of social media platforms in recent years and the dramatic

increases in consumers' usage of these have had a significant impact on the media landscape (Acar & Puntoni, 2016; Choi, 2011; Hill & Moran, 2011). Before discussing how social media have reshaped the advertising landscape, it is important to establish what is meant by the term 'social media'. Social media, describe by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008, p. 5) as *'the convergence of user commentary with video, photos, and music sharing, all present in a simple, user-friendly format'*, have provided consumers with the vehicle for such mass dissemination of their content and viewpoints (Interactive Advertising Bureau 2008, p. 5). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) further defined social media as the platform that builds on user experiences and technology, enabled by a set of Internet-based applications and Web 2.0 for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In other words, social media connect people on the Internet with the support of Web 2.0 and a range of applications that facilitate users' interactions, participations and collaborations. Researchers (e.g. Schultz, 2016; Kumar & Gupta, 2016) believes that this situation would lead to a 'reverse' of the buyer and seller roles in future advertising practices. Moreover, social media enable the rapid growth and distribution of user-generated content (UGC). The Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008) defined UGC as *'any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media professionals'* (p.1). The term UGC gained its popularity in 2005, and is usually used to describe the diverse forms of media content that are generated by Internet users and published through the social media. According to the organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2007, UGC consists of three basic features: First, the content should be created by non-media professionals, such as end users, ordinary people, hobbyists or other kinds of amateurs (OECD 2007, p. 8). Second, UGC is created material that should involve the creative efforts of non-media users' to develop or modify existing content. Third, UGC is material that is uploaded to the Internet and can be accessed by the public through online platforms. Apparently, the popularity of social media platforms is indeed driving the social engagement of users/consumers. There is no doubt that consumers have become more reliant on social media everyday social activities and consumption. Consumers are even over-engaged in social media in both professional and personal manners nowadays (Scheinbaum, 2016). The proliferation of Internet penetration and broadband subscription, as well as the popularity of digital mobile devices, have made significant impact and changes to the media landscape. At the same time they have shifted consumers' behavior. Indeed, social media are not only a form of technological advancement; they also play a role in shaping consumer culture, and this can have an impact on the marketplace as well as on the advertising ecology. Thus, the rise of social media and its advertising strategies has created challenges for the traditional advertising ecology (Sheehan & Morrison, 2009).

The change of consumer culture and advertising landscape

Consumer culture, then, is concerned with inter-relationships between consumers' symbolic expressions through the market and their economic, political and social resources. In Arnould's and Thompson's (2005) highly influential paper, consumer culture is presented as a social arrangement in the marketplace, creating relationships between social resources and culture as it is lived, and between meaningful ways of life and material and symbolic resources available to people. According to Kozinets (2001), consumer culture constitutes an interconnected system that uses commercial images, texts and objects to create a collective sense of consumers' environments and their experiences through the construction of overlapping meanings. Consumers negotiate and interpreted meanings, particularly in relation to their social roles, relationships and situations. Therefore, consumer culture shapes consumers' feelings, actions and thoughts, and eventually their interpretations and patterns of behavior in the marketplace (Holt, 1997; Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2001; Kozinets, 2002). Apparently, with the emergence of social media, consumers have shifted from being relatively passive members of the consumer culture, to having a leading position in actively creating social (rather than simply personal) meanings and promoting these meanings to their communities through digital networks. In other words, social media, used and shaped by consumers, form a multiplicity of cultural meanings and these meanings affect others within the market, including marketers and advertisers.

Today, many consumers around the world are connected with each other online whenever and wherever possible through social media. More and more consumers are engaged actively in online brand-related activities with a wide variety of social media platforms, such as blogs, social networking and video sharing sites (Mutinga et. al, 2011). Social media have indeed brought changes to the entire consumer culture, which has eventually changed the advertising landscape.

Mass media play an essential role in formulating or articulating dominant interests in society. Advertising is seen to play a crucial role in media industries, which in turn shape consumer cultures through commercial broadcasting and newspaper publishing (Kawashima, 2006). Percy et al. (2001) highlighted that advertising involves turning consumers towards a particular brand by cultivating long-term positive brand attitudes and promotion. In other words, advertising, to a certain extent, provides a kind of social education in meaning production while seeking to stimulate consumers' brand-related desires and social aspirations (Baudrillard, 1988). Advertising also represents a cultural world, people and the complexity of experience (MacRury, 2009). Advertisements embody sign systems and display layered levels of meaning in relation to social beliefs and cultural contexts (Leiss et al., 2005). In

view of how advertising influences consumer culture, some researchers (e.g. Aldridge, 2003) have claimed that it is one of the major mechanisms for creating needs in a consumer culture. Put simply, the power of advertising is that it appears everywhere in television, radio, newspapers, magazines and, nowadays, new social media. Advertising helps consumers to achieve their desires by creating symbolic meanings for consumption (e.g. Bauman, 1996).

However, the emergence of social media, particularly among the younger generation, creates a perfect platform for the construction and communication of self-identity and offers a new type of reference group against the dominant influences of advertising and marketers. Loudon (1993) has highlighted earlier that, social media can support the rights of consumers, and help them to become more powerful in relation to the marketplace. From the perspective of the socio-historic patterning of consumption, recent research has paid attention to consumers' experiences of social media. The emergence of social media has affected consumption practices as well as consumers' belief systems. Nonetheless, digital, online networks have become a meaningful and powerful medium of communication, and this social phenomenon affects communication in the market as well as the advertising ecology (Hanna et al, 2011).

Advertising ecology responses to the rise of social media and consumers' power

Changes in consumers' values relating to the media pose both opportunities and challenges for creative industries such as the entertainment media, marketing communication, the advertising industry, and film and television production. Focusing on the advertising context, the media environment has altered the relationship between marketers and consumers. Jenkins (2006) described the phenomenon of 'media convergence', where content is communicated and connected across diverse media within a digital network, and where content flows in two directions: top-down from the corporate world and bottom-up from the consumers. Jenkins further suggested that there are three principal components of convergence culture: media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence. Building upon Deuze's (2006) and Jenkins' (2006) concepts, Sheehan and Morrison (2009) described a new phenomenon which is more than a technological shift. The 'confluence of culture' embraces traditional and interactive forms of communication as well as consumers' increasing engagement with mediated content, and is in the process of drawing technological, cultural, economical and social impacts together. By a large, the rapid growth of social media has provided both opportunities and challenges for advertisers (Truong et al, 2010). On one hand, social media have permitted advertising professionals to interact with consumers and provide them with a richer experience through attaining direct feedback and content exchange. They also provide valuable platforms for viral advertising and relationship building (Utz, 2009). On the other

hand, social media have led to a fragmentation of consumers, making it more difficult in some respects for advertisers to reach their target audience and negative word-of-mouth can spread rapidly among consumers (Brown, et al, 2007). In general, advertising professionals have not had a good understanding of how to develop effective appeal and strategies for brand-related interactions on social media (Cova & Pace 2006). A more complex and blurred line has been found between media, production and agency services in traditional and digital spaces, so that clients and their advertising agencies have had to revisit brand strategies in the digital age (Burton, 2009). Moreover, digital and social media are seen to have fundamental strategic implications for the organisation of advertising organizations and the industry in general (e.g. Taylor, 2017; Creamer, 2012).

Many advertising professionals believe that the digital media platform is due to become a dominant one in the next decade (Coghlan, 2007). Overall, it seems that both technological and behavioural changes in consumers have had significant impacts on the advertising industry, requiring marketers and agencies to develop new ways of engaging consumers in the communication process. Both large and small-scale advertising organizations are paying increasing attention to social media for marketing and advertising activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Social media are also attractive to advertising professionals because of the relatively low cost of reaching consumers, the potential for greater efficiency, and the ability to engage in more timely and direct-contact communication than is offered by most traditional media tools (Choi, 2011).

The question of how advertising organizations need to change in response to this changing environment has not been discussed extensively. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) highlighted the creative challenges faced by the advertising organizations and creatives in the evolving confluence culture. They suggested that confluence culture requires traditional advertising organizations to expand their ranges of services and to seek new ways to increase audience engagement in communication. They identified four major challenges to the advertising industry, in the areas of message design, consumer engagement, integration of social media, and the development of creatives' talents and skill-sets. Based on these challenges that advertising agencies have been facing, Sheehan and Morrison (2009) argued that organizations have to move beyond the model of the 'mass message' and to recognize the importance of one-to-one communication and consumer interactions. They highlighted the importance of connecting and creating conversations between consumers and brands, with social media being a useful platform for both marketers and consumers to disseminate content and collaborate in creating rich and engaging brand stories.

Research Methodology

This empirical study used a qualitative study by a set of qualitative interviews in different levels and types of advertising organizations. This method was possible to illustrate the value of ethnographic practices for studying creative organizations and culture, contributing to a better understanding of advertising culture and practices (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). The interviews involved the construction and negotiation of meaning between the researcher and advertising creatives, and this suggests that the appropriate form of generalization here is reader analytical generalization, which refers to linking the findings from a particular case to a theory (Flick, 2007). Open-ended questions are used in the interviews in order to encourage elaboration and further conversation, and ‘floating prompts’ (Gibson, 1988). Most of these interactions with practitioners in the advertising development process involved conversation (Kelly et al., 2005); discourse analysis offers insights into agency practice, and the value of this approach was evident when examining metaphors used by participants, such as ‘hired hand’. Moreover, the interpretive and qualitative analytical method has been adopted to analyse the qualitative data gathered from the in-depth interviews

The study covered four key types and levels of advertising creatives (See Figure 1), they are (1) multinational full-service organizations; (2) independent full-service organizations; (3) multinational digital organizations; and (4) independent digital organizations. Regarding the levels of interviewees, they are (1) executive creative director/creative director; (2) senior art director/interactive art director/copywriter; (3) art director/copywriter; and (4) assistant art director/interactive designer. These four levels of advertising professionals corresponded to (1) management level; (2) middle-management level; (3) senior-operational level; and (4) operational level.

Figure 1: Sampling – list of interviewees

Discussion and data analysis

This study has explored creatives' perspectives on their role changes in response to the rise of social media advertising. They saw themselves as moving from playing a leading role in creative idea generation, to facilitating creative ideas and their implementation. Consumer empowerment and participation in marketing activities on social media platforms, and the growing range of technical expertise required in creating and implementing social media advertising solutions has meant that creatives are often no longer taking care of the creative idea generation solely. This points to the need for creatives to negotiate their creative identities in the social media advertising era. There are four key insights from creatives' perspectives have been found in this study, they are (1) consumers in social media era – from creatives' perspectives; (2) advertising creatives' evolving workgroup identification; (3) the shift from creative production to strategic facilitation; and (4) challenge and opportunities in social media advertising era.

Consumers in social media era – from creatives' perspectives

Most of the creatives interviewed acknowledged that consumers now play a much more important role in the creative process than ever before, and this has created a fundamental shift in the relationships between advertising creatives and consumers. Before the rise of social media, advertising messages were disseminated through mass media such as TV and print. Consumers were seen as passive receivers of advertising messages, which were created by advertising agencies and approved by clients. Today, digital technology and social media platforms have empowered consumers to play an active role in engaging in brand activities. Social media also facilitate marketers' communicating with their consumers directly. According to Muk (2013), there has been an increase in social media advertising budgets. Advertising budget is indeed always a challenge to marketers (Danenberget al., 2016). Marketers want to emphasize brand promotions on websites and social media because they believe that social media facilitate more direct communication with their consumers. Consumers' comments that user-generated reviews and recommendations on blogs have become more important for marketers and consumers' attitude and advocacy often create a significant impact on brand development (Luo & Zhang, 2013). During the advertising planning and production process, consumers were not likely to be involved until the creative ideas has been finalized, unless advertisers and agency planners drew on consumer research to gain insights and feedback in formulating the advertising strategy for their brands. Some researchers (e.g. Stewart & Hess, 2011) have even criticized the relevance of using consumer research in decision making about advertising plans. Nonetheless, there were comments about

the limited opportunities for consumers to have direct interaction with advertisers or advertising agencies. The interviewee FI/CD2, a creative director from a traditional advertising agency, explained that traditional advertising planning does not involve individual consumer's opinions other than through consumer research reports. This implies that consumers have no involvement in the creative design process.

FI/CD2 *"We (traditional advertising) didn't really involve consumers' opinions before, I mean, except the consumer reports for advertising planning...our old concept, we create what consumers need, right?"*

Previous research (e.g. Stewart & Hess, 2011) has noted that many advertising creatives do not like the idea of advertising research or revising their work based on consumers' comments. Many creatives' comments, in this study, indicated that consumers, who do not have proper training in advertising and who do not therefore fully understand advertising and marketing, are not really capable of evaluating advertising. Moreover, creative freedom and creative impact would be undermined if advertisers rely too much on consumer feedback. With the rise of social media, however, consumers are co-creating advertising and marketing activities (Lessig, 2008) and social media can be a good platform for conducting consumer research (Smith, 2009). Creatives see consumers' activities on social networks as mirroring trends and fashion; for example, blogs could be described as 'fashionable friends' (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011).

The creatives interviewed in this study saw consumers as being well connected on diverse social media platforms, informing, exchanging and interacting with each other, and generally forming powerful social communities than was ever possible before. This meant that consumers were engaged actively in brand activities, and even in advertising planning and creative processes. From a creative perspective, the empowerment of consumers in relation to brands and marketing activities presented both opportunities and challenges, and required them to pay particular attention to consumers using online media. They saw social media and social networking sites as providing useful insights about consumer interactions (Shih & Sanchez, 2009) and as helping marketers to build brands by tapping into consumer-networked relations. For example, DI/SIAD2, a senior art director from a digital agency, highlighted the importance of reviewing consumers' comments over the social networks in order to improve their creative processes and output.

DI/SIAD2 *"I am regularly checking the consumers' comments on social networks, Nowadays, they (consumers) are so active to criticise advertising campaigns...we must take these comments into account in order to improve our creative output".*

Previous research has suggested that creatives view their work as a vehicle for promoting their own talents and personal career objectives (McLeod et al, 2011). Given the changing role that consumers are playing in the development of brands and advertising, however, creative success was not always based only on their own creative ideas or creative executions. FI/CD1, a creative director from a multinational advertising agency, suggested that consumers nowadays are not only playing an active role in commenting on advertising campaigns, but are also a source of inspiration and advertising ideas.

FI/CD1 *“Nowadays consumers give us (creatives) a lot of new ideas, they tell us what they want, what their interests are, over the social media. We (creatives) only need to be aware of these comments”.*

Similarly, DI/CD1, creative director of an independent digital agency, suggested that many activities and updates from friends on social media provided him with new ideas that would have been beyond his own reach:

DI/CD1 *“When we browse on the Internet, or participate in Facebook, we know what people are discussing and concerned about. We know what people like and dislike, and at the same time, people from different backgrounds tell us something new that may be out of our scope; for example, the places they have travelled, the new gadgets they have found...we know more from them of what’s happening around the world”.*

It is an era of co-creation with consumers (Liljedal, 2016). This empowerment of consumers in relation to advertising strategy and creative ideas was also seen by the creatives in this study as an offer for opportunities in expanding their own creative autonomy and reputation. It is important to note that, in the creatives’ comments in this research, there is no sense of being undermined or feeling threatened by consumers’ co-creation acts online. Creatives care more about how to work with this situation but are rather worried about the consumers’ co-creation process. Anyway, in this new era, creative legitimacy can be earned not only from peers or creative awards, but also from consumer responses and recognition. For instance, FI/CD2, creative director of an independent full-service agency, emphasized that consumer responses as well as creative considerations played a more important role in advertising strategy, creative ideas and execution, and could also affect the success of an advertising idea.

FI/CD2 *“As creatives, we should also understand the need of the market, how we could ‘move’ [mobilize] the market. In the past, I was barely concerned about business. I was just concerned about how creative my work was. But now if you ask me, I think ‘creativity’ and ‘execution’ are no longer that important to me; the most important thing to me is how we can ‘motivate’ our consumers”.*

Creatives also make use of consumer empowerment through social media to empower themselves by showing consumer support for their creative ideas and countering clients' subjective judgments. For instance, FI/AD1, art director in an independent full-service agency, commented that there were some clients who evaluated creative ideas and execution would base on their subjective views. With the rise of social media, consumers' voices and preferences are more direct and instant; they can share what they like and dislike through social networking sites, initiate votes and invite comments on advertising and media content:

FI/AD1 *“I think ‘creative work’ can be seen very differently now. Previously clients may have criticized our creative ideas or visuals based on their own judgments. Clients may have said whether they liked it or didn't like it. Now it's not only about whether they like it or not... now it is about using creative executions to help them reach the consumers and to engage consumers' participation, how to make consumers like our ideas, I mean inviting consumers' engagement is more important now. We have to think about the direct response from the consumers' perspective, not for satisfying our clients only”.*

Today, whether an idea is creative or effective may not be only the client's decision. Now that every consumer online can be a commentator, reviewer and publisher, all organizations have to stop talking and start listening to how they are perceived (Smith, 2009). At the same time, creatives' voices on strategy and creative execution can be strengthened when their views are in line with the consumers'. Consumers can be a strong backup force for creatives seeking acceptance of their ideas and proposals.

At the same time, some creatives worry about reviewing consumers' diverse opinions and the workload pressures involved. For instance, FH/CD1, a creative director from a multinational advertising agency, talked about catching up on a huge amount of consumer comments before the deadline for an advertising campaign.

FH/CD1 *“It takes a lot of time to review consumers’ comments, and quite often those comments are different! It is hard to see the whole picture... you know, the deadline is coming; however, the opinions and comments are still being discussed a lot on the social networks”.*

Advertising creatives’ evolving workgroup identification

According to Copper and Thatcher (2010), workgroup identification refers to individuals defining themselves in relation to their peers in their immediate working unit. As mentioned above, the creatives tended to identify with one of two groups, namely ‘traditional creatives’ or ‘digital creatives’. This distinction was not only made by individual creatives, but also some agencies seemed to be organizing the creative function along these lines, forming creative teams so that some creatives specialized in handling interactive and social media advertising work while others worked on traditional media such as television and print. For instance, interviewee DH/CD2, creative director of a multinational digital agency, characterized himself and his ‘team’ as ‘digital creatives’ and other colleagues as ‘traditional creatives’, even while he identified commonalities across the two categories:

DH/CD2 *“...My work as an advertising creative is probably the same no matter whether I work in traditional or digital teams. We work in advertising and it is all about communication. Even though my team and I work more on digital platforms as digital creatives, the process that we go through or the thinking method of the traditional creatives in other teams is the same. The major difference is that we may use different channels or media to reach our target audience”.*

This notion of ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ workgroup identification is also reflected by creatives who work in multinational full-service agencies; for instance, FH/AAD1, assistant art director of a full-service organization, compared his area of expertise and the media his team handles with creatives working in digital teams:

FH/AAD1 *“For a traditional creative team, we present our idea to clients and we will present the big idea first, and tell them how the big idea could work on TV, print, online etc. We will think of a big picture in the first place. We have to work with the digital team very often. I mean...digital creatives are more expert in interactive media, but maybe we are more expert in traditional media”.*

This situation is demonstrated by informants' self-categorization as either traditional or digital creatives, and by their highlighting of differences between these two identities in terms of beliefs, knowledge, work content, work processes and skill-sets. For instance, DI/ACD1, associate creative director of an independent digital agency, commented that he had found significant differences in terms of the 'ways of thinking' and working processes between traditional and digital creatives:

DI/ACD1 *"It is a big gap! Traditional creatives assumed that their traditional ways of thinking could be applied to social media; but sorry; they failed. This situation reflects the innocence of traditional creatives...it is not about posting a poster on a website...hahaha".*

In the above extract, DI/ACD1 expressed a strong sense of bifurcation of beliefs about the application of online advertising platforms between traditional and digital creatives, illustrated by his comment about traditional creatives equating 'posting a poster on a website' with creative social media solutions. Macro used the word 'traditional' three times and constructed a superior identity as a 'digital creative' by associating himself with his workgroup, the digital team, and by emphasizing the 'big gap' between the 'innocent' beliefs of traditional creatives and the more sophisticated understanding of digital creatives regarding social media. DI/ACD1 also described the traditional creatives with some disdain, illustrated by the expression 'sorry', stating that traditional creatives have 'failed' in handling social media.

As mentioned previously, some organizations have created new positions and titles (such as 'interactive art director') for creatives who specialize in digital platforms so as to marking a clear differentiation from the 'traditional' advertising creative's work role. In other agencies there are clear distinctions between the two groups even if they do not have different positions or titles. For instance, in OgilvyOne, digital creatives are given the same title as art directors and copywriters in the creative department. Nonetheless, the distinction between two kinds of creatives was emphasised strongly in the account provided by DH/SAD1, a senior 'art director', of his colleagues:

DH/SAD1 *"Besides computer skills that I mentioned before, I think it is the ways of thinking, definitely! As I mentioned about the area driven by different computer knowledge that we require to work on the digital platform, it actually affects our ways of thinking and the working process. In fact, in our team, we have an off-line art director and online art director. The mode of thinking is different..."*

Despite having the same title as the art director in a digital agency and although these titles do not officially exist in the creative department, Barry made a distinction between ‘off-line art directors’ [i.e., ‘traditional’ creatives] and ‘online art directors’, [i.e., digital creatives], and he argued that the different skill-sets and modes of thinking required are driven by the different demands of working on different advertising communication platforms.

The shift from creative production to strategic facilitation

Thompson and Haytko (1997) stated that advertising practitioners play the role of bridging the commercial and the culture worlds through their use of the symbolic capital of culture and society. In this sense, advertising practitioners, including creatives, who are believed to possess socio-cultural and education capital, are regarded as ‘cultural intermediaries’ (Featherstone 1991), responsible for constructing symbolic meaning and utility for commodities in a society. On one hand, creatives are regarded as ‘commercial urban ethnographers’ who are attentive to social activities, exploring peoples’ demeanors, interactions and modes of expression (Hirota, 1995: 340). Several researchers (e.g. Miller 1997; Soar 2000; Kelly et al, 2005) found that creatives spontaneously incorporate their beliefs, observations and experiences gathered from the social world to develop advertising ideas. Others have echoed the significant role of creatives in society by portraying them as taking the ‘front row seats’ in advertising production and consumption (Soar, 2000, p.434). These studies help to challenge views of creatives as egocentric or superficial, as they suggest that creatives have a reflexive awareness of other cultural forms and the situations they encounter within the course of their everyday lives (Soar 2000). Furthermore, creatives are regarded as ‘idea generators’ (McLeod et al, 2011), as well as being in charge of the advertising production. The production of advertising takes place under a ‘double client system’ (Moeran, 2009) since creatives typically cooperate with technical specialists, such as photographers, illustrators or commercial directors, to work out their ideas once the clients have accepted the idea (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). In other words, clients employ advertising agencies for their expertise in branding and advertising campaigns and at the same time agencies employ a second-level ‘motley crew’ (Moeran, 2009), which may, depending on production requirements, include photographers, commercial directors, makeup artists and so on, to support the production of an individual job. With the growing popularity of the Internet for advertising, creatives also involve digital experts such as web and interactive designers, animators and programmers to carry out advertising campaigns. In the interviews conducted for this research, the creatives noted that, particularly with the rise of social media, they have to cooperate with a wider spectrum of support crew, such as ‘tech teams’ including programmers and digital experts.

FH/CD2 *“In previous times, I may say I spent 80% of my working time thinking of creative ideas, and left my teammates to handle the production. Now, I have less and less time working on ideas. For nearly half of my time I have to coordinate and share with other colleagues how the new technology can work; say, meeting with the tech team, suppliers and programmers; meeting with the media people; much of this running around, asking questions for one campaign rather than spending time on creative ideas of the campaign”.*

From his position in a multinational full-service agency, FH/CD2 observed that his role as a creative director had shifted from idea generation and production supervision to being a line manager of different team members. In the interview, FH/CD2 admitted that he did not know much about the production details when he first encountered digital advertising, especially in terms of digital production. Hence, he has to spend more time on meetings and coordination with his internal colleagues, including the creative teams and account managers, as well as with clients, regarding ideas and production. He also has to meet with the ‘tech team’ and outsourced suppliers, including digital experts and programmers. As highlighted by FH/CD2, it seems that the role of a creative director has evolved and been extended from generating and supervising creative ideas to facilitating media and production details in order to accomplish successful integrated advertising campaigns. However, during the creative process, successful idea generation and supervision requires knowledge of production and media. Even creative directors, who play a coordinating role, need to have solid knowledge of these areas in order to provide effective management.

DH/AD2 *“I think the role of creatives today is no longer on design or creative ideas only. It is about handling a solution for an advertising campaign. So what we provide now is not the ideas of a print ad, or a TVC only. We provide a solution; a solution that can achieve your goal and the required response under your planned budget. It doesn't have to be limited to a particular format anymore”.*

DH/AD2, art director of a multinational digital agency, believes that the role of the creatives is not about design but involves providing solutions with strategic value for advertising. Similar ideas were expressed by other creatives, from junior to middle levels of seniority, and in multinational and independent agencies. They suggested that creatives could no longer focus solely on generating creative ideas, but had to offer ‘solutions’ which make use of different communication media to achieve advertising goals. Thus the process of judging the success of a ‘solution’ is more complicated than before. An advertising solution today may include marketing considerations, consumer perspectives, technical and media factors as well

as creative ideas. Moreover, the creatives' excellence may not be judged merely on the creative component; judgments also involve marketing tactics, consumers' involvement and media competency. This suggests that the creatives' role has shifted from 'idea generator' to 'solution facilitator' in response to the rise of digital and social media.

Assael (2011) reflected that, with the increasing popularity of new technologies and cross-media campaigns, the main objective of media planning has become maximizing return on investment (ROI). For DH/CD1, creative director of a multinational digital agency, maximizing ROI was also his responsibility. He said that one important creative function that supports this was encouraging consumer participation in the advertising campaign. In other words, one of the critical aspects of this facilitator role is to engage consumers - what Nicholas called 'activation'. This requires creative ideas to be driven from a bottom-up perspective, informed by the consumers' responses and interest.

DH/CD1 *"... it is very important, and it is a usual practice, to see the result of our creative ideas. The work that we have to do is to generate needs and responses, but not about building a brand or image only. That is the term called 'activation', it's about how to activate activities and to drive the results. I have to help and think from the client's perspective too, of how much ROI I can bring for the brand with these creative ideas. How much response from consumers can I draw from an advertising campaign...It is not only about creative ideas, but also the consumers' responses and participation in the campaign that I have to take care of..."*

As creatives handle ideas across different media, including online and offline platforms, their role also incorporates more management duties, which may involve people, production and media. For instance, FI/CD2, a creative director of an independent full-service agency, argued that the creative of today is like a manager responsible for creative ideas, clients and agencies' business, the cooperation of creative workers, production, media and consumer response. In other words, the creatives' role has extended from ideas generation to a management role facilitating the creative ideas across the whole advertising planning cycle, in collaboration with a range of creatives and other professionals.

FI/CD2 *“As a creative today, half of my work is about management: managing creatives’ ideas, managing the agency’s business, managing our clients, managing the creative team cooperation, managing the production, managing the media and consumer response... it is not the same work as before and I have to take up several roles in my work at the same time; not only about doing hands-on work on creative ideas, but also stepping forward to work on management. My challenges that I have now are not only about producing creative ideas, but also how to manage all things in order to have good creative ideas across different media”.*

Challenge and opportunities in social media advertising era

Traditionally, the major advertising media were considered to be TVC and print, and advertising messages and ideas were delivered through a linear, one-way mode of communication, from senders to receivers (Belch & Belch, 1995). Technological innovations, especially the emergence of the Internet and mobile technologies, have changed the very nature of media, as well as the mass communication process. With the interactive nature of communication, it is difficult to differentiate between the ‘sender’ and the ‘receiver’ due to the interactive components of many new communication technologies (Heath & Bryant, 2000). In other words, one-way, primarily mass communication has evolved slowly into a more interactive process. Both mass and interpersonal communication can be facilitated by new communication technologies. Accordingly, traditional views of media audiences need to be revisited with a fresh eye to address new and different processes of communication as they emerge (Marlow, 2009).

In this study, the creatives suggested that the rise of social media advertising extends the possibilities for advertising ideas delivered through social networks and their linkage to applications on mobile phones and other devices. Most of the informants in this research, from both multinational and digital agencies, agreed that social media equip them with greater possibilities, including more job openings, new creative possibilities and opportunities for exploring different forms of creative production. For instance, FH/CD2, creative director of a multinational full-service organization, talked about the range of creative options and opportunities for consumer engagement associated with social media:

FH/CD2 *“The opportunity is that we can try some new ideas in this social media; with unlimited space and imagination like inviting groups, designing games, different ways of drawing people to the group etc. It involves some big ideas and it is quite challenging indeed”.*

Similarly, a creative director in an independent digital agency suggested that, apart from offering more creative possibilities, digital platforms, including social media, had brought more job opportunities for creatives like him:

DI/CD1 *“For us working on digital platforms, and especially with the increased usage of the Internet and social networks, we have more and more job opportunities. The variety of jobs is increasing, not only limited to building websites, but also we can think of more creative ideas to interact with consumers through the digital platform. We will have more opportunities for creation. I think the digital advertising industry in Hong Kong is getting better and better”.*

Nearly all of the creatives taking part in this study, in both full-service and digital agencies, and at different levels of seniority, talked about social media advertising as bringing more creative opportunities, and they were also enthusiastic about the opportunities in terms of their work roles.

Digital platforms also empower consumers to become more active and enable them to select the messages that they want to receive (Heath & Bryant, 2000). In other words, consumers nowadays are empowered by the nature of media to be active agents rather than passive receivers of information. Consumers are no longer considered as simply recipients of advertising messages; they are co-creators of knowledge and meaning-makers influencing a brand’s development (Roland & Parmentier, 2013). From a creative perspective, social media provides opportunities to meet their advertising goals through direct contact and interaction with consumers. For instance, FH/AD2, an art director of a full-service agency, indicated that consumers’ active participation is becoming more and more important for advertising strategies and planning.

FH/AD2 *“I think the advantage of social media to us is that there are more channels to reach our consumers directly, say the teenagers. It provides one more platform to reach the consumers directly other than just print or TVC. I can reach them by designing games, posting topics on forums that they find interesting, or creating blogs to have conversations with them. I can get to know our consumers more directly with their participation and feedback”.*

The creatives believed that social media allow them to explore possibilities that have never been used in traditional media. Future research should pay attention to the relationship between social media and traditional media (Knoll, 2016).

Conclusion and implications

This study explored advertising creatives' experiences in this changing media environment, offering insights into their negotiated identities as creative professionals in their advertising agencies and within broader communities of practice involving both 'traditional' and 'digital' advertising creatives, although the boundaries between these identities were becoming blurred. Building upon the key experiences of advertising creatives in the social media advertising era, this study's contribution revolves around the triadic structure of advertising creatives' emergent role that was identified from the analyses of interview data. According to McKenna (1991), he stated as a principle of marketing that 'marketing evolves as technology evolves'. This study explored the many ways that social media were shaping current advertising creatives' working practices, roles and role identities. The contributions to both theory and practice in advertising and organizational studies are examined next.

In short, the rise of social media advertising opened up creative possibilities for marketing and advertising, and in responding to the changing media landscape, advertising creatives appeared to be moving beyond traditional/digital media and traditional/digital creative dichotomies. They had to work on duties beyond what they previously saw as the responsibility of advertising creatives. The interviewee FH/AD2, an art director in a full-service advertising organization, expressed this very well when she said

'...I did not expect I would have to work on marketing strategy as an art director originally, but in work practice, it is very difficult to differentiate your responsibility. Now I am always involved in the strategic planning on ideas of marketing activities together with advertising ideas, joining the meeting with clients and brainstorming with account and media executives'.

In other words, it seemed that, with the emergence of the social media advertising era, the advertising creatives' work involved not only creative idea development but also strategy and technological production. In short, there appeared to have been a shift towards a triadic creative role, which required them to engage in more tasks, and with more stakeholders. This expanded creative role highlighted the importance of collaboration and integration in this particular creative industry. They engaged in strategy formulation with account managers and clients; in idea development and creative activities with clients, colleagues and sometimes with consumers; and in production supervision and management with internal colleagues and external suppliers. This study has shown how the growing importance of social media

advertising required the advertising creatives to work more closely and directly with clients and advertising planners in generating marketing and advertising strategy. The planning function of advertising campaigns previously relied on advertising account planners (Crosier et al., 2003; Grant & McLeod, 2007). Today, with the rise of social media advertising, and the associated changes in consumer culture, the planning function has to embrace diverse sources of strategic input. The role boundaries between advertising creatives and account planners were increasingly blurred and the advertising creatives no longer seemed to be able to focus solely on artistic ideas with little concern for marketing and strategy, as Hirschman (1989) had described. Working strategically with experts outside the creative department requires advertising creatives to develop strategic thinking and negotiation skills.

Their responsibilities for creative idea generation, implementation and production in the social media advertising era meant that the advertising creatives studied in this research had to work with a range of experts within and beyond the advertising agency. For instance, they had to collaborate with computer programmers and other technological experts in producing advertising campaigns. Indeed, this study found that some agency suppliers had expanded their services by strengthening their technical support for creative production. Malefyt and Moeran (2003) and Grant et al. (2012) noted that, for creative content producers, negotiation skills and interpersonal skills are more crucial than ever before. This study found advertising creatives are constantly working with different technological experts and programmers on creative production. They played a producer role, managing and supervising production teams for both traditional and digital media elements of a campaign. As creative content producers in the social media advertising era, they functioned beyond the traditional roles of creative copywriter or art director (Young, 2000), since they were involved actively in the preparation, production and post-production of advertising campaign materials, and worked within more complex networks of social relationships that included media, strategy and a range of technical experts.

Likewise, as the use of social media advertising strategies has become so popular, they have altered how people communicate with each other and also led to new forms of consumer behaviour (Hill & Moran, 2011). Consumers' brand-related engagement and interactions on social networking sites have had a strong impact on marketing and advertising practices (Chiou & Cheng 2003; Villanueva et al., 2008). For these advertising creatives, the process of advertising development (and creative idea generation) had started to involve collaboration with diverse experts who could develop engaging activities for consumers, which were not limited to traditional media, but incorporated a wide range of creative ideas and platforms. With the rise of social media advertising, the advertising creatives in this study also had more direct and indirect contact with consumers. They appeared to welcome consumer input,

embracing online consumer research and consumer feedback into their creative development processes, and drawing on consumers' online activity as a form of collaboration. In this case, the advertising creatives did not see consumer research as controlling or restricting their ideas (Grant & McLeod, 2007), but as a way of developing creative ideas and even justifying these when presenting them to their clients.

All in all, the triadic role of advertising creatives identified here illustrates the complexity of creative work in the social media advertising era. As presented in Figure 2, this triadic role involved three role identities: creative strategist, creative producer and creative facilitator. The advertising creatives played the role of creative strategist while they provided creative input into marketing activities and strategy, working with clients and account planners or managers. This role identity required a more strategic mind-set and the ability to communicate effectively with clients, planners and other industry stakeholders to come up with insights for advertising. The creator facilitator role identity required them to embrace a wider set of collaborations in the process of idea generation, and the creative producer role identity required them to engage with technical production and management, and to collaborate with a range of technical and production experts.

This new hybrid role was found to involve advertising creatives switching between these three identities over the course of the advertising development process, and each identity was constructed in relation to particular activities and stakeholders. Thus, each role identity required its own set of skills, although all required the merging of 'traditional' and 'digital' media knowledge and skills and the ability to work with a broader range of stakeholders, within and beyond their own particular advertising organizations.

As their role and working practices evolved, the advertising creatives needed to develop new knowledge and skill sets. This study suggested that those in the multinational full-service organizations wanted to learn more about digital technology while the digital advertising creatives wanted to develop their technical skills further as well as learning more about strategic planning. The triadic structure of the creative role identified in this study involved three role identities (i.e. creative strategist, creative facilitator and creative producer); three stakeholder groups (i.e. client, consumer and advertising industry partners) and the three interwoven activities correspond to each of the role identities (i.e. strategic planning, creative idea development and creative content production).

Figure 2: The triadic structure of contemporary advertising creatives' role

Each of these role identities requires advertising creatives to expand more from the merging of 'digital' and 'traditional' knowledge and skills. Since the contemporary role of advertising creatives requires them to work with a lot of different stakeholders, they also indicated the need to be involved in a wider range of activities that involve planning, idea development and creative content production, to develop skills beyond traditional/digital distinction, and to further their interpersonal and negotiating skills in order to be competent in the social media advertising era. Furthermore, the advertising creatives in this study reflected that they had taken on the responsibility of learning these new roles through diverse ways. They enriched their knowledge and skills about strategy and digital media by reading books. They also learned and developed knowledge in the creative community with creative peers and suppliers. For instance, they searched online for help, and discussed their ideas with each other. They also sought help from working peers within and beyond the organizations, including junior members of the creative department, and from suppliers and other experts in digital technology. However, there seemed to be little systematic attempt at training or informally mentoring advertising creatives on the interpersonal skills required to work with clients more effectively in advertising organizations. Such training, formal or informal, is essential for the advertising creatives to learn and to develop their competence. Therefore, the identified triadic role of advertising creatives is a valuable guide for advertising agencies that require formal structure changes.

To conclude, this paper discovered that the advertising creatives were experiencing a period of transition towards a triadic role, which was beginning to transcend digital/traditional distinctions and which required them to develop new skills and a wider set of professional relationships in the social media advertising era. Some of this developmental work was supported by organizational management practices, some of it was undertaken by the creative professionals themselves, but much of it took the form of situated learning within the advertising creatives' communities of practice; they shared knowledge with each other and obtained advice from a diverse set of experts within and beyond their individual advertising agencies. This study contributed to knowledge in the disciplines of advertising and organization studies by offering insights into how working practices, roles and role identities were evolving in an important creative industry in response to the rise of social media advertising. Although this study only offered a micro-level perspective on advertising creatives' practices and advertising organizations, which is still relatively rare in advertising and organizational literature (Hackley & Kover, 2007).

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Figure 1: Sampling – list of interviewees

	Multinational full-service agencies FH	Multinational digital agencies DH	Independent full-service agencies FI	Independent digital agencies DI
ECD/CD <i>(Management Level)</i>	FH/CD1 FH/CD2	DH/CD1 DH/CD2	FI/CD1 FI/CD2	DI/ECD1 DI/CD1
ACD/SAD <i>(Middle-management Level)</i>	FH/SAD1 FH/SAD2	DH/ACD1 DH/SAD1	FI/SAD1 FI/SAD2	DI/ACD1 DI/SIAD2
AD/IAD <i>(Senior-operational Level)</i>	FH/IAD1 FH/AD2	DH/AD1 DH/AD2	FI/AD1 FI/AD2	DI/IAD1 DI/IAD2
AAD/ID designer <i>(Operational Level)</i>	FH/AAD1 FH/AAD2	DH/AAD1 DH/AAD2	FI/AAD1 FI/AAD2	DI/ID1 DI/ID2

Figure 2: The triadic structure of contemporary advertising creatives' role

