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Implicit Theories of Creatives

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Implicit Theories of Creatives

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Implicit Theories of Creatives

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Abstract: Advertising creatives (i.e., copywriters and art directors) are known to use implicit theories to connect with their audiences, but little work has been done to connect those philosophies with research in academia. This research explores further the academic-practitioner gap that exists. The findings show there are some implicit theories being used by creatives that overlap with academic research, such as attitude toward the ad leads to attitude toward the brand and breaking through the clutter. There were also implicit theories used by practitioners that did not line up clearly with theories and constructs from academia. These varying levels of overlap are used to suggest future research and ways to bridge the gap in the educational process.

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Introduction

Despite the ongoing conversations over the past two decades about bridging the academic-practitioner gap in advertising (Gabriel, Kottasz, & Bennett, 2006; Nyilasy & Reid, 2007; O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998), there is still very little research into the advertising academic-practitioner gap and how to best address bridging the gap. The gap between academics and advertising practitioners refers to the lack of overlapping communication and interaction between the two groups with the result being the lack of academic theories being best utilized in the creation of advertising. One way to address the academic-practitioner gap is to identify the implicit theories advertising professionals currently use to create ads. While they may not have the same terminology as academics, there is research that suggests practitioners do use some type of implicit theory, or systematic framework, when creating ads (Gabriel et al., 2006; Kover, 1995; Nyilasy & Reid, 2009) and going forward, we will call these “practitioner philosophies,” which are informal theoretical frameworks (Kover, 1995) or systematic knowledge structures (Ross, 1989) that describe a process of creating ads or connecting with consumers. For example Kover (1995) found that copywriters are concerned with breaking through and getting the consumers attention.

Both Gabriel et al. (2006) and Kover (1995) attempted to connect practitioners’ philosophies to academic theories, while Nyilasy and Reid (2009) failed to explicitly connect the philosophy practitioners use to academic theory. This is important to the academic-practitioner gap because advertising professionals may already use tested

academic theories in the creation of ads, they may use philosophies that have been shown to be unsuccessful in academic research, and they may possibly have philosophies that academics have not yet thought to test. The most interesting implication of this research is to find out what, if any, practitioner philosophies line up with explicit academic theories or constructs. Finding a definition to theory is difficult because “Lack of consensus on exactly what theory is may explain why it is so difficult to develop strong theory in the behavioral sciences” (Sutton & Staw, 1995, p. 372). The author will use a general definition for theory proposed from Corley and Gioia (2011), “theory is a statement of concepts and their interrelationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs” (p. 12). Formal theories are ruled by logical inferences and are born out of formal reasoning (Berger, Roloff, & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2010).

This research seeks to bridge the knowledge gap by discovering what frameworks copywriters (i.e., those who write the words for ads) and art directors (i.e., those who put the visuals together for ads) in advertising agencies employ and how those frameworks (i.e., philosophies) connect to academic theory or constructs. Copywriters and art directors are known as advertising creatives or simply called “creatives” in the advertising industry. Creatives execute the words and visuals in advertisements. By finding out what theories they are already using, it will give researchers a base for understanding what practitioners already know. It is also beneficial to determine if advertising practitioners know they use those theories or if it is just part of the practice of ad creation. If they are creating ads without fully understanding “why it works,” creatives are at a disadvantage. Without being able to explain to the client why an ad will work,

good advertising may go unused. Also, a lack of understanding of the current body of academic research can lead to unnecessary trial and error for those working in agencies. Both academics and advertising professionals can assist in learning more about the gap and how to bridge it.

This research will expand on the research that attempts to bridge the academic-practitioner gap and could be used to enhance the education of those seeking advertising degrees by generating knowledge that could better link academic theory and constructs (i.e., topics that have been studied by advertising academics and published in peer review journals) to applied practice. The remainder of this article provides an overview of relevant literature on the academic-practitioner gap and how practitioners view topics being studied in academics. This is followed by the research questions that guided this project, study methods, results, and a discussion of the implications of these findings for academics and practitioners.

The Academic-Practitioner Gap in Advertising

THE GAP

The notion of getting academic research into the hands of advertising professionals is a topic of frequent conversation among academics. It is a topic that has been discussed in advertising literature for over 30 years (McQuarrie, 1998; Nyilasy & Reid, 2007; Preston, 1985), and has been a topic of conversation in marketing literature even longer. When it comes to the academic-practitioner gap in advertising, Preston (1985) makes a call for “advertiser research,” which is research focused on the goals of advertising professionals with consumers’ goals as subordinate. “Advertisers’ ultimate goals are action resources, such as purchasing” (Preston, 1985, p. 10). While there is some overlap between basic (consumer) research and applied (advertiser) research, focus only on the consumer leads to the detachment of academic research from practitioners’ goals (Preston, 1985). The concept of advertising research being detached from advertisers’ goals is further expanded on through a meta-analysis by McQuarrie (1998), where the findings indicate that lab experiments published in academic journals do not control for reality factors such as non-focal attention to embedded ads, interference of competing brands, decay from exposer time, not incorporating repetitive exposures, and using unfamiliar brands. While the meta-analysis draws into question the external validity of the lab experiments, it does not and cannot speak to the extent that the reality factors actually matter to the issue of detachment.

While Preston (1985) and McQuarrie (1998) draw attention to the gap, Nyilasy and Reid (2007) elaborate on why the gap exists. They analyzed key writing on the gap and identified five reasons why there is a disconnect between advertising professionals and academics: (1) knowledge dissemination and outlets for distribution of academic knowledge; (2) the form and content of the knowledge being incomprehensible; (3) the structure of academic rewards and the organizational culture that hinder a practical focus; (4) the philosophy of the role of academic research; (5) practitioners' unwillingness or inability to seek out academic research. Part of the academic-practitioner divide happens due to the nature and structure of academia, while part of the divide is due to advertising professionals not fully understanding why or how academic research could help them (Nyilasy & Reid, 2007). While these categories are useful, Nyilasy and Reid (2007) state that the academic versus professional debate, which peaked in the 1980s, has ended with the professional (applied) side winning out. This makes the philosophy of the role of academic research a less likely cause in the current continuation of the gap. It is also a mistake to distinguish outlets for knowledge dissemination and the context of the knowledge being incomprehensible as distinctive from the organizational culture of academia and the structure of academic rewards. It is the organizational culture and reward systems in academia that lead to the gap in outlets for knowledge dissemination, which in turn also proliferates the form and content of the knowledge being incomprehensible.

The gap turns out to be a two-sided problem. (1) Academics acknowledge the gap exists and that it needs to be bridged, but there is little incentive for them to do so (AMA

Task Force, 1988). At the same time, (2) advertising professionals do not fully understand academic research and the benefits it could provide them, and they have little access to comprehensible and applied knowledge, which gives practitioners little reason to seek out the knowledge themselves (AMA Task Force, 1988; McKenzie, Wright, Ball, & Baron, 2002; Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004).

ACADEMICS

One of the major problems that proliferates this knowledge gap is the lack of incentives for academics to make the connection with advertising professionals. Tenure-track positions expect publications in peer-reviewed journals and conference attendances at academically orientated conferences (AMA Task Force, 1988; Defleur, 2007).

Academics need publications in peer-reviewed journals, which is one of the main ways academics' performance is measured; publications also play a major role in receiving tenure (AMA Task Force, 1988; Brennan & Ankers, 2004; Defleur, 2007; November, 2004). November (2004) noted, "At most universities, the critical factor is the number of publications and the type of journal in which they are published—not relevance" (p. 41). The term often used for this environment when talking about the academic reward system is "publish or perish" (AMA Task Force, 1988; November, 2004; Brennan & Ankers, 2004). This framework is stressful and leaves little room for academics to build the relationships needed to bridge the current gap, despite the fact that many academics would like to make the connection with practitioners (Brennan & Ankers, 2004). There is no incentive for academics to publish in the trade journals (e.g. Ad Week, Advertising

Age, Communication Arts Magazine, Brand Republic) where advertising practitioners seek information (AMA Task Force, 1988; Defleur, 2007) or build a following of professionals through a blog. It takes time and hard work to build the relationships with trade magazines or build an online blog following, so one's work could be disseminated outside of academics—time that is not available for outlets that will give little back to the career of the academic.

There is also no incentive for academics to attend advertising practitioner conferences, while the overlap of current advertising professionals at academically orientated conferences is marginal to completely nonexistent. At the same time, conferences for advertising professionals leave little room for the research of academics because they are structured differently: there is no submission of research papers and no peer review; they have calls for awards, not calls for papers; they may submit work (i.e., ad campaigns or one-off ads) for competition, but attendance by people not winning a competitive award is common; presenters are scheduled out in advance, are the top in their field, and have nothing to do with those who sign up to attend; and the emphasis is on workshops and learning from single presenters, as opposed to a panel of people with the same research interest. There is little to no incentive for academics to attend commercial conferences and build relationships or network at those events.

PRACTITIONERS

While academics have little incentive to make the information easily accessible to practitioners, it then becomes a question of why practitioners do not seek out the

knowledge being created in academics. Practitioners may not understand the value of the information created by academics (Brennan & Ankers, 2004; Chong, 2006), academic research papers can be hard for those outside of academia to understand (Ottesen & Grønhaug, 2004), finding the practical relevance within academic publications may be difficult to those working in advertising (AMA Task Force, 1988; Chong, 2006), some practitioners do not know of the research that exists (Brennan & Ankers, 2004; McKenzi et al., 2002), and the scientific method of research is also viewed as being at odds with the creative nature of advertising (Chong, 2006). The “academic speak” of journal papers could be a major obstacle to dissemination of information, along with literature reviews and methods sections that hold little value to practitioners of advertising. Being able to clearly understand how the research was conducted to convey validity and reliability of the results are key factors to better dissemination of knowledge and research created by academics.

A major factor behind why advertising practitioners do not seek out academic research is advertising professionals may not understand how research could benefit them (Brennan & Ankers, 2004), and practitioners are often focused on the shortcomings of research (Chong, 2006). Having a solid understanding of theory and research being done by academics could benefit practitioners in two ways. First, it could help focus the energies put toward advertising campaigns. When practitioners have a better understanding of what works in advertising and why it works, it could lead to better advertising (i.e., more persuasive, increased ad trust, higher likeability that leads to more positive affect for the brand) and could lead to less trial and error. Understanding

academic theories would give practitioners the ability to craft messages and campaigns that are more likely to be effective and would give advertising practitioners more tools in their wheelhouse to create the most effective advertising possible.

One of the benefits of academic research for practitioners is how it can give practitioners the ability to explicitly explain and justify the work they create. A solid foundation of academic theories could give practitioners the ability to explain why they made the choices they did for a campaign, which could reduce the “perceived risk” of a campaign. Advertising practitioners want to take risks with ads and marketing strategies they believe will pay off, but their clients may be less willing to take a risk on an untested creative strategy. Clients may see an advertising campaign as being too risky (i.e., too creative, too over the top, unlikely to connect with consumers), but if advertising professionals started with theory to create a campaign, they could then explain to the client why the campaign would work, thus reducing perceived risk by the client. This could also reduce the need for copy testing and cut costs associated with creating an advertising campaign. By starting with theory, advertising companies may also reduce internal costs, which is of little interest to researchers but would be a benefit for advertising agencies.

Another obstacle to the dissemination of knowledge is the lack of understanding of what academic research is. The term research holds different meanings for academics and practitioners (Brinberg & Hirschman, 1986; Chong, 2006; Shrivastava & Mitroff, 1984; Stewart, 1989). In academic research, there is more freedom to the questions one can ask, while practitioners want answers to specific outcomes of specific ads or

campaigns on which they are currently working (Chong, 2006). In advertising agencies, the answer is the point of the study, while in academics the methods and generalizability are major points of the study. Advertisers need something that works well enough to solve a problem and academic research is trying to build knowledge and build on existing theories. While both are concerned with the sample, advertising research is sampling from their target market and academics typically try to have a broad sample of individuals from different demographics. Academic research is typically grounded in theory, while agency research is not. These sometimes subtle and sometimes drastic differences in what research means to academics and advertising practitioners makes it difficult for professionals to understand the validity of the work academics do.

The information gap between advertising practitioners and academics exists because of both the structure of the two communities and the lack of communication between academics and practitioners. Academics have little time and no incentives to bridge the gap despite the fact that many believe the information and knowledge should be disseminated. Practitioners do not fully understand the benefits they would receive from learning more about theories and academic research, and they have difficulty accessing the information.

Research into Advertising Professionals

There is some research into advertising practitioners in terms of ethics (Drumwright & Murphy, 2004; Krugman & Ferrell, 1981), defining advertising (Richards & Curran, 2002), differences in definition of “advertising effectiveness” used between academics and practitioners (Cook & Kover, 1997), trust (Kim, Song, Braynov, & Rao, 2005), academic research (Chong, 2006), the relative power of advertising (Ewing & Jones, 2000), implicit theories used by advertising practitioners (Kover, 1995; Nyilasy & Reid, 2009), and agency use of advertising models (Gabriel et al., 2006). Most of those studies did not attempt to connect academic theories to the philosophies used in the creation of advertising, as will be discussed further, but there is a growing body of knowledge that does.

ADVERTISING PROFESSIONALS’ PHILOSOPHIES

While all of the studies cited in the previous section do appear to be based on some type of theoretical framework to conduct and analyze their research, not all make an attempt to connect the philosophies used by practitioners back to academic theory. In the area of ethics in advertising, Krugman and Ferrell (1981) looked at ethical perceptions advertising practitioners hold in regard to others within their organizations. Richards and Curran (2002) used the Delphi method, which engages multiple waves of surveys with a group of experts in the field until a consensus is reached, to cultivate an updated definition of advertising that reflects the advances in communication used by the

advertising industry. Cook and Kover (1997) discuss how “advertising effectiveness” has different meanings for advertising practitioners and academics. Chong (2006) interviewed creative directors to understand their general views on research; the interviewees in this study focused on practitioner or agency research and did not specifically talk about academic research. Nyilasy and Reid (2009) looked into the meta-theories used by practitioners and found that practitioners do hold common philosophies they believe are “common sense.” They also noted that the meta-theories used by practitioners are “markedly different” from those in academia, which is contradictory to the findings of Kover (1995) and Gabriel et al. (2006) that are discussed in the next section.

CONNECTING TO THEORY

Some studies did attempt to connect practitioners’ philosophies to academic theory. Drumwright and Murphy (2004) sought to find out the degrees to which advertising practitioners participate in ethical behaviors, what they viewed as ethical behaviors, and how those ethical standards and behaviors compare within the industry. They connected the approaches used by practitioners back to academic research and found that practitioners are partaking in moral myopia (i.e., not clearly seeing moral issues) and moral muteness (i.e., being reluctant to share moral views with a group) when engaging in their practice. Kim et al. (2005) compared the dimensions of trust formation process in business-to-consumer advertising between practitioners and academics. They found that practitioners and academics align on some dimensions and diverge on others.

Practitioners placed more emphasis on technological and product dimensions of trust, whereas academics placed more emphasis on consumer behavior and information content, and both groups emphasize institutional and transaction dimensions of trust. Ewing and Jones (2000) looked at practitioners' beliefs in the power of advertising and whether practitioners believed advertising had a "strong power" or "strong theory" (i.e., advertising plays a central part in persuasion and has formidable role in the market) or a "weak power" or "weak theory" (i.e., advertising gently nudges or reminds and has little power to persuade consumers). They found that educational background, age, and agency experience significantly determines if they believe in strong or weak theory. Creatives, younger practitioners, those with less than seven years' experience, and some degree types (e.g., mass communications, journalism and art school graduates) lean more toward strong theory, while those with business background and those with more experience lean toward weak theory. Kover (1995) interviewed copywriters for implicit theories and found they have a common set of philosophies that drive their work and consumer insight. He also noted that many of their philosophies differ from the formal finding in academics. For example, Kover (1995) found that on the measure of how much a person thinks about or engages with a message, which is called involvement, academics miss the mark by emphasizing involvement with the product when advertising copywriters' view of involvement is dynamic and creatively bound. Gabriel et al. (2006) wanted to know if account planners in advertising agencies used formal models of "how advertising works," or advertising effect, studied in academics. Formal models could be used by account planners for understanding consumers (Baskin & Pickton, 2003). Gabriel et al. (2006)

also wanted to know what caused some account planners to not use formal models. The findings showed that most account planners did not know formal models of advertising effect, those that did preferred models that reflected hierarch of effects, and they found account planners did not have animosity toward theory.

Research Questions

The body of knowledge around the topic of philosophies used by practitioners when creating ads is still at the beginning phases and more qualitative data to identify these philosophies will continue to build on the foundation that exists to understand this area of research better before a survey could demonstrate the more widespread validity of these earlier, more exploratory investigations. This study builds on the work of Drumwright and Murphy (2004), Ewing & Jones (2000), Gabriel et al. (2006) Kim et al., and Kover (1995) to explore more of the implicit theories used by practitioners, connecting those philosophies to formal academic work, and to address the question of where do these philosophies come from by asking the following research questions:

RQ1: Are there practitioner philosophies that line up with academic theories or constructs?

RQ2: Do advertising creatives explicitly talk about academic theories or constructs?

RQ3: How do advertising creatives define research?

Methods

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH

The preliminary interviews were conducted to verify the approach and wording of the interview guide that was adopted from Kover (1995). Originally the interview guide was for copywriters and the language was adapted to be relevant to both copywriters and art directors. One example of this was changing the question, “Is there a regular way of dealing with writing an ad?” was turned into “Is there a regular way of creating an ad?”

The preliminary interviews were conducted with three art directors to make sure it was relevant to the expanded sample. The participants of the preliminary interviews had been working in advertising between seven and eleven years. All were currently working in Austin and had experience working in other agencies in other cities. All three had degrees from universities or community college and had gone through some type of portfolio school afterward. Interviews lasted from one to two hours.

The interview guide for this dissertation was updated after the preliminary interviews. There were two major changes to the interview guide after the preliminary interviews were done. One change was the background information questions, which included age, years working in advertising, titles held, number of agencies worked at, degrees held, and location currently working, was moved to an online pre-interview survey to reduce the time it took to conduct the interviews. The other change that was made to the interview guide was to add a question at the end of the interview directly

asking about theory, “What are some theories about consumers you use to connect with your target audience?” This question was added as an aided-recall to see if people could be prompted to talk about theory, because based on past research about implicit theories (Gabriel et al., 2006; Kover, 1995) advertising practitioners were unlikely to explicitly talk about theories or constructs from academics. This question was placed at the end of the interview guide to ensure the validity of the earlier parts of the interview – the goal was to avoid priming participants to talk about theory, but then give them an opportunity at the end when prompted to talk about it.

One practitioner philosophy that present in all three of the pre-interviews was the idea of self-enhancement in ads. When self-enhancement in an advertisement is congruent with what a viewer aspires to be, it increases positive affect (Chang, 2005). Kover (1995) also found that copywriters talk about aspirational images in ads (i.e., images that show a better version of life), suggesting the interview guide for this project was eliciting the same kind of data and findings as earlier research it sought to build on. All of the art directors interviewed made some type of comment about ads needing to be slightly better than real life:

“You cast real people in [an ad] or you try and make it as real as possible and then, you end up looking at something that just like—that feels like everyday life. I don't think that helps people. I don't think that is effective. I think you want to show somebody the slightly better version of something.”

Another theme that showed up in the interviews was the idea that advertising can manipulate people’s minds and at the same time they also said that advertising had a weak effect on the views. In line with the research from Ewing & Jones (2000), art

directors that have been working in advertising longer would be more inclined to believe advertising has a weak effect; at the same time, the interviewees thought advertising was manipulating the views.

In this small sampling of preliminary interviews, philosophies and constructs that align with formal academic theories were starting to emerge that were similar to the findings of Kover (1995) about breaking through to the viewer and creating inspirational (i.e., better than real life). This provided confidence that a larger collection of interviews in conjunction with the updated interview guide, which was changed to better extract philosophies and constructs used, would generate the information needed to answer the research questions.

SAMPLE

In-depth interviews based on the interview guide (Appendix A) were preformed with advertising creatives (N=20): copywriters (65%) and art directors (35%). Recruitment was through snowball sampling. The researcher started with current connections in advertising firms and received additional potential participants through those connections. In addition to snowball sampling from existing industry connections, recruitment for interviews was also done through posting on the LinkedIn boards for copywriters and art directors. Finally, agencies in the Midwest were picked for cold calling through email to recruit for the interviews. The region of the Midwest was targeted to get perspectives outside of the traditional advertising industry hotspots of New York City, San Francisco, and Los Angeles. The final sample included creatives from

firms in New York (20%), California (15%), Texas (55%), Arizona (5%), and Nebraska (5%) who work in business to consumer advertising agencies. The size of the agency was not taken into account, but in-house advertising professionals, those who work solely for a particular company or brand on that organization's staff, were not interviewed.

The advertising professionals interviewed ranged in age from 22 to 57 with a mean age of 34 (SD=9.8), 40% were female and 60% were male, all participants had degrees from a four-year university with 60% of the participants having additional schooling, 70% of participants had gone through portfolio school, and ranged in work experience from 1 to 33 years in advertising with the mean years of experience at 9 (SD=10). The practitioners have been given pseudonyms for quotes within the results and the pseudonyms with descriptors can be found in Appendix B.

ANALYSIS

Using thematic analysis as described by Braun and Clarke (2006), a number of decisions about the data was made before analysis begins. First, the constructionist view, which as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), “examines the ways in which events, realities, meanings, experiences and so on are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society” (p. 9), was taken while analyzing data because research about advertising from both academics and marketing firms has found its way into the classroom and popular culture to the point where the themes emerging from the data will reflect discourses operating within society about effective ways to advertise. These society discourses may or may not reflect current academic research on advertising.

Second, the decision of what to count as a theme was made; any patterned response or meaning that reflects the research questions or was a systematic knowledge structure that describe a process of creating ads or connecting with consumers was counted as a theme. Third, a rich thematic description of the data set was chosen over a detailed account of one particular aspect. This study was not designed to understand in depth what implicit theories are used by advertising creatives or to describe them in detail; this has already been covered by other research (Gabriel, Kottasz, & Bennett, 2006; Kover, 1995; Nyilasy & Reid, 2009). This study was designed to connect the implicit theories used by creatives in advertising agencies to explicit theories studied by academics, and to identify themes that may be of interest to academics for future research. Fourth, themes and patterns were identified through inductive thematic analysis; the data was not coded to fit into pre-existing theories or constructs because practitioners did not speak about their work with explicit connections to theories or constructs studied in academics. Fifth, due to the research questions being about practitioner's philosophies (i.e., frameworks used to create ads and connect with consumers), it was unlikely advertising professionals would talk about academic theories at a semantic or explicit level; therefore, the focus was on latent themes or underlying conceptualizations that emerge.

The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and thematic analysis was performed continuously until saturation occurred. The first step in the process was conducting the interviews over the phone using the interview guide adopted from Kover (1995) and then adjusted based on the preliminary research. While the interviews were being conducted, hand written notes were taken. As soon as an interview was completed

the notes were used to create memos of the interview highlighting practitioner philosophies that were important to the practitioners in this study, which helped during the coding process to have the broader themes in mind. For example, different elements of ads (i.e., the music, the visual style, the typeface, or by creating an emotional reaction) that help to break through and connect with consumers, or hook someone's attention, were mentioned through out the interviews in response to a variety of different questions; this helped to identify the theme of "breaking through." When coding for "breaking through" anything broadly related to and how practitioners in this study describe the different aspects of breaking through, which where later titled as sub-themes "clutter," "hooks," and "right time, right place."

The memos also helped with adapting the interview guide as the interviews were progressing. One such change was dropping the questions about emotions in advertising and emotional appeals. Early on in the interviews it became apparent that emotions in ads and how the practitioners in this study used emotional appeals were outside of the scope of this study because their answers where not overlapping and to clarify how practitioners understand emotions in ads would involve in-depth interviews on that topic alone by a researcher who specialized in emotions in advertising.

The threshold for themes was 50 percent or more. For example, all practitioners answered a series of four questions about the necessity of consumers paying attention to ads and was labeled "conscious and unconscious processing." They were then grouped by how much they believed ad processing needed to be conscious or unconscious to be effective. In the section on "breaking though," practitioners talked about different sub-

themes that are involved in the process of breaking through. In this case, the threshold was 50 percent for the sub-themes and “clutter,” “hooks,” and “right time, right place” were the sub-themes that at least 50 percent of participants mentioned.

The interviews were transcribed and an online program called Dedoose was used to broadly code the transcripts into larger themes, some themes were “practitioner philosophies” (i.e., Breaking Through), there were some themes coded (i.e., clutter) that were items they talked about a lot and seemed very important to the practitioners in this study, and other themes that were coded for RQ2 and RQ3 were not practitioner philosophies. The broad themes were coded based on the questions they were associated with or the topic which was talked about. For example, Daryl addressed the challenges clutter and breaking through as, “There’s so much clutter out there that cutting through that can be a challenge,” and when Shawn said, “Make it [the ad] interesting and people will watch” it was similar to Derrick’s more direct response, “Something has to hook you into paying attention.” All three were about getting the attention of the consumer, using words like “cutting through,” “people will watch,” and “paying attention,” and thus were coded as “breaking through.” When these were coded into sub-themes for the section on “breaking through,” Daryl’s response was not in line with Derrick or Shawn’s responses and thus was coded as a the sub-theme “clutter” while Derrick and Shawn’s responses were coded as the sub-theme “hooks.”

During the broad coding, excerpts and responses from questions were kept together even when participants started going off on tangents during a response. Often these tangents covered other topics that were asked about later in the interview. The

author would then skip those questions when they came up in the interview because (1) to keep the interviews under an hour time limit, which was the amount of time participants agreed to, and (2) in most cases participants had negative response to being asked a question they felt they had already answered, directly saying they had already answered those questions. Due to some of the responses and excerpts being long and covering more than one topic, a response or excerpt could be coded with multiple themes.

Next the excerpts from the broad themes were printed out, re-read several times, and coded into the more defined sub-themes (i.e., Clutter, Hooks, and Right Time, Right Place). Notes were also taken during the re-reading process to understand the overarching ideas of each sub-theme. After the themes were coded and the author created a codebook (Appendix C), which could be used was used to check face validity of the themes and sub-themes by an advertising practitioner not connected to the project. The practitioner read this dissertation and the code book; they did not suggest any changes to the themes or sub-themes, and the practitioner agreed with the themes and sub-themes the author produced.

Lastly, the connection to academic advertising research was made. Since advertising is a debtor field and uses theory from other, more established fields with the stimuli of advertising (Nan & Faber, 2004), any theories or constructs the author could find that was used with the lens of advertising as a stimuli, rather than all communication research, and has been published in peer reviewed journals was considered when the author when connecting practitioner philosophies to academic theories or constraints. The author used the knowledge they already had in some areas (e.g., dual processing theories

or constraints like need for cognition, attitude toward the ad equals attitude toward the brand) to start the process of finding academic research to connect to the philosophies that practitioners talked about and was continued in online databases of peer-reviewed journals (i.e., Google Scholar, EBSCO, Sage, Taylor & Francis Group, and ScienceDirect) to be as thorough as possible. Other topics (e.g., clutter) the author used key terms like “clutter” from the practitioners in the study to start the search processes in online databases of peer-reviewed journals (e.g., EBSCO, Sage, Taylor & Francis Group, ScienceDirect, etc.) for concepts and constructs that have been researched in academics (e.g., Johnson’s (2014) research on clutter). The author started by reading well-cited and relevant articles and used those articles to find more peer review journal articles to connect to the philosophies that practitioners in this study talked about.

Results

Due to the use of inductive thematic analysis, the results start with the larger philosophies used by advertising practitioners, within the larger theme the difference aspects of those themes used by practitioners are discussed, finally each theme ends with explicitly linking those philosophies used by advertising practitioners to academic research, or identifying philosophies that open up a new line of research.

In regards to RQ1: Are there practitioner philosophies that line up with academic theories or constructs?—the answer is yes, but the degree to which those philosophies overlap with academic theories or constructs ranges from a little (e.g., Consumers do not want to think) to quite a bit (e.g., Attitude toward the ad). The following sections will first discuss in detail practitioner philosophies that stood out in the interviews and then the extent to which those philosophies overlap or align with academic theories.

PRACTITIONER PHILOSOPHIES

Breaking through. A major practical concern for practitioners in advertising is breaking through the clutter and hooking the audience into paying attention long enough to make an impact. To break through, practitioners in the study said ads needed a good “hook” to move from awareness to engagement. Participants also talked about the ad being in the right place at the right time; meaning, if a person does not see it or is not interested in it at the moment, it will not have an impact.

Clutter. One of the concerns for 65 percent of the creatives who were interviewed is breaking through the clutter and trying to draw attention of consumers who are constantly being bombarded with logos, sponsorship, or some form of advertising that is finding its way into any available space that can be found: annoying pop-up ads online, stadiums named after the sponsors, ads embedded into video games, metal plates on benches that pressed ads onto people's bare legs when they sat down, and even urinals have been turned into advertising space. Clutter came up as a topic when asked, "How do you try to connect with the consumer when you create ads?"

A common theme among the practitioners in the study was an awareness of how advertising has become increasingly invasive in our daily lives and how this creates a challenge because consumers are good at blocking out advertisements. Carol stated it this way while she was talking about connecting to consumers, "Advertising does seem to keep popping up everywhere as soon as there's space for it." Practitioners were also aware of the overwhelming number of ads that are seen daily, how people have become good at blocking out the extra noise, and that breaking through the clutter is a major challenge for practitioners as Tara said, "We see, I think the number is like 5,000 ads a day. We are already pretty good at tuning things out on our own." While Daryl addressed the challenges that clutter causes, "There's so much clutter out there that cutting through that can be a challenge." In both instances, awareness of clutter leads to a recognition that the clutter changes the way people engage with media in general. Not only are

practitioners aware of how much advertising clutter there is in the world, they recognize that it is not the most ideal environment for them to be working in:

I was watching some soccer this morning, and there's ads all around the stadium, there's ads on the jerseys, and it's just like information overload... There's just so much noise going around that you need to try and get as blindly in front of people as you can. I wish it were a little different. (Carl)

Many practitioners who were interviewed were aware of and concerned by the amount of advertising clutter there is out in the world and that breaking through advertising clutter can be difficult. They also elaborated on how to break through the clutter and get the attention of the consumers they are trying to connect with through hooks.

Hooks. All the practitioners in this study talked about break through to consumers by making the message resonate with the consumer through what they called “hooks” designed to create interest when asked, “How do you try to connect with the consumer when you create ads?” Practitioners in the study defined hooks as the one piece of the advertisement that draws customers into the message and makes them interested in listening to that particular message. As Derrick said, “Something has to hook you into paying attention.” According to these practitioners, one way to create a hook is through the way the message is crafted: the music, the visual style, the typeface, or the way a message is worded. All of the practitioners mentioned one or more of those elements through out the interview process. For creatives in this study, the creative elements are the hooks that draws the consumer in:

As the advertiser, you need to come in with a hook that's so irresistible they will say, “Well, go on. What else do you wanna say?” That's how you break through. (Eugene)

According to the practitioners, another hook that will draw consumers in is making them solve a simple mental puzzle within the messaging of the ad. In response to being asked about connecting to consumers Abraham said:

You need a straight headline but then visuals going to make them do all the work. So, if they have a bent headline, they need a pretty straight visual. If you have a bent visual and a bent headline, people are going to be confused. (Abraham)

Several of the participants described it as completing a circle. An advertisement cannot complete, or close, the circle for the consumer; they need to be challenged to make the leap and close the circle themselves. On the other hand, advertisements cannot make the consumer work too hard to close the circle; Abraham described it as an ad can go from A to B to D and let people figure out C, but an ad can not go A to D; if ads do not give enough information to complete the circle, consumers will also not be drawn into the message:

It [the message] should just challenge the viewer to solve a little bit of the puzzle on their own to get them involved rather than just be a message that's like hitting you in the head with a two by four, you felt it but it wasn't very pleasant. They don't want to be beaten with messaging. They want to be lulled into being charmed to actually draw the message in on their own. (Derrick)

Carl described it like this, "By giving them [consumers] the opportunity to solve or figure it [the ad] out themselves, it's more of a connection." Making a connection through a good hook can even create interest where there was not interest before.

According to all the practitioners in the study, creating buzz and making advertising interesting to watch helps hook them into paying attention. Shawn said it quite simply, "Make it interesting and people will watch." Not only can a good hook create interest, but participants believed that people do not always know what they want until they see it.

According to Daryl, “There’s a certain amount of people who don’t know what they want until they see it.” Kevin held this same view but thought it was more prevalent, “I don’t think most people even know what they want, or want to hear.” These are both examples of how practitioners in the study know they need to hook consumers who might not know how a product or service could assist them.

Breaking through the clutter involves finding a good hook and “a lot of the challenge is finding the hook,” according to Daryl. Practitioners are trying to get the consumer to stop and pay attention when they are not interested in being interrupted from what they were doing: driving a car, scrolling through Facebook, reading a blog, watching a television show, or talking with a friend before the movie starts. According to practitioners, finding the hook that gets consumers interested without disrupting their day and in a way that makes them want to get involved with the message is key:

That's a great consumer behavior kind of thing—don't stop your consumer. Grab their attention. You can't force somebody to look at it. If you do, they're going to hate you. You've got to make them want to want it. (Abraham)

Sometime finding that hook is by catching people off guard:

There is this cognitive dissonance that’s happening. A perfect example of this is the original Old Spice commercial where he is like, ‘I’m on a horse’ and you go, “Right. What? Hang on, okay. Catch me up.” That’s what makes Dos Equis attractive, because every line is a joke and so that catches you off guard and you go, “Wait a minute. What are they saying?” (Eugene)

Having a good hook can get people engaged where there wasn’t interest before. This can be done through making consumers think or by catching them off guard. Not only does the ad need to hook people into paying attention, but the ad also needs to connect with consumers in the right place at the right time.

Right time, right place. According to 65 percent of practitioners in the study, advertising messages also need to be presented at the right time and place to resonate and connect with the consumer. Practitioners do not think ads need to be everywhere; they just need to be where the consumer's eyes are looking at a time they are thinking about the product or service being advertised. This can be a thing they are currently looking for or something they can be persuaded to upgrade:

Either the person is looking for what you're selling or the person who can upgrade to what you're selling, or the person has an option and can easily switch around to what you're selling. (John)

The placement depends on where the consumer seeks information and what types of media they are using. Several participants talked about the sidebar ads on Facebook and how they show ads for products a person has recently searched for online. Search for eyeglasses and Warby Parker ads will be displayed in the sidebar, or spend time looking for beds and Helix Sleep and Casper sponsored posts will show up in a person's newsfeed:

There probably are also occasional instances where maybe it's [an ad is] a little more welcome, and I'm thinking about really targeted web ads, that show me the exact shoes I looked at online and I could go to purchase. At least that has been very relevant. Something that is very targeted to me and my interest. (Maggie)

It is not about how many ads a consumer sees, but about the connection that ad can make:

Maybe it's a shift from quantity to quality engagement in some ways, because the world is so noisy. So how can we help our brand authentically connect with an audience that's already kind of looking for them as opposed to just blasting it out there; try to get a million impressions to how can we actually help you find the audience that truly wants to connect with you already based on their lifestyle or choices, their interests and help them connect with you in a meaningful way to where they're gonna be part of your tribe. (Rick)

Presenting ads at the right time and in the right place is an objective that can become easier to miss than to hit as one participant point out. Breaking through the clutter to connect a relevant message with consumers at the right time and place goes beyond the advertising creatives crafting the right message. It takes media and account planners to know where the consumers are seeking information or entertainment. Breaking through is the outcome of a good process within the advertising agency of making sure ads are in the right place at the right time:

You may say the right thing but at the wrong time or to the wrong people and those things [messages] will just go over people's heads and they won't have any reaction. I think those are the types of things that would get rejected. Again, it comes back to, are you saying the right thing at the right time to the right people. And that's why it's not just up to me; it's up to the guys I'm working with in media, it's up to my brand manager, and I have to rely on my account planner. It's a team effort, and if one of those things aren't in place, then the ad gets rejected. (Eugene)

Creating ads that break through the clutter by using a good hook and placing ads in the right places at the right time is at the forefront of the minds of advertising creatives.

Connecting breaking through to academic theory. There has been significant research done in the area of advertising clutter and its various effects across media platforms (Brown & Rothschild, 1993; Elliott & Speck, 1998; Ha, 1996; Ha & Litman, 1997; Jake Rotfeld, 2006; Riebe, & Dawes, 2006). While some media platforms have greater negative impacts of advertising clutter, the effects are not nearly as prominent as advertising practitioners believe. Elliott & Speck (1998) found that perceived ad clutter leads to lower attitude toward the ad and more ad avoidance. Television advertising was viewed by consumers as having the most communication problems, the highest perceived

ad clutter, and was avoided the most (Elliott & Speck, 1998). They also found that radio advertising was viewed a slightly better than television advertising in those same factors, and magazines were the rated the same as television advertising for communication problems, but lower on perceived ad clutter.

The amount of clutter was also overestimated; in popular news medias, which was repeated by a few practitioners in this study, claim that people see up to 5,000 ads a day. Johnson (2014) found that 5,000 is all brand exposures, which would include the brands within your home, and only about 362 advertising exposers per day:

- Average number of advertisement and brand exposures per day per person: 5,000+
- Average number of “ads only” exposures per day: 362
- Average number of “ads only” noted per day: 153
- Average number of “ads only” that we have some awareness of per day: 86
- Average number of “ads only” that made an impression (engagement): 12 (Johnson 2014)

Being exposed to more than 350 ads per day is what would be considered clutter, while the 12 ads that made an impression are the ones that break through and connect with the consumer.

Breaking through was also a theme found by Kover (1995), when interviewing only copywriters using the same interview guide and there has also been some research on how to “break through”: Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel (2002) looked at advertising originality and familiarity on attention and memory; Pieters and Wedel (2004) looked at how images, text size, and brands gain attention; Stout, Leckenby, and Hecker (1990) looked at the effect of music in television commercials; and Till and Baack (2005) studied creative advertising and its effects on brand attitude, recall, and purchase intent.

These studies get at some of the elements that practitioners are concerned with—font, visuals, originality, and creativity; these are similar to the elements the practitioners listed—the music, the visual style, the typeface, by creating an emotional reaction, or by tapping into the universal truths that connect individuals. The concept of advertising at the right time and place has also been studied in academics with a heavy focus on digital and online advertising (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003; Gross, 2010; Shamdasani, Stanaland, & Tan, 2001; Van Reijmersdal, 2009). In the case of the “right time, right place” advertising, creatives know it is an important issue, but rely on media and account planners to know where to reach consumers, which removes control of the “right time, right place” away from creatives within an advertising agency.

Consumer Processing. When asked questions to see how practitioners believe consumers view and process advertising, the practitioners in the study had very contradictory things to say about how consumers process ads. In the last section, 90% of the participants talked about how ads need to make consumers think and have a mentally rewarding payoff, which was in response to questions about how to break through, get the consumer’s attention, and connect with the customer. But when asked questions about how much thought consumers will put into advertising, 50% of participants said consumers would put little to no thought into an ad. Another example of the advertising practitioners in the study saying opposing ideas was on the topic of how people like or dislike advertising. All of the practitioners interviewed said consumers dislike advertising at some point in the interview, yet 55% of those practitioners said that consumers do like ads to some degree. The last responses in relationship to consumer processing was on

whether consumers need to pay attention to ads for them to work. Again, 40% of the participants said at some point during the interview that consumers had to both pay attention for ads to work and that advertising could work if consumers were not paying attention. This section will dig deeper into how practitioners believe consumers view ads by exploring “consumers do not want to think,” “consumers dislike ads,” and “concise and unconscious processing.”

Consumers do not want to think. In the last section, “Breaking Through,” 90% of practitioners in the study talked about not completing the circle for customers and giving them a mental problem to chew on to create a payoff for the customer that builds engagement and interaction when asked, “How do you try to connect with the consumer when you create ads?” Yet, in response to the questions about how much mental work consumers will put into understanding an ad, 50% of practitioners said that consumers would put very little mental work into an ad. Practitioners interviewed believe consumers are smart and want to think while at the same time practitioners interviewed believe that consumers are not thinking at all. For those practitioners that think consumers will not put much thought into an ad, it was simple and straightforward. They had very short and uncomplicated responses to the question “How much mental work will consumers put into understanding an ad?” Emma response was, “I mean, I’d say little to none.” Lori’s response was even shorter; with no elaborations she simply said, “Oh, not a lot.”

However, other practitioners in the study responded to the same question with the belief that only on very rare occasions would a customer put any mental work into understanding an advertisement and that according to Carol consumers would put no

thought into an ad, “unless you make it really, really compelling.” Carol was not the only person to hold this view and Daryl described how “very little” thought people would put into ads:

People will spend virtually no time anymore paying attention to something to try to figure it out, with a few exceptions, a few that are able to capture their interest...I mean, you can't really hide the punch line on anything. (Daryl)

Not only are people not putting mental energy into processing ads, but according to practitioners in the study, consumers might even be actively thinking about not paying attention to ads and consumers are putting forth effort to ignore the ads consciously or unconsciously. As one copywriter put it:

As far as processing ads, the thing to remember is that people aren't getting into a subway and saying, “Oh, I can't wait to read the ads.” And whatever it is, they are either consciously or unconsciously not paying attention. (Tara)

Only two participants mentioned ad-blocking software and it was in regard to their own use of ad-blocking software and how Forbes magazine makes them turn off ad-blockers to access the website.

A quarter of the practitioners interviewed had a more nuanced view and said it depends on the person, the place it is being advertised, and if a person is interested in the product. These practitioners believe that consumers have to be interested on some level to put forth mental effort to think about ads:

I think it depends on the payoff. If it's going to be a short 15-second spot, then you can't make them think too much about it, but if it's something where it's like a long interactive experience then I think it's okay to be a little more thought provoking. (Tara)

This dichotomy that lives even within individual practitioners over how much mental effort consumers will put into ads is only one situation when it comes to consumer processing that practitioners in the study held very contradictory views—even within the individual.

Consumers dislike ads. Another area that held a dichotomy was how much consumers hate ads. All of the practitioners in the study at some point during the interview said consumers do not like advertising. The idea that people hate advertising is common and considered general knowledge amongst practitioners in the study. Most frequently the comments about consumers disliking advertising came up in regard to being asked, “How do you think consumers view advertising?” Some of the harsher views were by Emma and Chad. “I think they don’t give a shit about it” as Emma described it or as Chad said, “Advertising people are like right above used car salesmen, you know, it’s not great.” And if not right out disdain for advertising, practitioners believed that there was at the very least a strong indifference to advertising. Carol described it like this, “I think consumers are largely indifferent to it. I think a billboard is just a billboard, no matter how clever or fantastic looking it is—same with all media, I think.”

Again, there was a dichotomy within the individual practitioners who were interviewed about how much people like or dislike ads, with 55% of practitioners mentioning at another point within the interview, typically when wondering off from another topic, that people like ads, at least to some degree. The idea that ads are like or

disliked based on the person is similar to the dichotomy that exists in how much people will think about the ad; it comes down to the individual person:

I think it really depends on the specific ad itself because sometimes, you know, you see things shared on Facebook... It's a really cool interactive experience, so I think people think that they don't like advertising, but I think that there's some really cool examples that prove them wrong. (Tara)

Practitioners in the study acknowledged that consumers have to sit through some very bad ads and that consumers appreciate and remember the good ones:

I think consumers, like I said, they don't like advertising to a point but they also love it. I mean, look at the Super Bowl commercials, people are talking about them. It's everyone. They're interested in it. (Anna)

The timing of the interviews may have skewed the number of practitioners in the study who mentioned consumers liking ads. The interviews were taken within the three months leading up to Super Bowl 50, which was the third most watched Super Bowl broadcast to date, receiving 111.9 million views (Nielsen, 2016). This is a time when advertising agencies are in a push to complete work that will be showcased and when Super Bowl ads start getting “leaked” online. Tweets about the advertisements alone during Super Bowl 50 reached 4.6 million Tweets that were sent by 1.4 million unique authors (Nielsen, 2016). The number of practitioners who said that people like ads on some level and who also mentioned the Super Bowl at the same time was 25%.

Conscious and unconscious processing. The last area related to consumer processing and how consumers view ads was in the conscious and unconscious processing of messages in advertising. This was another area in which individual practitioners in the study held dichotomous views about how consumers process

information. There were three categories of response to a series of questions of four questions about the necessity of consumers paying attention to ads: advertising messages can work unconsciously (30%), consumers have to pay attention to the ad for the message to get through (30%), with the largest group of practitioners believing both, or a combination of both, conscious and unconscious processing works to get messages through to consumers (40%).

With unconscious processing of ads, two practitioners in the study called it “osmosis” and it was believed by practitioners that consumers’ brains process information without being consciously aware:

I’d say mostly subconsciously without even realizing they’re processing it [the ad]. It’s kind of like going by, taking in information, and then maybe having it come up later. I think most people go by day-to-day, take it in, and don’t think a whole lot about what’s going on unless it’s very current or relevant to their current situation. I think the sidelines are probably the way that ads are more effective. (Kevin)

While Kevin thought the unconscious was more effective, it was more common for practitioners to think “a good ad” could get through without the customer having to pay attention and deeply engage with the message or ad. One practitioner even admitted that she used to believe consumers needed to pay attention, but has changed her mind:

It’s one of those things where I use to [think consumers had to pay attention for ad messages to get through]. I do think they [ads] affect you even if you’re not paying attention to them. I don’t know if it’s enough to have you make any decisions but you just think about it even if it’s not a lot. (Beth)

Most of the practitioners interviewed who thought messages could get through without the consumer paying attention did not necessarily think that it was enough for

people to make a decision, but even small amounts of thought about a product or brand by consumers is good.

The largest group of participants thought that both unconscious and conscious thought played a role in advertising messages. All of the practitioners coded as “both” did believe that conscious thought and active engagement was a better way for an advertising message to get through, half believed that messages could get through even without people paying attention to the ad, and the other half believed that the unconscious was where the filtering process takes place. They believed that the unconscious filters all of the messages and when there is something that would be of interest, the conscious thinking about the ad or message kicks in:

I think it's [ad messages] processed on a need to know basis. I feel like they see it for a split second where their brain subconsciously determines if it's worth thinking about or not. I think at this point people have developed this really, really strong filter over whether or not they should adsorb any advertising or not. (John)

And lastly there was the group of practitioners in the study who believe that consumers do have to pay attention to the message for it to get through:

I think a lot of people would hope that advertising could somehow subconsciously communicate, but I don't really believe that because I think you see messaging and you take some of it in, and in your filtering process and then there's that little bit that makes you go, “Oh, wow. That's deep. Look at that.” And then you literally choose to absorb and take it in and read more. (Derrick)

It also depended on how the question was asked. In response to asking if consumers need to pay attention for information to get through, Tara said, “That's a really interesting one. I'm not sure.” But later when asked, “Are ads more effective if the viewer is engaged with the message?” Tara said, “Absolutely.” This example really

drives home how important it is for advertising practitioners to understand how advertising works in the minds of the consumer. Without a clear understanding of how consumers view advertising, creatives are at a disadvantage, and the lack of consistency within the individual on the topic of consumer process may be hindering their ability to connect with consumers.

Connecting consumer processing to academic theory. The most straightforward research to these topics is in the area of whether people like or dislike advertising. While demographic factors like age, race, and gender play a role in how positive consumers feel toward advertising (Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Mehta, 2000; Yoon, 1995), the general overall results from current academic research is that consumers do not feel as negatively about advertising as practitioners interviewed in this study believed (Kaiser & Song, 2009; Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998). The number of comments made by practitioners about consumers liking ads in connection with the Super Bowl seems warranted. Consumers do appreciate well-crafted advertising and can tell when practitioners put forth effort into their craft (Ambler & Hollier, 2004; Dahlén, Rosengren, & Törn, 2008). Well-crafted advertising that consumers view as expensive with high amounts of effort being put into creating the ad signals quality of the product in the minds of consumers (Ambler & Hollier, 2004; Dahlén et al., 2008) and also increases positive attitude toward a brand, brand interest, and word of mouth intention (Modig, Dahlén, & Colliander, 2014)

When it comes to the research on whether or not consumers want to “complete the circle” or want ads that make them think, this author could not find any articles directly

related to consumers wanting ads that are easy or difficult to process and figure out.

There is the moderator need for cognition (NFC), which is how much an individual wants to perform effortful cognitive activities (Cacioppo & Petty, 1982; for review Cacioppo, Petty, Feinstein, & Jarvis, 1996). NFC and its effects have been well studied in advertising (Cacioppo, Petty, & Kao, 1984; Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992; Martin, Lang, Wong, 2003; Zhang, 1996; Zhang & Buda, 1999). NFC is a trait within the individual, is different from person to person, and is typically studied in academics as a dichotomous variable—high or low NFC. NFC has been shown to moderate many different aspects of advertising, including but not limited to humor (Zhang, 1996), message framing (Zhang & Buda, 1999), attitude change (Haugtvedt & Petty, 1992), memory (Peltier & Schibrowsky, 1994), implicit and explicit conclusions (Cacioppo et al., 1984), literal and non-literal messages (Brennan & Bahn, 2006), and inferences about admitted conclusions (Stayman & Kardes, 1992).

The philosophy of practitioners in this study on “closing the circle” or filling in the information gap and the contradictory philosophy that consumers do not want advertising that makes them think could be connected to the idea of implicit and explicit conclusions made by advertising messages used by Cacioppo et al. (1984), literal or non-literal messages (Brennan & Bahn, 2006), or inferences about admitted conclusions used by Stayman and Kardes (1992). Cacioppo et al. (1984) found that high NFC individuals have more positive attitudes toward implicit conclusions in advertising and low NFC individuals are not affected by implicit or explicit conclusions made by advertising messages. The study by Brennan and Bahn (2006) supported those findings. In their

study on literal or non-literal messages in advertising, high NFC individuals had more positive attitude toward non-literal messages and low NFC individuals did not differ between literal and non-literal messages. Stayman and Kardes (1992) tested inferences about admitted conclusions made to advertising that were made spontaneously and found more inferences made by people with high NFC (study 1) or where involvement was high (study 2). Study 2 used involvement, which might be similar to what practitioners in the study were talking about when they say consumers need to pay attention and consciously think about advertising for it to work (Stayman and Kardes, 1992).

The philosophy of unconscious and conscious processing used by advertising practitioners in the study in some cases could be in line with engagement that impacts effectiveness of advertising (Calder & Malthouse, 2008; Wang, 2006), or involvement (Mitchell, 1981) that in academic research is used as a moderator of dual processing systems (Chaiken, 1987; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983). In other cases, the practitioners' philosophy of unconscious and conscious processing is more similar to dual processing models (i.e., elaboration likelihood model (ELM) or heuristic-systematic model (HSM)). In dual processing models, there are two main routes of processing: the central processing route and the peripheral route. When a person is putting high degrees of thoughts into processing the communication they receive, they are using the central processing route; when they are putting low degrees of thought into communication they are receiving, they are using the peripheral route. This model postulates that information processed through the central route will be more influential and persist longer than

information processed through the peripheral route (Chaiken & Eagly, 1989; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984).

This section shows that the terminology is not the same between academics and practitioners. The philosophies used by practitioners in this study about how consumers' process information is loosely connected to academic research and again shows how important it is to bridge the academic-practitioner gap.

Attitude toward the Ad. Another philosophy that practitioners in the study were particularly concerned about, is how consumers responded to individual ads, advertising campaigns, and the larger idea of building brand personality—which was simply referred to as branding in the advertising agencies. When asked, “How does the ad affect the brand in the minds of the view?” practitioners were all in agreement that advertising affects consumers' views of the brand and that it is ultimately the goal of advertising to do so. Eugene responded to the question like this:

The hope of advertising is that you are affecting people's view of the brand, ideally positively... You want people to remember the moment they engage with your ad... and hopefully creates a memory that when people see your brand, if they don't remember the specific moment, they remember the feeling from it.
(Eugene)

One way they described the relationship between ads and brands was through building brand personality or brand equity. According to the practitioners in the study, every ad is designed to build the personality of the brand through the look and feel of the ad. It is the role of the advertiser to keep that message consistent and make sure all messages go out on target with the branding build for a company. This is achieved through advertising campaigns that revolve around a consistent message. According to

the practitioners in the study, advertising campaigns and individual ads are the ways through which the brand is shaped, how a company communicates brand personalities, and they give the consumer a feel of what the brand or company really is—feelings for the brand are created through the ads and are designed to connect to the consumer. When asked, “How does advertising effect the brand in the minds of the consumer?”

practitioners said ads are how they communicate the brand’s image. Eugene described this effect of the ad on the brand by saying, “That’s why in advertising you have to be aware of that role as the steward of the brand... you can affect someone’s opinion.”

Maggie was also very aware of how ads affect the brand in minds of the consumers and she described it like this, “All of our communications need to convey the brands to the people they are speaking to.”

The impact of single ads on the brand was also discussed. A few practitioners talked about a single bad ad as something that could be overcome within the larger campaign. When the integrated advertising campaign (e.g., the website, print ads, television commercials, branded content, etc.) is on point with a consistent message, then one ad—good or bad—cannot impact the larger message being delivered:

That's why we spend so much time with branding companies in keeping their branding consistent because if they see one ad, they just saw a great ad... but when you see them as a whole, then you've seen a thousand Coke ads, you get a feeling of the company so one ad might be very small but the cumulative effect of all them has a huge effect to your brand. (Daryl)

Daryl mentioned that it takes more than one ad to have an impact, it takes a whole integrated campaign and Nance said the same thing when she said, “I don’t think an ad stays strong enough to stand alone if it’s not integrated into a full marketing effort.”

There was also a more mixed view on the impact of a few bad ads. While one ad might not impact a brand, a lot of bad ads might and the number it takes could be different depending on the brand:

If Pepsi runs a bad ad, they can just apologize and they can move on, but if there is a smaller company that runs a bad ad, it could maybe affect their business.
(Lori)

Practitioners were also aware that it is their job to protect their client from bad messaging.

I think that's one of the things that we struggle with 'cause a lot of times you know clients want to put something out that might be harmful to their brand and they're thinking about an ad you know but this one's not as good but don't worry about it. That's the balance that we constantly have to strike like we're trying to protect your brand and even though it's just one little thing we have to keep a lot of it from going out. You'll never know how many is the, really the tipping point.
(Daryl)

More than 60% of practitioners interviewed did believe that how consumers feel toward the ads will have a strong impact on how consumers feel about the brand and they used terms like “synonymous” and “incredibly linked” when talking about the affect of ads on brand:

I think the two are incredibly linked. I think that it can really be a hit or miss for brand equity if you create an amazing ad. People can, if you say the brand the first thing they can think of is that ad. But then again if you come up with a horrible ad and they say their brand, their mind can immediately go to that terrible experience they had. So I think they are intrinsically linked. (Tara)

The philosophy used by practitioners describing how the ad can effect how consumers feel about the brand is a construct used by academics. It is known as the moderator attitude toward the ad (A_{ad}), and its role in attitude toward the brand (AB) has

been well studied with both experimental and field research (for review Brown & Stayman, 1992). Significance for A_{ad} playing a role in AB has been shown through studies that measured either a direct or indirect relationship to AB.

Connecting Attitude toward the ad to academic theory. A_{ad} having an effect on AB is one area in which advertising practitioners have a strong alignment with a phenomenon that is well studied in academics. This does not mean practitioners and academics are using the same terminology. Practitioners do not talk about the “mediating effects” of an ad on the brand. Also, what practitioners call integrated advertising campaigns are often referred to as “synergies” within academic research and are usually only studied with two variables, or channels, on brand attitudes: web and television (Chang & Thorson, 2004), advertising and publicity (Stammerjohan et al., 2005), or online and radio (Voorveld, 2011). How A_{ad} effects AB is well studied within academics. These responses raise the interesting question of how integrated advertising campaigns can mediate the effect of one message or ad. This opens up a new line of research on intergraded campaigns and attitudes toward the brand.

PRACTITIONERS’ DISCUSSION OF “THEORIES”

In regards to RQ2: Do advertising creatives explicitly talk about academic theories or constructs?—yes, a few practitioners in the study did explicitly talk about academic theory, although the majority of them did not.

The interview guide was designed to get practitioners to talk about the concepts, philosophies, and theories that they use to create and design ads without directly asking

about known theories or philosophies that practitioners might be using, but the last question asked in the section “strategy,” which at the very end of the interview just prior to being asked one question on defining research and three general closing questions about any thing else the participants would like to add at the (see Appendix A), was a question that directly asked, “What are some theories about consumers you use to connect with your target audience?” While this question did directly say “theories,” of the 40% of participants who mentioned having a theories course in college only one participant directly connected the term “theory” in this question to the types of theories or constructs in academic research.

At some point during the interviews prior to the more direct question mentioned above, 30% of participants did explicitly state that they knew of the existence of academic theory; although, only one participant did mention theory later when asked directly about it toward the end of the interview. Another 10% mentioned that understanding psychology and sociology is important to creating advertising and connecting to the consumer; although, none of them mentioned this in relation to the final question “What are some theories about consumers you use to connect with your target audience?” that was asked at the end of the interview. With much of the advertising research building on theories, concepts, and measurements from psychology and sociology, for practitioners to make the connection is considered a small step in the right direction in bridging the academic-practitioner gap. The majority of participants did not mention academic research or theories at all.

Those with knowledge of academic theory. There were some practitioners (30%) in the study who explicitly knew of academic theories and understood that academic theories existed. Of that 30 percent, they all stated that they had a theories class in college when asked questions about their educational background, and most of the participants that mentioned getting theories courses in college tried to talk about theory and how it was useful. Most were unable to explicitly talk about the theories they learned or used. Often they would mention theory at some other point in the interview and when directly asked about theories they use to connect to the consumer at the end of the interview, they would not come back to academic theories. One participant brought up theory when asked about emotions:

So, if I'm remembering my theory correctly, they're most effective when not used for something quantifiable or not combined with that sort of an approach. I think emotions are, gosh, this is a tough one. They're kind of our way in, in some ways. If we can get an initial emotional reaction, then there's a chance that the audience will stick around or listen to the rest. If we can make someone laugh right off the bat or someone be intrigued, then maybe they won't change the channel just yet. (Carol)

And later when directly asked a question about what theories she uses, Carol said, "People are busy. People just don't have time for anything not worth their time." Carol had talked about having a theories class in college at the master's level, and had even tried to use them while answering other questions, but when asked about theory she gave a response that did not include any theories. This was true for the majority of participants who talked about theory. One participant tried to name a theory they use, "social media theory," which is not an academic theory and one participant was very excited about theory. When Beth answered questions from the section about education, she mentioned

the Theory of Planned Behavior, talked about how she had wanted more theories classes, and how useful theory can be:

Aren't you going to teach me either more of the theory behind these things? We did have one theories class which was amazing. But I just really didn't feel like they were trying to help me learn more above and beyond what I would have learned in an undergrad course besides theories. Theories, I think, really helped us. I wish there were more classes like that. (Beth)

Beth did not mention theory again when questions about connecting to the consumer were asked or when directly asked about theory. There was another small fraction of participants (10%) who mentioned theory and believed trying to use it has a negative impact on creativity. As one participant said:

I wouldn't say certain theories. I'd say the only theory I'd go back to is understating relevance, but that's always changing, so I would say no, there's no backbone theory that I go to. Because I think that would stifle the creative process for me. Part of the creative process, is opening yourself up to the audiences, and what a meaningful solution it would look like for them. And so if I think I would carry too many concrete, I carry too many concrete presuppositions. I think that will hold us back from finding the right solution. That would make too many assumptions for me. (Rick)

Or when asked about theories to connect to consumers, they did not give it much importance:

I don't. I don't have any of that [theories]. We have strategists, they come up with that stuff, but usually they'll put it out to us. But yeah, I don't think too much about that. Expect for what they give us—it's something to think about. (Daryl)

Of the practitioners (40%) in the study who were coded as having knowledge of academic theories, the lowest threshold was for those who mentioned psychology and sociology (10%) when directly asked about theories they use to connect to consumers. With much of the academic research in advertising borrowing from those two fields, the

author considered it as better than having no knowledge of academic theories and research in regard to the academic-practitioner gap. Another common factor for those participants was they had been out of school for a longer period of time (15+ years) and mentioned that taking multiple courses in school, including psychology and sociology courses, helped them be more well-rounded at their job. Psychology and sociology in particular try to explain how humans behave in different situations or under different conditions, and that is important for advertising. As one participant put it:

I think just having a basic understanding of human psychology or sociology and what drives people is a good background to have. Again, the whole idea that fear and greed are the two most powerful drivers and if you can somehow tap into those it can really work for you... so I think that's again part of that idea of a well-rounded ad education, so I went to a university and I took sociology, and I took psychology and other classes to learn these things about human behavior and so I think the more you can know about human behavior outside of the advertising world, the more you can adapt it to work for you within advertising. (Ryan)

This shows that some advertising practitioners know it is important to understand human behavior that knowledge can assist in the creation of ads, but as Carol so eloquently put it, “I think a lot of people don't realize that advertising is an academic discipline.”

Overall, even the participants who knew about academic theory and thought it was important were mostly unable to clearly explain it, talk about it explicitly when asked, or in some cases explained it incorrectly. There were 20% of participants who stated that knowing theory was important in being able to explain to the client why choices were made; again, none of the participants in this study mentioned this in relation to the final question “What are some theories about consumers you use to connect with your target audience?” that was asked at the end of the interview. The

majority of these participants were also not actively using theory in their work despite knowing about it. This is why bridging the academic-practitioner gap is important—some creatives know that theory exists and it is useful to justify choices to a client, but they often do not know what theory to use, do not know how to integrate academic concepts into creative work, or they are not using those theories and concepts correctly.

Those without knowledge of academic theory. The majority of participants did not attempt to directly talk about academic theories or concepts, did not mention any theories class in college, and did not allude to advertising as an academic discipline. When directly asked about theory or when they mentioned the word “theory,” it was philosophies they used, not theory. When this group of practitioners was directly asked about theory, they had very different answers. One of those philosophies was about how people feel about advertising. At the top of one company’s creative brief, it says that people hate ads and people do not remember advertising. Another philosophy was that consumers are ignorant about information, products, or brands. An example of this is when asked about theories, Kevin said, “I guess maybe that consumer doesn’t really know anything and be as informative as possible. The quickest and fastest way possible.” There was also the philosophy of “completing the circle” in which consumers want to think, but not too much. Abraham described it as, “I’ve always thought A to B to D, they can figure out C... Consumers like to solve simple problems, even if it’s just an ‘Oh, oh ah-ha’.” There was a small section of practitioners who avoided answering the question about theories (15%) and another small set of practitioners (15%) that stated their theory was to respect the customer—respect their time and intelligence, treat them with respect,

and not try to trick them. One of the practitioners who answered the question about theory in regard to respecting the consumer said:

I guess if there's a theory, it's really a theory about consumers, it's really respect. It's probably my number one universal theory is respect the consumer, trust them to be thoughtful and ingenious and capable and then give them creative messages that will leverage those considerations. (Rick)

The philosophies stated above—how much thought consumers will put into ads, how consumers feel about advertising, and completing the circle—came up with other practitioners in the study in relation to other questions and will be elaborated on later in the results.

HOW PRACTITIONERS DEFINE RESEARCH

In regards to RQ3: How do advertising creatives define research?—when asked to define “advertising research,” every practitioner in the study mentioned some form of internal research within the advertising agencies (e.g., focus groups, copy testing, target market research, click through rates (CTR), etc.) either pre-creative or post-creative, with only 30% of practitioners who mentioned academic research. Pre-creative research is the research done by planners and given to creatives in the form of a creative brief that copywriters and art directors use as a creative springboard for the big ideas and executions of advertising campaigns. Post-creative research (e.g., copy testing and focus groups) is done after the big ideas and multiple executions are created to see how it will be received by the target audience before the final creative executions are released in their finished form. When practitioners knew about academic theories (30%), they were

more inclined to talk about academic research and know of its existence—83% of those who knew about academic theory also mentioned academic research.

When participants were asked to define advertising research, a few practitioners (20%) directly pointed out that the author doing the interviews was doing research, but that there was the research done within the advertising agencies as well. When Carol was asked about advertising research, her response was very similar to the others who recognized that what the author was doing was a type of advertising research:

It's the process of examining. Well, I guess, do you mean advertising research within agencies, or advertising research as in what you're doing right now? [Carol was instructed to answer for both] So, I guess what you're doing right now is more, I would say, examining kind of the nature of this field and the kind of underlying theories and what drives it and such. Whereas, at agencies, it's a lot more about just what works and what doesn't, yes. (Carol)

This is a good example of how the term “research” means something different to academics than it does to advertising practitioners. Academic research is typically grounded in theory and is trying to build knowledge, and build on existing theories, while agency research is more focused on the results. One example of the practitioner research not being grounded in theory was in the area of focus groups for testing post-creative ideas before campaigns are finalized. All of the practitioners in the study that mentioned post-creative research (55%) mentioned focus groups for testing creative executions of ads and all of them said post-creative research is not very credible:

But I also think that post-production advertising research is not very credible... trying to presume that those people would react in a conference room full of their peers to an ad, the same way they would react to it if they saw it in a publication or on a television while they're sitting at home, eating their potato chips from a bag and drinking a beer, are two really different things. I think pre-creative research is a good useful tool and I think post-production research is basically

flawed and untrustworthy. Like conceptual copy testing is I think kind of bogus. (Derrick)

In academic research, there is often more freedom to the questions one can ask, while practitioners in the study said they want answers to specific outcomes of specific ads (e.g., CTR, focus groups, or copy testing) or typically the answer is the point of the study (i.e., what the consumer wants or how to motivate their purchases for a specific product). Practitioners want to know the end result and do not give much thought to academic theories that exist, which might save them time or resources when trying to gain insights into consumer behavior. One practitioner described several different types of agency research and what they expect to gain from their research:

Advertising research is usually trying to get insight of consumer wants or consumer behavior, so typically you're trying to see why your consumers pick one brand over another, what motivated their purchase or their choice, and then...what would be compelling to change their minds. You can also research and test different creative concepts to see which one connects most deeply with your prospects, so it's really all about trying to get inside into the consumer and their thoughts. (Ryan)

This practitioner described both pre-creative testing to try to understand consumer behavior and post-creative testing of different creative concepts, which both attempt to understand the consumer and their thoughts.

These sometimes subtle and sometimes drastic differences in what research means to academics and advertising practitioners make it difficult for professionals to understand the validity of the work academics do, thus driving a bigger wedge into the academic-practitioner gap. Tara's quote is also a good example of the importance of bridging the academic-practitioner gap. While Tara was aware of academic theories and

research, she did not actively employ that knowledge to her project despite the fact that she talked about research articles being useful:

But if there is an area where we're not really sure about, it helps to have a research article or something to back you up. So I think it can be really effective, especially when you're doing something a little on the risky side and you're not sure if it's going to pay off well. If you can have something to back you up, especially when it's time to present this idea to the client, that can be incredibly helpful. (Tara)

There were no cases of an advertising practitioner in this study discussing how they used their knowledge of academic concepts, theories, or research when creating campaigns.

Kover (1976) described the above difference between academic research and the research of practitioners in advertising. There has been small body of research into how practitioners view research (Chong, 2006; Cornelissen & Lock, 2002; Kover, 1976, 1995; Kover & James, 1997; Vaughn, 1982). While some of that research reflects the views of participants in this study, there are other “general knowledge” statements that have been made which do not reflect the sentiments of creatives in this study. Kover (1995) found that copywriters view post-creative research such as copy testing and focus groups as destructive to the creative process, which was also the sentiments of both the copywriters and the art directors in this study. Kover (1995) also found that copywriters accept creative briefs, which uses pre-creative research to give creatives insights into the consumer, only to the degree that it helped copywriters understand the target audience, but all the practitioners in this study stated that the creative brief was extremely important to their work, with many calling it the “springboard” to good creative work. Many of the practitioners in this study said they had received some type of theory course, research

course, or account planning course in college that gave them a better understanding of the different aspects of the advertising business, and this shift in attitudes from creatives may be due to changes in the educational process in the last two decades.

Another difference between past research and responses from practitioners in this study was that in the study by Chong (2006), practitioners focused on what was wrong with advertising research and not what benefits it could bring. While participants in this study did dislike post-creative research, reaffirming the findings from Chong (2006), they diverged when it came to pre-creative research; most participants in this study did see benefits from pre-creative research. The finding also diverged on the topic of research in the creative process. Chong (2006) found that creative directors believed that creativity belongs in the “realm of the imagination, and thus cannot be researched” (pg 371), while some practitioners in this study did see the benefits both academic and agency-based research could have on the creative process. These differences could be a cultural difference between the samples (i.e., United States and Singapore) or it could simply be a change in advertising culture over the last decade.

Discussion

This research was an exploration into what philosophies advertising practitioners, specifically the creatives (i.e., copywriters and art directors), are using that align with academic theories or constructs. What was found is that there are many areas of overlap in regard to practitioner philosophies and concepts studied in academics, although the terminology was very different in most regards. Those with knowledge of theory were mostly unable to articulate it, and only a few thought it was important. The number of participants who had some type of theories course yet were unable to discuss it or thought it was not useful points to the need for a better way to connect during the educational experience of future advertising practitioners. There are also lines of future research that could help clarify the differences found.

REALITY OF ACADEMIC-PRACTITIONER GAP

There were some topics in which advertising practitioners had a good understanding of well-studied concepts within academics, but the terminology did not always match. There were several areas in which there was a clear overlap in academics and practitioner concepts with A_{ad} having the clearest alignment of ideas, but the terminology did not always match. Practitioners in this study had varying degrees of how strong they believed A_{ad} effects AB, but they did understand that the effect exists. While there are any number of elements, or moderators (e.g., package design, name of product,

country of origin, ethics of the organization, etc.), that build brand attitudes, or brand equity (Aaker, 1991; Creyer, 1997; Mohd Yasin, Nasser Noor, & Mohamad, 2007; Orth & Malkewitz, 2008; Pappu, Quester, & Cooksey, 2006; Shaw & Shiu, 2003), A_{ad} is where advertising practitioners have control over the outcomes and they understand the A_{ad} leads to AB relationship is key.

The relationship of A_{ad} on AB is well understood, but there was a difference in the language used between practitioners and academics. The terminology in academics is more often “synergies” (Chang & Thorson, 2004; Stammerjohan et al., 2005; Voorveld, 2011) with “integrated campaigns” being used to a far lesser degree (Bauman, 2003) for more than one channel of communication, while advertising practitioners use the term “integrated campaigns.” The other difference is that while advertising academics have typically used two channels for advertising messages when testing synergies, it is common for practitioners to use more than two, especially with large clients, for integrated campaigns.

Another area in which there was much more overlap between academic research and practitioners’ philosophies was on the topic of clutter and breaking through. Practitioners overestimate how much advertising clutter exists, but existence of the clutter and its effects on consumer attitudes is confirmed by academic research (Brown & Rothschild, 1993; Elliott & Speck, 1998; Ha, 1996; Ha & Litman, 1997; Jake Rotfeld, 2006; Riebe, & Dawes, 2006). There was also overlap on how to break through that clutter by using elements that hook the consumer into paying attention—visual style, font choices, music, originality, and creativity (Pieters & Wedel, 2004; Pieters et al., 2002;

Stout et al., 1990; Till & Baack, 2005). This is an area where although practitioners in the study mentioned the elements and used them to create ads, they were unable to explicitly state how those elements worked. The practitioners' use of these design elements in advertising was driven by "gut feelings" about how they work and not necessarily explicit executions of the elements.

Another area in which there was some overlap of ideas was in consumers liking or disliking ads. There was a larger number than expected of practitioners who thought that people do like ads to some degree (55%), which may have been caused by an upcoming Super Bowl and is known as one of the largest advertising events in the US (Nielsen, 2016) where companies run their best work. They also thought how much a consumer likes an advertisement depends on a combination of the person, the quality of the ad, and the place where it is viewed. Advertising research in academia has looked into these qualities as pieces that make up likeability or receptivity of an ad. Having ads in the right place has become easier to study in the digital channels (Danaher & Mullarkey, 2003; Gross, 2010; Shamdasani et al., 2001; Van Reijmersdal, 2009) and there has also been some research into the perceived quality of an ad and its effects (Kirmani, 1990; Kirmani & Wright, 1989), making this another area in which practitioners and academics do have some overlapping understanding of how consumers think. At the same time, practitioners in this study did overestimate how much consumers dislike advertising (Kaiser & Song, 2009; Shavitt et al., 1998) and seemed unaware that demographic factors can influence likeability of ads (Bush et al., 1999; Mehta, 2000; Yoon, 1995).

Where the gap between academics and practitioners begins to be more noticeable is on the topic of conscious and unconscious message processing. There were some practitioners (40%) who thought advertising works through a mix of conscious and unconscious message processing, which is in line with academic research on dual processing (Chaiken, 1987; Petty, Cacioppo, & Schumann, 1983), but most of the participants (60%) thought either it works completely unconsciously or advertising messages must be given conscious attention to work. The gap becomes more noticeable and the connection between practitioners' philosophies and academic research becomes more unclear when the advertising practitioners talked about the dual processing pathways. None of the practitioners used the term "dual processing" when talking about conscious and unconscious processing; most of the practitioners used the words "involvement" or "engagement," which moderate the conscious processing pathway of dual processing models, to describe conscious processing. It also becomes more confusing because practitioners use the terms "involvement" and "engagement" interchangeably, while in academic research there are differences in the way involvement and engagement are measured and studied (Calder & Malthouse, 2008; Hallberg & Schaufeli, 2006; Mo & Singh, 2008; Mitchell, 1981; Wang, 2006; Wolf-Wendel, Ward, & Kinzie, 2009), although not all academic research defines the terms clearly enough to always understand the difference between the two. Involvement is the consumers' motivation to process information (Greenwald and Leavitt, 1984) while engagement is turning a customer onto a brand idea through contextual relevance. Engagement is a precursor to involvement that mediates message effectiveness, which in turn drives

attitude formation (Wang, 2006). The dual processing models in advertising and persuasion are well studied along with the moderating effects of involvement and engagement, this is an area in which bridging the knowledge gap between academics and practitioners would be beneficial to practitioners in giving them a better understanding of how consumers process ads.

Connected to the dual processing systems and engagement, there is the moderator of NFC, which is an individual's need for cognitive effort and to "intrinsically enjoy thinking" according to Haugtvedt et al. (1992). People high in NFC are more likely to form attitudes based on evaluations of product attributes, while low NFC individuals are more likely to form attitudes based on peripheral cues in ads. It is unclear if this is what practitioners were talking about when discussing the two sides of how much consumers want ads that make them think. On the one hand, practitioners in the study thought it takes leaving a little information out of an ad for consumers to figure it out on their own for the ad to connect and increase involvement. On the other hand, practitioners thought consumers want to put little to no thought into ads at all. Many of the practitioners held both views depending on how the question was asked. The idea of "not completing the circle" for customers and people not wanting to think about ads could also be connected to implicit and explicit conclusions made by advertising messages used by Cacioppo et al., (1984). How much consumers want to think about ads is another area in which the academic-practitioner gap is not only prominent but also much less clear about how practitioners' philosophies connect to academic research.

While this study showed there is some overlap between advertising practitioners' philosophies and the theories and constraints used by academics, it also confirmed there is still an academic-practitioner gap in advertising that needs to be bridged. This is a conversation that has been going on in the literature for over 30 years, although it has received little attention in academic research, and it is a conversation that could be changed. Having a better knowledge of the topics that need to be bridged and how big the knowledge gap between academics and practitioners is will help shed light on a solution to how to bridge that gap.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS

One way the academic-practitioner gap can be bridged is during the education process. With a clearer understanding of how advertising practitioners are using theories and constructs, it will be easier to incorporate those theories and constructs into more explicit uses in practice. This study also showed there are some topics that need a clearer understanding of how advertising is an academic discipline and how that discipline can help future advertising practitioners. Some theories and constructs practitioners already have a clear understanding of how they function; such as A_{ad} there is already a clear understanding that ads can affect consumers' attitudes toward the brand. Clutter is another topic that practitioners have a clear understanding that there is an effect. In both cases, there were some varying degrees of how big practitioners thought those effects were, but practitioners in the study still had a good understanding of the concepts.

When it came to breaking through the clutter, practitioners in this study were using the same techniques that have been studied in academics (i.e., visual style, font choices, music, originality, and creativity), but they were relying on “gut instincts” instead of being able to explicitly explain how they use them. For example, using metaphors in language and visuals leads to more positive inferences about the brand being generated by the viewer, which those inferences are more likely to take hold because there are multiple inferences and they were self-generated (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). An explicit understanding of ways to break through would give current advertising students a better understanding of how and when to employ which principles. Additionally, understanding what different factors play into advertising likability, from demographics to the quality of the ad, would be of benefit to students learning about advertising.

Another area on which the education of future advertising practitioners could focus to help start bridging the gap is the difference between academic research and the research that occurs within advertising agencies. The majority of participants did not mention academic research and all of the participants talked about the research that happens inside advertising agencies. Having a general understanding of advertising as an academic discipline and what knowing the types of research that happen in academia would help to bridge the academic-practitioner gap. There are models, theories, and constructs being used in academics and being tested in many different ways, environments, and with different interactions. With all of the knowledge being produced in academia, there are many areas in which practitioners can use those tested outcomes to

better focus their work or create solutions to problems that might not have been seen before.

This research has found some topics that would be easy to work into current advertising creative classes without changing the current course structures. The way to work these topics into the classroom is to make the students see how it can be effectively used in their work of creating ads. When a theory or construct can be connected to the creative process in a way that makes theory or constructs part of creating the ad with the consumer in mind it would be more salient in the minds of students. One way of making this connection would be to have a creative with experience in an agency co-teach with a professor who is experienced in academic. Working together they could bridge the abstract usability of academic theory with the functionality of creating campaigns that will resonate with the viewers. One suggestion for this would be having students pick a theory or construct from academia and create an advertising campaign that incorporates that knowledge and is for that theory or construct. Another way of making the connections more explicitly connected would be to have creative professors teach about advertising history and in the same class period have theory professors teach the theories and constructs that connect to the time periods the ads were made, how the ad motivates consumers, or how advertising in that time period influenced academic research.

Another way to bridge these two very different thought processes is by having more professors with knowledge of academic theory (i.e., doctorates of philosophy) who also have a strong knowledge of the advertising creative process and agency experience. Making the connections explicit and connecting those topics to how it can benefit the

work of creatives is a step in the right direction for bridging the academic-practitioner gap. There are some topics that will be discussed below that need further research by academics to fully understand the knowledge gap and how best to address it.

FUTURE RESEARCH

There were several topic areas that emerged from the interviews where there could be future academic research to elaborate on or clarify the understanding of advertising practitioners' environments and help build more practical applications to bridge the academic-practitioner gap. One of the areas in which there is room for future research in academics is in regard to the number of channels used for advertising synergy research. Typically academic research has only used two channels (Chang & Thorson, 2004; Stammerjohan et al., 2005; Voorveld, 2011), while it is common practice for advertising practitioners to use more channels. The author also makes the suggestion that academics use the term "integrated campaigns" to help make research more understandable and accessible to practitioners.

Another area for future research that would be useful to help bridge the academic-practitioner gap would be in the area of elements used by practitioners to break through the clutter (e.g., visual style, font choices, music, originality, and creativity). While the effects of these elements on consumer attitudes and behaviors have been studied (Pieters & Wedel, 2004; Pieters et al., 2002; Stout et al., 1990; Till & Baack, 2005), there is room for future research on how advertising practitioners use those same elements and to what degree of precision are they using those elements. The next step in this research could be

in-depth interviews with advertising creatives to dig deeper into the elements they use to break through the clutter and how they believe those elements break through the clutter to connect with consumers. A better understanding of this area of the academic-practitioner gap is needed to find an appropriate way to bridge it.

A third area for future research is in the area of emotions and how practitioners believe emotions work on the viewers. This is a topic that in-depth interviews would be beneficial. The practitioners in this study had very different views on what the word “emotion” meant, how emotions should be used, and if they are effective. The question on emotions was dropped during the interview process in this study because of the limit of overlapping responses and the need to go much more in-depth was a stress on time constraints during the interview process. Also, there are a broad range of emotions studied in academic research including but not limited to love, hate, fear, anger, joy, and sadness (Holbrook & Batra, 1987). It was decided that continuing to ask questions about using emotions in advertising and how emotions work on the consumer was outside of the scope of this project, but it would be a fruitful line of research for continued expansion in the area of emotions in advertising similar to Ball & Mackert (2013).

A fourth area for future research to bridge the academic-practitioner gap is in the area of how much consumers want to think about ads. The next step would be in-depth qualitative research to give a detailed account of this one particular aspect discussed by practitioners, which would help clarify what the practitioners believe about this aspect of consumer processing and how it would connect to the current body of knowledge. A clearer understanding of practitioners’ views on how much thought goes into an

advertisement would give a better idea of how to bridge this particular gap because understanding how NFC works and if practitioners are leveraging it correctly is a different conversation from implicit and explicit conclusions made by advertising messages.

After further in-depth interviews to more fully understand the different aspects of the academic-practitioner gap, the next step will be to design a survey to test those knowledge gaps and see if it exists in a broader context in agencies across the country. A large scale survey could also find out if where they live, what agencies they work in, or what schools they attend effects their knowledge of how advertising theories and concepts work in real life context.

This study showed that even those practitioners who had theories classes in their advertising programs were not using those tools to the best of their abilities. Another future line of research in regard to the academic-practitioner gap would be interviewing advertising professors to find out how they incorporate theory into the classroom and how they connect those theories to the creative process, the creation of ads, and functional tools that advertising students can use in their future careers. A better understanding of how theories are being taught and why they are not connecting with the students in a memorable way will assist in bridging the academic-practitioner gap.

LIMITATIONS

While this study has found some areas that could help bridge the academic-practitioner gap, there are some limitations. One limitation was on sampling and the

timing: the interview coincided with the busy season in advertising agencies, making recruitment difficult. Another limitation on the sample was it started through snowball sampling and through cold contacting advertising agencies across the country. While there was a good mix of participant backgrounds in education, work experience, location, and age, there was a small cluster of students from the same graduate program and another cluster of participants from the same state.

Another limitation was that due to the choice to cover a broad range of topics instead of doing a detailed account of one particular aspect, there were philosophies discussed by the practitioners in the study that did not get as in depth as they could be. One example of this was in regards to emotions in advertising. This is a complex topic and there are researchers dedicated studying emotions in advertising, because the topic of emotions in advertising was too big for the scope of this project some questions were dropped from the interviews as the interview process progressed.

Also, there was a limitation on the academic research that was connected to practitioners' philosophies. The author was not looking for particular theories during the data collection process and let the practitioner philosophies that were most important to the participants in the study emerge from the data. In doing so there were some topic areas (e.g., dual processing theories or constraints like need for cognition, attitude toward the ad equals attitude toward the brand) that were connected to practitioner philosophies because the author was already familiar with them. This familiarity was used to direct the search terms. Another limitation in this area is due to the topics the author was unfamiliar with (e.g., clutter), which means the terms used to search for published research might

not have been the most effective; for example, practitioners used the term “integrated campaigns” while research more often used the term “synergies.” The author found multiple terms in the published research that connected to the same idea; this means that while the author tried to be as thorough as possible, there might have been other terms that were missed during the process of searching for academic research that connects to the philosophies the practitioners in this study.

Conclusion

The academic-practitioner gap has been a topic of conversation in the literature for more than 30 years, and while it has received little research, it is a topic of conversations in many departments in academia. This study confirms the findings of past research on the existence of the academic-practitioner gap (Gabriel, Kottasz, & Bennett, 2006; Nyilasy & Reid, 2007; O'Donohoe & Tynan, 1998) and adds to the body of research on the academic-practitioner gap by examining the philosophies of advertising practitioners and how they align with academic research to build a better understanding of what specific areas the gap exist in and how large that gap is.

The new insights found are: advertising practitioners are using some theories and constructs that are studied in academics, practitioners and academics are not always using the same language, and there are some philosophies used by practitioners that are not clearly aligned with academic research. It has also shown there are still many more areas where the academic-practitioner gap is prominent and needs more research to understand and more work to bridge. There were practitioners in this study that touched on theory and understood how important it is, but they did not necessarily understand how to incorporate those concepts into their creative work.

The best way to start bridging the academic-practitioner gap may be to start in college, and it is important that the connections between creativity and academic theories and constructs are taught simultaneously. It is also important that those connections are

made explicit in the educational process and incorporated into the same classroom.

Getting the future advertising practitioners involved in bridging the academic-practitioner gap is also important. If practitioners understand how to use the theories and connect it to the creative process before they leave school, they will have the tools to be more successful in their future careers.

Appendices

APPENDIX A

Interview Guide

Online pre-interview survey

1. Name
2. Email address
3. Year born
4. What is your educational background? What degrees and/or majors do you have and what school(s) did you receive them from? Was it a 2-year college, 4-year college, or art school? Was it an advertising portfolio program or an advertising creative sequence?
5. How satisfied are you with the education you received?
6. How many years have you worked in advertising?
7. How many agencies have you worked for?
8. What is your current job title?
9. How long have you been at your current job?
10. What other job titles have you held in advertising?
11. Have you done freelance work?

Interview guide adapted from Kover (1995) for interviews with advertising professionals

Interview Guide

Background

Before we jump into questions about your work, I am just going to ask you a couple demographic questions. We are not capturing any identifying information, but this is helpful for us to compare responses...

1. What did you do prior to advertising?
 - a. How did this experience provide anything you use in your job now?
2. How did you get into advertising?
 - a. Did you choose to go into advertising?
 - i. Why advertising and not something else?
 - b. Did some experience lead you to enter into advertising?

3. How does your past experiences inform your work?
4. How involved do you consider yourself regarding your work?
 - a. How do you feel when clients tell you to change something
 - b. What are some frustrations you have about your job?
 - c. What do you really enjoy about your job?
 - d. What are your biggest motivators at work?
 - e. How important is this job to you?
 - i. How often do you think about work outside the office?
1. (if they have worked at multiple agencies) What has been the major differences between the agencies you've worked at?
 - a. What has been similar?
2. Going more broadly, how do you view the advertising industry as a whole?
 - a. What changes do you see coming in the industry?
 - b. Why should there be changes or not?
 - c. How do you think consumers view advertising?
 - i. Positive or negative?
 - ii. Why or why not
 - d. When thinking about advertising broadly, what are the general practices that work well?
 - i. How do these work?
 - e. What are general practices that might need to change?
3. How has advertising changed since you've started?
4. How relevant is traditional advertising methods like print, radio, or TV?
5. How is digital advertising changing the industry

[For those with advertising education - If they have an advertising degree or went to an advertising school]

Now I want ask a few more questions about your education...

1. What brought you to a degree in advertising?
 - a. Why not another?
 - b. What did you hope to get out of your (degree received)?
 - c. How satisfied are you with (that) degree?
 - i. What was satisfying about it?
 - ii. What was not satisfying about it?
 - d. Were your goals and expectations met?

- i. Why or why not?
 - e. What skills did you gain?
 - f. What skills did you wish you gained?
 - g. Did you feel prepared after (that) degree?
2. Tell me about the program.
 3. What skills did you learn that were the most valuable?
 - a. Least valuable?
 4. What kinds of classes did you take? (art direction, copywriting, account planning)
 5. Describe some of the most memorable lessons you were taught.
 - a. Were there things or ideas you did or tried in ads that they told you not to do?
 - b. Were the things or ideas that they said to do work really well for advertising?
 - i. Where do these ideas come from?
 - ii. Do you believe they are right?
Are those ideas useful? Why or why not?
 - c. Have the lessons or ideas you learned been useful in your work?
 - i. How?
 - ii. Why do you think some have not been useful?

Opinions on ads

Ok, now I want to shift gears a bit and get a sense of your opinions on advertising...

1. What role does advertising play in society and why should advertising be viewed as important?
2. Tell me about some of your favorite ads. What is it about them that you like?
 - a. What characteristics are present in the advertising you admire?
 - b. Name a campaign or two that you really like that's not your own
 - c. Why do you like it?
 - d. What artistic elements do you think make it effective?
 - e. What about the copy?
 - f. Why does this ad connect with you?
 - g. How does this ad connect with the consumer?
 - h. Is it memorable?
 - i. Why or why not?
3. How do you think your clients value creativity?
 - a. Is it the same or different from you?

- b. What about how other people in the agency view creativity?
 - i. Account managers
 - ii. Creative management
 - iii. The copywriters or art directors
- 4. How do you think consumers view creativity in advertisements?
 - a. How is it similar or different?
- 5. What has had the biggest influence on the way you do your work?
 - a. Do you believe there is a “best” way to create advertising?
 - i. Probe...
- 6. What is the difference between “good” advertising and effective advertising?
 - a. How does this play out in day-to-day work?
- 7. There is an idea that creatives use culture/(cultural references) in advertising and that advertising also creates culture/(cultural references). How do you see this dynamic working?

Strategy

Finally, I want finish up with some questions about the strategy you use to make advertising...

- 1. What role does the creative brief play in your work?
 - a. Do you typically use a creative brief?
- 2. How do you try to connect with the consumer when you create ads?
 - a. What approaches of tactics do you use?
 - b. How would you characterize the approaches that you use?
 - c. Think back to the last campaign you worked on and what was the approach for connecting with customers?
- 3. What are messages that people don't want to hear in advertising?
- 4. What role do emotions play in advertising messages?
 - a. Which emotions connect best with viewers?
 - b. How might tapping into someone's emotions backfire in an ad?
 - c. When are times that fear might be good to use in ads?
 - i. Nostalgia?
 - ii. Humor?
 - iii. Rational?
 - iv. Sex?

- v. Social?
 - d. How did you learn how to use these appeals?
5. How do you know when advertising will connect with viewers?
 - a. What opens up a person to your message?
 - b. What turns a person off to advertising messages?
 - c. What is a compelling idea that will get through to your audience?
 - i. How do you know if you have an idea like this?
 - d. What kinds of things get through to audiences?
 - i. Are there images, wording, or appeals that are more likely to get through?
 - ii. Does a consumers' interest in a specific class of products play a role?
 - iii. Can good advertising create interest where there wasn't interest before?
 - e. What gets rejected by audiences?
 - i. images, wording, or appeals
 - f. What gets ignored?
 - i. images, wording, or appeals
 6. Going wider – Some people say that advertising appeals to or communicates with people's fantasies or their dream worlds. What do you think about this?
 - a. What, if anything, do you do to include this in the advertising you create?
 7. What things get through to people?
 - a. Why?
 - b. How did you learn this?
 8. What kinds of messages do people want to hear?
 - i. Personal relevance or importance
 - ii. Personal connection
 - iii. Internal state of arousal
 - iv. Core values
 9. What role does source credibility play in advertisements? And what sources are the most credible? (Spokes people, real people, athletes, celebrities)
 10. How much mental work will viewers put into an ad?
 - a. Do people like ads that make them think? Ads that make them mentally work to fill in some of the information?
 11. Thinking about how advertisements are seen, how do you think viewers process information?

- a. Does the viewer have to pay attention to ads for the message to get through? Why or why not?
 - i. In what ways can messages get through and be effective without a viewer paying attention?
 - ii. Can subliminal messaging work?
 - 1. How does it work?
 - 2. Why does it not work?
 - iii. Are ads more effective if the viewer is engaged in the message?
 - 1. In what ways can you get a viewer to engage?
 - b. Is there a limit to how many times a viewer can see an ad before it starts to have a negative impact or become boring to the viewer?
 - i. How many does it take?
12. Is it more important to focus on the product or the brand?
- a. Why?
 - b. How did you learn this?
13. How does the ad affect the brand in the minds of the view?
14. Have you heard of the term brand equity? (the value of having a well-known brand name)
- a. How does advertising build brand equity?
 - b. How does brand equity affect the way you might advertise?
15. What are some theories about consumers you use to connect with your target audience?

Research

16. What kind of advertising research do you use when creating ads? Either preproduction or post-production?
- a. Where do you get research data?
 - b. How does it affect your work?
 - c. Can you give me a specific example of a time where research influenced a campaign you had?

Closing questions

17. What do you think is the most important thing that current advertising students should be learning?
- a. Why?
18. Is there anything I forgot to ask that you think would be helpful?

19. Any final thoughts about your experiences in advertising?

APPENDIX B

Participants

PSEUDONYM	GENDER	AGE	CREATIVE FUNCTION	YEARS IN ADVERTISING	LOCATION
Carol	Female	26	Copywriter	2	New York
Chad	Male	30	Art Director	2	California
John	Male	25	Copywriter	2	Texas
Tara	Female	22	Copywriter	1	New York
Kevin	Male	25	Art Director	3	California
Eugene	Male	25	Copywriter	3	Texas
Ryan	Male	39	Copywriter	17	Texas
Derrick	Male	50	Art Director	30	Texas
Shawn	Male	48	Copywriter	26	Texas
Daryl	Male	39	Art Director	10	Texas
Emma	Female	30	Copywriter	6	Texas
Maggie	Female	57	Art Director	33	Texas
Marc	Male	45	Copywriter	19	California
Abraham	Male	29	Copywriter	5	Texas
Beth	Female	30	Copywriter	3	Texas
Nancy	Female	37	Copywriter	3	New York
Anna	Female	25	Copywriter	4	New York
Lori	Female	28	Copywriter	3	Arizona
Carl	Male	28	Art Director	6	Texas
Rick	Male	35	Art Director	5	Nebraska

APPENDIX C

Codebook

Practitioner 'Theories'	Definition	
Those with knowledge of academic theory	Practitioners who mentioned ideas tied to academics	Aren't you going to teach me either more of the theory behind these things? We did have one theories class which was amazing. But I just really didn't feel like they were trying to help me learn more above and beyond what I would have learned in an undergrad course besides theories. Theories, I think, really helped us. I wish there were more classes like that. (Beth)
Those without knowledge of academic theory	Practitioners who did not mention any ideas tied to academics	I guess if there's a theory, it's really a theory about consumers, it's really respect. It's probably my number one universal theory is respect the consumer, trust them to be thoughtful and ingenious and capable and then give them creative messages that will leverage those considerations. (Rick)

Research Research	This includes academic research and internal research done at an advertising agency	It's the process of examining. Well, I guess, do you mean advertising research within agencies, or advertising research as in what you're doing right now? [Carol was instructed to answer for both] So, I guess what you're doing right now is more I would say examining kind of the nature of this field and the kind of underlying theories and what drives it and such. Whereas, at agencies, it's a lot more about just what works and what doesn't, yes. (Carol)
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Breaking Through Clutter	How much advertising consumers get	There's so much clutter out there that cutting through that can be a challenge. (Daryl)
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	bombarded with daily	
Hooks	How to get consumers to pay attention	You need a straight headline but then visuals going to make them do all the work. So, if they have a bent headline, they need a pretty straight visual. If you have a bent visual and a bent headline, people are going to be confused. (Abraham)
Right time, right place	Advertising needs to be in the right place at the right time for ads to work on people	Either the person is looking for what you're selling or the person who can upgrade to what you're selling, or the person has an option and can easily switch around to what you're selling. (John)
<hr/>		
Consumer Processing		
Consumers do not want to think	Consumers will put little to no thought into advertising	As far as processing ads, the thing to remember is that people aren't getting into a subway and saying, "Oh, I can't wait to read the ads." And whatever it is, they are either consciously or unconsciously not paying attention. (Tara)
Consumers dislike ads	Consumers like or dislike of advertising	Advertising people are like right above used car salesmen, you know, it's not great. (Chad)
Conscience and unconscious processing	To what degree to consumers need to think about or pay attention to advertising for it to work	It's one of those things where I use to [think consumers had to pay attention for ad messages to get through]. I do think [ads] affect you even if you're not paying attention to them. I don't know if it's enough to have you make any decisions but you just think about it even if it's not a lot. (Beth)
<hr/>		
Attitude Toward the Ad		
Attitude Toward the Ad	The degree of impact the ad has on the brand	The ad kind of shapes what the brand is. The brand is the message. The ad is how you deliver it. If the ad isn't delivered well, you're going to ruin the message. (Chad)
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