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Negotiating creativity: An ethnographic study of selling advertising services.

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Abstract

Advertising creativity has proven to be highly subjective and its inherent tensions becomes apparent when studying how advertising services are sold. An advertising agency is often evaluated through a pitch which creates an asymmetrical power relation where the client commonly receive the advertising they are perceived to want, which is not necessarily what they need. However, the agency rather aim to utilise the potential of their knowledge in order to present a solution to the client's problem. The purpose of this paper is to understand how the pitch work, preceding the actual pitch presentation, unfold in practice. By adopting a sociomaterial perspective this ethnographic study follow the pitch process of an advertising agency in Sweden. The results show that the agency made their knowledge explicit through the use of different objects in order to create a common knowledge of how to solve the pre-determined problem. In this perspective the tensions are not to be solved, but rather negotiated at a boundary in order to accumulate the knowledge from the different specialists' involved in the creation of the advertising. Thus, agency managers need to focus on negotiating and transferring the agency's knowledge, rather than presenting the final advertising.

Keywords: Advertising creativity, Actor-network-theory, Knowledge boundaries, Boundary objects

Introduction

Advertising is a professional service which is characterised by the delivered output being customised for any situation, where the value is created in client-projects through learning with and from each other (Van der Valk et. al., 2005). The client are looking for a solution to a problem (West et. al., 2016) and the advertising agency's expertise is the ability to analyse a market and come up with creative ideas that leads to sales (Moeran, 2005; Sasser & Koslow, 2008). Advertising creativity is an execution that surprises and provides insight to its intended audience, with the goal of supporting an intended campaign strategy (West et. al., 2016). However, advertising creativity has proven to be highly subjective (Hirschman, 1989; Kover et. al., 1995; Young, 2000; Koslow et. al., 2003; Koslow et. al., 2006; West et. al. 2008) and no model or framework exist to predict the success of a campaign (Nyilasy & Reid, 2009). This have resulted in tensions due to the project-based working form, where the agency is often highly economically dependent on the client which creates an asymmetrical power relation (Kelly, et. al., 2005). Thus, the client commonly receive the advertising they are perceived to want (Koslow et. al., 2006) which is not necessarily what they need, and without learning in client-projects less value will be created. Due to the knowledge intensive nature of advertising and the importance of learning in client-projects, the importance of cooperation is widely recognised (Duhan & Sandvik, 2009). Therefore successful agencies are known for their long relationships with clients (Hackley, 2009). However, due to the intangibility of advertising services (Van der Valk et. al., 2005; Hackley, 2009), an agency is often evaluated through a pitch where they present a solution to a pre-determined problem in competition with other agencies. In the pitch the asymmetrical agency-client relation becomes apparent and it is the key decision makers at the client who are the gatekeepers that have to approve before the advertising reach the end consumer (Earle, 2007). The agency has to discover and satisfy the likes and dislikes of key decision makers in order to win the account (Moeran 2005). Yet, the agency will get evaluated on the work they deliver which is problematic when their perception of what is creative or good differ from the client's perspective (Earle, 2007). At the same time the focus is on the client as a recipient of the pitch, rather than the end consumer as a recipient of the advertising (Moeran, 2005). Irrespectively of what is considered creative or good it is up to the decision makers of the client, who are more comfortable with something that they are familiar with, i.e. strategy or sales, as opposed to the unfamiliar, novel advertising creativity (Earle, 2007). During the pitch there is no cooperation, as in traditional client-projects, which form tensions. However it is the starting point of the agency-client relation where both parties have no previous experience of working together.

Without prior knowledge of each other's business, it is challenging for the agency to come up with creative ideas that supports an intended campaign strategy. The subjectivity of advertising creativity makes it difficult for the agency to decide what work to present (Earle, 2007) which creates further tensions during the pitch work. Thus, the intangibility of advertising services makes the client reluctant to pay for the evaluation and work the agency conduct through the pitch. This have been a problem in Sweden that resulted in both the industry organisation Komm, and the equivalent for the advertising buyers in 2011 to form an

agreement. Instead of working for free in order to win a new client, the agency should rather be evaluated on merit, interpretation of the challenge and appropriateness based on previous experience (Tjebbes & Aperia, 2011). When the agency do not receive payment for their work, they must win the pitch to get a return on time invested – time that otherwise could been allocated to current client accounts. But if the agency would receive payment, winning would not be as crucial for their business. Thus, their focus could shift from pleasing the client to rather present a strategic path where they would utilise the potential of their knowledge in order to present a solution to the client's problem.

The complex nature of advertising creativity and its inherent tensions becomes apparent when studying how advertising services are sold. Previous studies on advertising creativity have used in-depth interviews (Koslow et. al., 2003; Hackley & Kover, 2007; Stuhlfaut, 2011), and thus neglecting the fact that creativity is not something an individual possess (Amabile & Pillemer, 2012; Kover, 2016). Descriptive methods have typically been used due to ease of accessibility (Sasser & Koslow, 2008), and there are few examples of ethnographic studies within advertising production (c.f. Alvesson, 1998; Moeran, 2005; Nixon, 2006). Due to the challenges of subjectivity, researchers in the field have urged for exploratory studies of advertising creativity and how it is produced (McFall, 2004; Kelly et. al., 2005; Hackley, 2009; Kover, 2016). This paper is concerning the marketplace were advertising is sold and evaluated. It follows the process of an advertising agency in Sweden pursuing the opportunity to win a client account in a reality where local knowledge form tensions at boundaries that need to be negotiated.

The purpose of this paper is to understand how the pitch work, preceding the actual pitch presentation, unfold in practice. With the perspective from an advertising agency we map the boundaries that arise in the asymmetrical agency-client relation where the pitch work is conducted without payment. We will present how the client create a common meaning where they align the interests towards a shared goal, and how the agency make their knowledge explicit to align the interests towards their preferred solution. To fulfil the purpose of this paper we answer the following research questions:

How are tensions negotiated during the pitch work?
How are knowledge boundaries managed?

To understand the inherent tensions in advertising creativity we present an ethnographic study of how the pitch work unfold through the lens of actor-network-theory. By adopting a sociomaterial perspective our focus is on how the work is conducted, rather than to account for subjective re-interpretations. The problem is not how advertising creativity is produced or how to manage the production of creativity, it is rather to understand what happens (or do not happen) before the advertising reach the end consumers (Nyilasy & Reid, 2009; Klover, 2016). Thus, we draw upon the concept of knowledge boundaries (Carlile, 2002; 2004) to present how the agency and client create a common knowledge of what problem to solve and how to solve it. We turn to boundary objects (Star & Griesmer, 1989) as an analytical tool, to understand how the agency manage the knowledge boundaries towards a common knowledge

of their preferred solution to the client's pre-determined problem. To put our study and theoretical approach in a context, we will proceed to present the previous research in the field of advertising and advertising creativity.

Advertising and creativity

Tensions within advertising
Advertising is a widely studied concept and advertising agencies' contribution to the world of marketing is often understated. It is, for example hard to conceive of the world's most powerful and well-known brands without advertising (Hackley, 2009). Situated in the borderland between the field of arts and commercialised mass production (Hartley, 2005), the structure of the agency has a clear division of labour between creative personnel involved in the creative production and agency management closer to the client's day-to-day commercial practice (Scase & Davis, 2000; Zwick & Cayla, 2011). The creative personnel, often art directors, copywriters, designers and producers are typically referred to as *creatives*, in a way to address the group. The agency can be viewed as a repository of competences (Grabher, 2004) that are moulded together in project teams depending on the client and what problem to solve (Van der Valk et. al., 2005). The project-based working form makes for disruptive learning due to the changing constellations of team members (Grabher, 2004) which results in a positive effect described as creative abrasion (Leonard-Barton, 1995). But critical voices describe it as a constant battle, primarily between agency management and the creatives, which results in tensions (Kover et. al., 1995; Hackley 2000; 2003a; Kelly et. al., 2005; Hackley & Kover 2007). The agency management and account managers represent the client's interests, and therefore advertising is to be considered a sponsored creativity (Kelly et. al., 2005) – without a client there would not be a business. In an attempt to solve these constant battles the role of the account planner was introduced as an initiative by the agency management. This have shown to put even more stress on the creatives since they not only need to defend their time spent on creativity for the agency management, but also their interpretation of the end consumer (Feldwick, 2007; Hackley, 2003b). Moeran (2005) showed that before the pitch presentation the agency had to learn as much as possible, often in extremely short time, about the client's business. This included its products, sales, and end consumers but also how the client company itself was organised, in particular the power structures of the decision makers. Thus, it is the combination of market and organisational factors that enables an agency to convince potential clients of its expertise and professionalism – through which they win accounts and grow in size (Moeran, 2005). The insights from planning is a key factor when working with advertising. Understanding the client's expectations and what problem to solve is crucial for winning a pitch, but regarding the production of advertising the end consumer insights are important. They are gathered through planning, that has developed the production of advertising to become consumer-centric (Feldwick, 2007) and due to the subjective nature of advertising, employing more scientific arguments is helpful for the agency (Grabher, 2002). The planner as a repository of pertinent market information (Chong, 2006) can be the voice of the end consumer through gathered qualitative and quantitative data (Hackley, 2003b). The agency can choose between

a range of methods to conduct planning, e.g. focus groups, surveys, interviews, observations or document analysis of third party reports. Through planning a more systematic and comprehensive advertising can be fostered (Koslow et. al., 2006), however it is still dependent on the client's interest in financing the time needed for the agency to get a deeper understanding of the target group and the client's market. The scientific arguments function to contradict the subjectivity of advertising creativity and to manage the inherent tensions in the field.

The complexity of creativity

The management of the agency need to combine the artistic with the strategic in order to produce appropriate campaigns for clients that are looking for a solution to a problem rather than producing art (West et. al., 2016). However, what is considered as appropriate and creative have shown to differ among agency and client (Kover et. al., 1995; Koslow et. al., 2006), account executives and creatives (Hirschman, 1989; Koslow et. al., 2003), practitioners and consumers (West et. al. 2008) and even between copywriters and art directors (Young, 2000). The client's view on what is appropriate simply means delivering against ROMI, or return on marketing investment, where appropriate in the eyes of the agency often implies winning creative awards (Earle, 2007). Creativity is complex and subjective to the degree that there is no scientific model on advertising creativity (Nyilasy & Reid, 2009), even after 60 years of research in the field (Sasser, 2014). Therefore, no method or device are able to help the agency management with the choice of what creative work to show a client. It is rather an evaluation based on experience that have to be applied and such decisions are made on a regular basis by the agency (West et. al., 2016). This force the account executive to use subjective reasoning, attempting to predetermine what the client will think. Thus, trying to anticipate what the client will consider as appropriate and how the proposed creative work will meet the intended objective (Earle, 2007). The subjective aspects of advertising creativity results in complexity for the client that is evaluating the services. Koslow et. al. (2006) found that access to top management and the client's openness to new ideas was optimal for the creative quality of the advertising produced by the agency. However, with the involvement from an experienced high-ranked decision-maker the results were rather opposite, due to the evaluative aspect and their power to enforce their judgments. Those clients rather received the advertising they were perceived to want (Koslow et. al., 2006). At the same time, the criteria used by a client when selecting an agency have shown to differ from the criteria used when deciding whether to keep an agency; the importance of creativity diminished as the relationship matured and instead emphasis was put on the agency's variability in order to handle unexpected change (Henke, 1995). The client's role cannot be overlooked when trying to understand the production of advertising, and advertising creativity in particular. As showed by Moeran (2005), the agency is generally more concerned to foster an impression on its client that it is a professional, business-like and credible organisation with which it can safely conduct its business. However, due to the agency being economically dependent upon the client (Kelly et. al., 2005), it is difficult to present an appropriate solution for a pre-determined problem, when the problem is defined based on the client's knowledge and not the expertise of the agency.

The non-human actors of advertising

The success of a campaign is dependent on the context, which requires to study the production of advertising in order to understand advertising in a wider perspective (McFall, 2004). Advertising reflects reality back at us while combining familiar elements in novel ways (Hackley 2009)*,* which creates a problem when agency and client have different interpretations of their reality. The creatives decode the meaning of contemporary culture to incorporate their interpretation into the production (Kelly et. al., 2005). Therefore advertising has been argued to not represent the cultural or social norms of the end consumers, but merely the norms shared among professionals (Schwarzkopf, 2011). Thus, to understand advertising, one need to understand the actors involved. Advertising work is not about managing the transfer of value or meaning from one sphere to another, nor about managing the relations between individuals and advertising structures. Rather it is about understanding the material and distributed nature of the work along with the processes and translations between different actors involved in its production (McFall, 2010). Advertising is thus produced and negotiated within a complex network that includes media, clients, competitors, regulators, and of course end consumers (Schwartzkopf, 2011). The complex nature of advertising creativity and how it is produced becomes apparent when looking at the way advertising services are sold and evaluated. Due to its intangibility it is difficult to evaluate before the agency and client have started working together (Van der Valk et. al., 2005). Previous research have shown the complexity of advertising work in general and pitch work in particular. To study the actors involved in the production of advertising we need to move away from descriptive methods, to acknowledge the non-human actors present. By adopting an Actor-network-theory (ANT) perspective we treat different materials, like people, machines, ideas and so on, as interactional effects rather than primitive causes (Law, 1992). Creativity is thus the result of actors working together, rather than a thing an individual possess. Through this perspective, we can understand how both human and non-human actors work together, and therefore transition ourselves from the subjective nature of advertising. Even though ANT implies being a theory by name, employing it as a method will create a systematic understanding of how actors are held together in networks, without any preconceived notions or definitions (Latour, 1999). Identifying actors and how they connect to each other allow the tracing and explaining of causes. Thus, ANT provide a lens through which we can study and explain what happens (or do not happen) as the pitch work preceding the pitch presentation unfolds. The pitch is the starting point of both a campaign and a new agency-client relation. Therefore, understanding how the pitch work unfold, by studying the production of advertising, will create an understanding of advertising before it reach other market actors i.e. the end consumers.

Networks and knowledge boundaries

ANT is specially useful for our study when the agency, client and other actors all together establishes the outcome of the pitch. In ANT actors like ideas, objects and people are equally important in the creation of social interaction. It describe how the network of these actors perform continuously and translates into, for example strategies, creativity or campaigns.

Introducing actor networks

At the heart of ANT lies the metaphor of the heterogeneous network. Suggesting that society, organisations, agents and machines are all effects generated in patterned networks of diverse, human and non-human material (Law, 1992). Therefore, it is hard to conceive any interactions with other people that are not mediated through objects of one kind or another. Our communication with each other is mediated by a network of objects which participates in shaping of our interaction. ANT is analytically radical since it treats people and objects the same and denies that people are necessarily special (ibid.). This aspect is certainly important in our field of study where previous research on advertising have focused a lot on the individual and the subjectivity of advertising creativity is widely recognised. However, when all of social life becomes networks, we cannot cope in practice and therefore networks disappear in the process of simplification. This implies that network patterns that are widely performed are often those that can be punctualised (Law, 1992). The network can thus be reduced to a puncualised actor that are not questioned until it breaks down and stop functioning properly – the network has become black-boxed (Latour, 1987; 2005). The black-box are network packages or routines, that can be more or less taken for granted and counted as resources in any form (Law, 1992). This process of how a network with heterogeneous set of bits and pieces, each with its own inclination, are formed into a punctualised actor is through translation. This verb implies transformation and the possibility of equivalence, where one thing (i.e. an actor) may stand for another (i.e. a network). In the context of our study, an advertising campaign presented in a pitch is a network constituted by a diverse set of both human and non-human actors. To cope in practice the client will reduce the campaign to a punctualised actor, and by the same reason we will adopt a process of simplification in our study to focus our attention to the actors we perceive important to fulfil the purpose.

In the pitch advertising agencies compete to win a client's account, by presenting a solution to a pre-determined problem that needs to be translated to an appropriate solution. To create an understanding of how this is successfully managed we turn to Callon's (1986) four phases of translation by which an actor network is constructed. The first phase, problematisation is about determining a set of actors and define their identities in a way to align their interests. This is done when a focal actor is established as an obligatory passage point by which the actors interests are aligned in the network of relationships. The second phase, interessement is the negotiations that take part when the fragmented set of actors are aligned through problematisation (Callon, 1986). This can be done either through coercion or by maintaining the integrity of the actors interests to fit their own goals (Star & Griesmer, 1989). The third phase, enrolment is the result of successful interessement, where competing interests are interrupted and an alliance is constructed. The fourth and final phase, mobilisation is where the actors are translated into a context and the network is solidified. But to translate is also to express in one's own language what others say and want, why they act in the way they do and how they associate with each other: it is to establish oneself as a spokesperson. At the end of the process, if it is successful, only voices speaking in unison will be heard (Callon 1986). By adopting this perspective we can follow how creative campaign solutions and new meanings are mediated by different interests of the actors involved. The obligatory passage point forms alliances and the resources needed to achieve the intended outcomes (Silva and Backhouse,

1997). Previous research has illustrated its widespread usage in analysis of how success or failure of aligning actors emerge in establishment of new information systems (ibid.), getting articles published (Hardy et. al., 2001) re-growth of scallops populations (Callon, 1986) and collection of museum material (Star & Griesmer, 1989). Therefore, in accordance with the purpose of our study to understand how the pitch work unfold, the methodological choice of answering *how* is specially suitable by ANT (Law, 1992). Through this perspective we can answer how tensions emerge and are managed between actors involved in the pitch preparation. Thus, it has guided our process to understand how actor networks are constructed. To narrow this perspective we turn to the concept of boundary objects (Star & Griesmer, 1989) as an analytical tool, to understand how the agency manage the knowledge boundaries towards a common knowledge of the client's pre-determined problem and align the interests towards their preferred solution.

Managing knowledge and negotiating creativity
The advertising agency operates in a knowledge intensive business and need to transfer their knowledge to client-projects, but also across boundaries inside the agency in order to work together. Therefore, they need to understand how to capitalise on their knowledge in order to succeed. In this perspective creativity is constructed in a process by gathering different specialists' individual knowledge towards a common goal. In order to understand how to manage these transfers of knowledge we first need to recognise the knowledge boundaries that exists. We then turn to the concept of boundary objects, that can be seen as repositories of knowledge that are managed to create common understanding of information, new knowledge or clashing interests. Through the perspective of boundary objects we understand how the agency create possibilities for its employees to work together and how to showcase their solutions in a reasonable way for the client.

The knowledge intensive and complex nature of advertising services is amplified during the pitch work due to the lack of cooperation. To understand how this affect the work we draw upon the concept of knowledge boundaries. Carlile (2004) identifies three different types of processes used in order to effectively manage knowledge across boundaries. These are the processes of; transferring, translating and transforming, and they are associated with the *syntactic*, *semantic* and *pragmatic* knowledge boundaries. At a *syntactic* boundary, knowledge is transferred according to a common lexicon, which implies that domain-specific knowledge can be efficiently managed across the boundary. When new requirements or new actors are present, interpretative differences in what a word, measurement, or outcome means limits the effective management of knowledge between actors. With this novelty comes new differences and dependencies that need to be identified and their consequences need to be understood. As the novelty increases, common knowledge used in the past may not have the capacity to represent the novelties now present (Carlile, 2004). This could be the use of new media channels, novel strategies to reach the end consumer or simply the transition from analogue to digital marketing. When novelty arises there is often a lack of common knowledge to adequately share and assess domain-specific knowledge at a boundary. Thus, as novelty increases, the amount of effort required to adequately share and assess knowledge increases (Carlile, 2004).

At a *semantic* boundary, learning about and translation of domain-specific knowledge establishes common meanings that become adequate for the actors involved to share and assess their knowledge. However, there is a distinction between tacit- and explicit knowledge which implies interpretative challenges of moving knowledge across boundaries. In the process of making one's knowledge explicit, different interests are often revealed making the creation of common meaning impossible. It is rather required a process in which actors negotiate and are willing to change the knowledge and interests from their own domain. However, problem arises when a powerful actor reuses a common knowledge that constrains the capacity and ability of other actors to represent the novelty they are facing (Carlile, 2004). This relate to the issue that clients receive the advertising they deserve (Koslow et. al., 2006), due to high degrees of novelty and the fact that knowledge is at stake (Carlile, 2002). The problem and difficulty in abandoning previous knowledge is well-known and has been referred to as the curse of knowledge (Camerer et. al., 1989). However, if a semantic response does not resolve the problem, it leads to a *pragmatic* boundary. What is now required is negotiation and transformation of both the common knowledge and domain-specific knowledge used in the past. Here, common interests are developed that allow actors to address the consequences, differences, and dependencies of each other's domain-specific knowledge (Carlile, 2004). The inherent tensions in advertising creativity is in this perspective due to the human actors different knowledge of what is good and appropriate. Therefore, the concept of knowledge boundaries let's us understand how actors are negotiating creativity.

Advertising work across boundaries

The transfer of knowledge across boundaries is made possible by boundary objects, which are defined as both *concrete and abstract, specific and general, conventional and customised* (Star & Griesmer, 1989, p. 408). A boundary object can be almost anything – what matter is the context (Star, 2010). The boundary object is flexibly interpreted depending on the usage and interest of the actor, e.g. a map can show directions for one actor, while pointing out distance for another. The boundary object has a sense of scale whereas it can lay a foundation to grow an infrastructure upon and transform into further processes. Thus, it function to share information and requirements for cooperation in work settings. It enable knowledge sharing across boundaries through its bridging functionality and its interpretive flexibility makes it strong in individual site use, but weakly structured in common use (Star, 2010). Kellogg et. al. (2006) showed that coordination across boundaries in a rapidly changing environment, where knowledge is constantly changing, makes it difficult to construct shared meaning through boundary objects. Project members rather made their work visible and legible to each other, assembled through a coordination structure, i.e. an intranet. This may facilitate adaptability, speed, and learning in the short term. But it entail contradictions due to the project members attempts to hold on to their local knowledge, social identities and perceived interests as they work across boundaries. This may limit organisational creativity in the long run by suppressing the mutual engagement and occupational friction that can generate creativity (Kellogg et. al., 2006), through the concept of creative abrasion (Leonard-Barton, 1995). The tensions related to local knowledge have been shown in previous research on

advertising work, where the project-based working form creates an environment where common knowledge is at stake. However, when managing the boundary between agency and client during the pitch work there is rather a lack of cooperation. In this scenario, creating shared meaning through boundary objects is important for the agency to align the actors interest towards their preferred solution.

Whether an artefact (i.e. an object) has or will acquire a common identity or whether it will satisfy local needs is accomplished through the use by actors within a social context. However, it is possible by powerful actors to transfer their own symbolic capital to name an artefact as symbolically valuable. It is then defined as a designated boundary object but it may not become a boundary object-in-use (Levina & Vaast, 2005). Within their local domain powerful actors can effectively maintain their knowledge, and through authority defend their tasks. This is used to maintain control, but in transformation of the artefact outside their local domain, the powerful actor could be challenged by others (Bechky, 2003). Thus, to become boundary objects-in-use, artefacts have to be locally useful and must have a common identity across fields (Star, 1989). Therefore, it may also emerge from the interactions between participants, as they strive to share meaning across local domains. This distinction between the designation and actual use of boundary objects illustrates that artefacts do not necessarily have proper uses in practice, but rather that they may serve different purposes for different users (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). By adopting a sociomaterial perspective, viewing such objects as diverse and shifting assemblages that are multiply performed help to explain how and why boundary objects emerge and evolve in practice and achieve their effects in particular times and places. Thus answering how a particular artefact is an effective boundary object in one setting but is less effective in another (Doolin & McLeod, 2012).

Even if there is a lack of previous research concerning boundary objects in the production of advertising, others have adopted it in studying creative environments regarding product development (Bechky, 2003), design work (Ewenstein & Whyte, 2009) and in the creation of virtual prototypes (D'Adderio, 2001). By studying the role of engineering sketches and drawings Henderson (1991) showed their important role as devices that socially organise workers, the work processes and the design concepts made. The visual communication enrolled the participation of those who would employ the sketches in either the design or production process. The drawings functioned as network-organising devices due to the enrolment of group participation and that they were repositories for knowledge created and adjusted through group interaction aimed toward a common goal. This was made possible by the actors that focused their attention and communication with each other by referring to it. The visual representations were so strong that participants found it difficult to communicate about the design at all without them. The flexibility of the sketch or drawing as a boundary object helped to enrol additional participants and accumulate collective knowledge (Henderson, 1991). However, boundary objects can both have a function in minimising the need for social interaction and collaboration, e.g. coordination, as well as a maximising negotiation and mutual understanding of perspectives (Pennington, 2010). In the context of our study, boundary objects as an analytical tools is useful to understand how knowledge and

negotiations take place at a boundary as the advertising agency work towards presenting a solution to a pre-determined problem.

Methodology

Choice of methodology

To fulfil the purpose of this study we set out to understand how the pitch work preceding the actual pitch presentation unfold in practice. By adopting an ANT perspective we transitioned ourselves from the descriptive methods dominant in previous research, thus positioning our study accordingly with the requests from researchers within the field (McFall, 2004; Kelly et. al., 2005; Hackley, 2009; Kover, 2016). The choice of ANT guided our process of identifying knowledge boundaries in order to study the inherent tensions in the field of advertising creativity. The sociomaterial perspective let us identify boundary objects to understand how knowledge was transferred and negotiated at a boundary. This could only be done by spending time with the actors present at the agency during the pitch work, and therefore an ethnographic research approach was adopted (Van Maanen, 2011). The setting where we conducted the ethnography was a Swedish advertising agency named *Meaning After Words* (here on referred to by the acronym MAW). It was given a fictive name reflecting its innovative advertising for the sake of their wish to stay anonymous throughout this paper. We chose to conduct shadowing at MAW where the mobile researcher could take part of the interactions perceived to be of interest (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007). It was a methodological choice to create a deep understanding of the social context and how the advertising work unfolded in practice at MAW. Furthermore semi-structured interviews were chosen as a complement to give the shadowees an opportunity to elaborate their reasoning on the situations observed. Due to the presence in the social context, regular challenges of interviews were avoided (Berg et, al., 2004). Therefore, conducting in-depth interviews were a natural complement to the previous informal talks, where the shadowees could share their viewpoint and thoughts on situations. A more detailed discussion of the data collection will be presented after introducing the setting.

Introducing the setting

A few months before starting the ethnography at MAW we met with our contact person in one of their meeting rooms. During this meeting we were sharing our interest to conduct a study in the field of how advertising is produced and we received some initial information regarding the agency. Our aim was to access MAW for at least four weeks, to conduct an ethnographic study and observe the day-to-day work through shadowing. By remaining in the setting of MAW during a longer time period a deep understanding of the practice could be developed (Van Maanen, 2011). Since we entered the setting with an explorative perspective our focus narrowed as interesting topics were found.

MAW is regarded a traditional mid-sized advertising agency in Sweden with about 25 employees. They operated their business processes and external communication in line with the normative advertising agency. Thus, communicated roles, titles of personnel and their

client case projects all cohere with the norm (c.f. Grabher, 2002). Therefore, it is a business aligned with our purpose of understanding how the pitch work unfold in practice, and a possible critical case. A critical case is defined to hold strategic importance in relation to a general problem, and implies that the result found in a particular context, is likely to exist in other similar businesses as well (Flyvbjerg, 2006). We agreed on confidentiality to be able to access the setting. This was the result of MAW sharing the purpose of giving to the scholarly field of advertising. Without their trust, this paper would never see daylight, and therefore it let us see with our own eyes, behind closed doors, what others' never would. In this setting were we conducted a detailed examination of a single example (Flyvbjerg, 2006), we were dependent on this choice of company, fully relying on them trusting us. The access that let us be mobile in the setting of MAW resulted in a rich data collection which will be presented further in the following section.

Data collection
The data collection will be presented through a description of how the ethnographic process unfolded. By describing how data was collected through shadowing and complemented with semi-structured interviews, we create an understanding of our path towards the empirical findings in the study. A few months after the initial meeting with the contact person it was time to enter MAW to start the ethnographic study through shadowing. In the weekly Monday meeting, one of the authors, who were going to do conduct the data collection on site (from here referred to as *the researcher*) was introduced to the employees. A common ground of confidentiality was built, to facilitate a trust to share (Silverman, 2013) by ensuring that people, projects and company names would stay anonymous throughout the study. Many employees showed an interest in the study and during the time in the setting several of them approached the researcher to ask curiously how the study progressed. Some even came to talk about the importance of the study and shared their perceived issues within the field of advertising. To be something else than a stranger in the shadowees working day, the field work needed to be conducted over a long time span. Thus, elevating the researcher into the shadowees own contexts by hearing, seeing and feeling the same things as they did (Van Maanen, 2011) while taking descriptional notes. By continuously being present just like a regular employee working at MAW the researcher could share the same experiences and build relations with them through conversations. The long lasting researcher-shadowee relationship resulted in a natural lubricant to reflect private thoughts, asked by the researcher or expressed by the shadowee. Thus, except of being present in the office for conducting observations, the researcher ate lunch with the employees in the kitchen every day, discussed weekend plans, apartment purchases, advertising educations and spent time coping with client issues.

In the office landscape there were seatings for every employee. But since someone always had a day of, worked in a project room or met with clients there were always possibilities for the researcher to sit among the employees. By covering real-life situations multiple wealth of details were created which was important for the development of a nuanced view of reality (Flyvbjerg, 2006). The seating situation implied that the researcher moved around to different

parts of the office continuously which was suitable in order to interact with different people. Many employees were eager to share what they were doing and in combination with the researcher's presence during project meetings it resulted in a surprisingly quick overview of everyone's work and projects. Due to the open office landscape it was easy to get an overview of what happened. Since the landscape connected to both the CEO's office, the meeting rooms and the kitchen the researcher was always aware if project groups gathered or if more informal discussions were about to take place. The researcher had great access to different internal project meetings and was never denied to join when asking. Observing actual events instead of actors recalling previous experiences is a prosperity with the shadowing collecting method. This is particularly suitable for an interpretative research approach when studying processes of interrelation (Quinlan, 2008). Thus, aligned with the ANT perspective of understanding how advertising work unfold. Sitting quiet beside the participants in meetings gave insight to the operations of projects. If a topic were unclear the project members often described the purpose of their actions or a situation with a client by reflecting on what happened after the meeting. Furthermore the researcher had access to the CEO's office when something was about to happen, and was able to sit down in a chair and simply observe different situations as they unfolded. The discussions were on a more strategic level, compared with those taking place among the employees in the office landscape. The CEO were often on the phone calling clients, different stakeholders and talked with management or senior personnel. Either way the topics were key accounts or concerning the strategy of MAW. The access to the CEO's office and project meetings came in handy as the study progressed. The researcher followed several projects during the first half of the time at MAW before narrowing down to follow the pitch. This was perceived beneficial due the extensive knowledge developed of the agency's processes and the work conducted by the employees. The main advantage with shadowing is the mobility (Czarniawska-Joerges, 2007) and as the individuals involved in projects to a large extent worked simultaneously the researcher could move between them, sit down to listen in and ask about details. Overlooking the landscape allowed the researcher to join as they gathered for meetings to observe interactions and negotiations as they unfolded.

To document the data descriptional notes, including the context were conducted in order to minimize the need of editorial comments (Martin & Turner, 1986). Full sets of notes were completed within a day in order to get an as truthful description as possible of the situations unfolded. The fully written data sets were completed with help from recordings and the end product were self-explanatory for any other reader to avoid misconceptions between the researchers as only one was present on site. The perceived benefits of this approach was the ability for the other to analyse the data with an unbiased perspective. It was suitable due to our ANT perspective, that forced a rich documentation of how the material and distributed work unfolded at MAW. To cope in practice we adopted a process of simplification in our study to focus the attention on the actors we perceived important to fulfil the purpose. These were except for the human actors present, different tools and objects used to produce the advertising. The data in the notes built the foundation for conducting semi-structured interviews. In an non-linear research process like this, unanticipated issues needs to be anticipated (Dubois & Gadde, 2002). Thus, collected empirical data was after an initial

analysis structured and used to further discuss matters of importance with the studied employees in the form of the semi-structured interviews.

After seven weeks in the context of MAW the pitch preparations were all done. The researcher scheduled the semi-structured interviews with the five members of the observed project group. The interviews gave them the opportunity to go into more details of different situations that occurred during the pitch work and to develop their reasoning on MAW's processes in general. This gave a direct access to the story (Silverman, 2013) from their point of view, as a result of the shared experience between them and the researcher. For the same reason the individual session were less of an unequal interview situation due to the already established relation (Kvale, 2006). After a total of 200 hours in the setting the researcher thanked the people at MAW on the weekly meeting, by providing them with some reflections. The condensed story of the pitch preparations will be presented in the empirical findings through an ethnographic narrative. Thus providing a rich description of the collected data for any reader to experience.

Data analysis
When analysing the data we turned to grounded theory, an intentionally non-linear and iterative process, which is particularly well suited to deal with qualitative data gathered through an ethnographic study (Martin & Turner, 1986). From our inductive data collection process we documented everything that we perceived could be of any interest. Firstly, as the empirical material started to build up, we began our search for concepts on our way to create knowledge in the field of how advertising is produced. The aim at this initial stage was to find the right level of abstraction where our categorisation of concepts discovered explicitly related to the phenomenon of our study (Martin & Turner, 1986). To name a few these were; pitch, profitability, awards, brief, retainer and cooperation. With a greater understanding and a more narrowed view, we continued our data collection until a theoretical saturation was reached. Therefore, the researcher spent almost twice as much time in the setting as we initially planned. From the thick description of the empirical data collected, we started to perceive relationships and conducted yet another abstraction into a higher conceptual level. During these iterative steps of collecting data and identifying concepts, we wrote memos on themes holding the different observed situations together. This was done to not have to remember everything observed or thought (Martin & Turner, 1986). As the process of conceptualisation progressed we started to relate our identified concepts to literature. Thus following Martin and Turner's (1986, p 155) recommendation in order to *minimise the imposition of a priori concepts onto the data.* Through this extensive collection of data, the pitch was a concept that caught our interest after relating it to literature in the field. The tensions that were apparent in the previous research of advertising creativity were also apparent in the pitch structure at MAW. Thus, it became our choice to focus our study on how the pitch work unfolded. When it comes to presenting our ethnographic study we followed Flyvbjerg's (2006) arguments of leaving the scope for readers of different backgrounds to make different interpretations and draw diverse conclusions. Thus leaving the narrative open,

letting it unfold from the many-sided, complex, and sometimes conflicting stories that the actors told.

Ethical implications

There are always ethical implications when observing and interviewing people, but following Callon (1986) we consider them actors of enrolment. Their experience, background or gender were not in our interest since they all act upon their own interest, and therefore the participants could be anonymised in our study. Before the data collection begun we got informed consent from the participants who were informed that the participation was voluntary and that they got the possibility to withdraw anytime during the study. As researchers we also kept the power relation (Kvale 2006) in mind while conducting our data collection which will be presented in the following section.

Empirical findings

Entering the agency

On the second floor of the building MAW resides. When entering the office the first person you meet is the receptionist, someone with far more responsibilities than answering phone calls. (S)he is handling orders, financial matters and office administration. Walking passed the reception there is an open office landscape, a 15 times 15 square metres area with a ceiling height of approximately five metres. It is filled with project managers, production managers, designers, copywriters and art directors. They are sitting or standing by tables with their Macbook's connected to external monitors in front of them. At the end of two tables in the back the agency director and the CFO are seated with their screens facing the walls, overlooking the office landscape. Connected to the office landscape there are three meeting rooms of varying sizes, a kitchen with a long table and in the corner of the open office landscape the CEO's office is located. The door to the CEO's office is often open except when silence is needed or non-disclosed discussions are taking place.

The pursuit of strategy

MAW has done the analysis that they are viewed as a production partner in most of their current accounts, meaning that they get to produce material that is already decided upon by the clients. The CEO strive to make MAW a strategic partner, to gain legitimacy, win more accounts and to see the business grow. (S)he explain how they should create advertising that change the target audience's view on brands, by deep analysis of them. Preferably packaged in advertising films who are seen as the finest that can be done. As the CEO puts it*: Spam mail and telemarketing are the advertising channels that are the worst. Finest? Definitely films!* Films are easy to understand and stimulate several senses. At MAW the management reason that new markets needs to be broken into in order to be trusted and able to do strategic projects. However, the pursuit of moving up the ladder comes with a catch 22, since doing status projects require time, money and freedom, which is widely known by the management at MAW. But time, money and freedom are seldom trusted on agencies that are looked upon as production partners. In their best practice model for an average campaign, the rule of

thumb is that the time spent on the initial strategic phase (the first three steps typically referred to as planning) approximately take as much time as the production phase, and freedom is required to be able to come up with novel ideas. It is a linear model with steps within both the strategic phase and the production phase. The steps are; research, insights and analysis, definition of the target group, strategy, concept, choice of channels, implementation and evaluation of results.

MAW argue that they do not need to do all the steps, but at least make sure they are there. The biggest agencies can request half a million SEK for planning just to allow the clients through the door, while the asymmetrical agency-client relation results in the smaller agencies being happy as long as they got work to do, i.e. production work. As mentioned by the CEO, *you are not thinking of being hungry if you are about to drown.* Implying that you will not have time to think about doing high status projects if you are fighting for your business to survive. There is no room to question a purchase order by the smaller agencies. *You are our biggest client, if you want to have a pamphlet then we will make one in three days*, says the agency director when illustrating the scenario by describing the smaller agencies' reaction to a large account. MAW, however, has done well financially which result in enough capital to at some extent say no or question non-strategic suggestions by potential clients. Even if it comes with a risk of losing the revenue from such a project – MAW strive to follow their principles. *If they do not share our view on advertising we would not want to do it anyway.* as one of the project managers strongly expressed in a conversation on this particular topic.

With their ambition of being viewed as a strategic agency they have a belief that good strategic advertising should not be rational, it should rather be emotional. A recurring topic regarding the major accounts of MAW is how to position the advertising as caring for the end consumer – to understand them and provide them with products and services that simplifies the lives they want to live. With a vast selection of substitutes in the future and with a declining economy, people are going to remember who stood by their side, even when they did not have to. As metaphorically described by the CEO:

> *This weekend I was going out eating with some friends and we had not made a reservation. There were no tables available anywhere and of the eight places we went to, only one did try to care about us. When the economy turns and all of them are looking for customers, guess which one I will go back to?*

This is part of the mission statement of MAW: everything communicates and by being a strategic partner of the client, they can question whether it is correct to take certain action.

Playing with emotions
During the first day at MAW there was a conversation in a small meeting room between the agency management. The reason for the meeting was one single document – a brief that after the meeting was handed to the researcher. When looking over the brief it was quite

straightforward. It was about a product launch and MAW had been invited to participate in a pitch, without receiving any payment for the work. The advertiser, BAWS (an acronym for the fictive company name *Building Augmented World Solutions*), was searching for an agency to create the product launch campaign.

The brief is two pages long describing:
- BAWS background
- Deadline for the presentation (within four weeks)
- Requirements to include in the pitch:
    - Concept idea for the campaign
    - Media strategy, advertising channels and target groups
    - Suggestion for a digital campaign site
    - Mood boards
    - Agency description of competences, processes and organisational structure
    - Reference cases
    - Cost estimations

According to the brief MAW will be evaluated on:
- Quality of the material
- Organisation
- Price
- Level of creativity
- Reference cases

In an additional appendix there is a communication strategy for BAWS and a communication plan for the product that is about to be launched. Like several other client accounts at MAW the invitation to the pitch is a result of previous relations. *I surely know a hundred CMO's,* says the agency director, illustrating the personal network that the experienced people at MAW had built in their long careers. The personal network is important and the invitation to the pitch for BAWS is a great example of that.

On the first day of the pitch work the CEO who has the overall agency responsibility and is the one receiving the brief, call for a start-up meeting. (S)he has gathered a project manager and a widely competent creative. The project manager has a lot of strategic experience and is usually responsible for handling the client relation while the creative will be in charge of developing the advertising concept of the campaign to pitch. The start-up meeting takes place in the medium sized meeting room. In the beginning of the meeting, the CEO argues:

> *The industry [of BAWS] has rational answers to emotional questions, there*
> *is no way the end consumers can evaluate their appreciation of the product*
> *by a look at a blueprint.*

The CEO presents a shallow hypothesis concerning the emotional aspect of purchasing the products on the market. It is not much, but at least something to start with. The recently

formed project group have an idea that the solutions will end up in a mood film (which will be described later) in order to illustrate the tonality of the proposed advertising concept. The CEO assign their motion graphics designer to create the mood film to ignite the creative spark, without a deeper notion of the concept. The shallow hypothesis presented by the CEO in the start-up meeting will function as the starting point for the creative work.

When illustrating an emotional approach a mood film is considered a powerful tool. It is a short film consisting of specifically chosen music and handpicked film sequences. To illustrate the emotional approach MAW will present the mood film as a foundation of the advertising concept of the campaign they will pitch. However, this has not been asked for in the brief, where mood boards are requested. Mood boards are usually constituted by static pictures arranged together to illustrate and fulfil the same purpose as a mood film. MAW have found out the identity of the three other agencies competing in the pitch through leaks, and that they are experienced within BAWS' industry and usually do mood boards. *Mood boards are hygiene factors,* says the art director who has joined the others in the pitch work, *the mood film captures emotions in another way.* To have a motion graphics designer at MAW is a great asset, that is used in several other project to generate emotional responses in different types of presentations. In this particular case, the designer spends one day using stock material (i.e. film sequences available online for anyone to use) to edit a one minute film together with music. During the work process the art director and the creative looked at different competitors of BAWS. While browsing through competitors' websites and comparing one to another the art director expressed: *It's pretty clear that they are all very similar. It's almost funny!.* Developing the reasoning together they both come to the conclusion that their emotional approach will position BAWS, even further from the competition who use plain product pictures with rational arguments.

On the fourth day of the pitch work, in a corner of the office the CEO talk with a senior project manager, who has no previous involvement in the pitch work, almost whispering:

> *I looked at the film,* the senior project manager says, *it was emotional in the beginning, but not until the end. It is bad feedback but I don't have a better suggestion.*

> *That was the feedback of the project manager as well,* the CEO replies, *its foundering. I don't know how to tweak it...I called our contact [at BAWS],* the CEO continues, *I will send the film to get feedback. It will be a hint. If (s)he says 'well...present something, but not this' then there is no reason to tweak it. I don't know the person, we only met twice, (s)he is very analytical.*

In general MAW avoids to share things before a presentation since it has a tendency to travel in the client's organisation. As stated in another project by a project manager: *I would like to send a first suggestion to the contact...but the whole board wish to see it, and there is a risk that it has legs.* Implying that if something is presented out-of-context others could have the wrong interpretation. But in this stressful pitch process it is a calculated risk MAW is willing

to take, thanks to the previous relationship with the contact person. It takes two days before the contact person gets back with feedback – and it is great. *This will totally separate you from the other agencies,* (s)he says. Whether (s)he has seen the suggestions from the competing agencies are yet to be known for the CEO, but that is unlikely since there is more than a week until the deadline. What is certain though is that the contact person has evaluated what the other agencies usually produce since they are invited to the pitch. The feedback injected energy to the project group who felt confident that they were on the right path. The designer makes an additional three films, one for each target group (further discussed in the next theme), with emotional tonalities like the mood film.

Creativity derive from planning
A key factor when working with advertising is to build the concepts on insights. To know the expectations and goals of the advertising, insights need to be collected from the client through interviews. But even more important are the end consumer insights, which are usually gathered through planning. Clients are often reluctant to spend money on the strategic parts of a project due to its intangibility and issues of addressing the value in regards to the end product. Planning takes time and is considered to be needed in order to make great advertising. The brief provided by BAWS lacks planning and MAW need that information to produce accurate advertising. Who to speak to, why and how. The only information provided in the brief are three defined target groups, based only on demographics including age span and relationship status. To be able to anchor the pitch work in some kind of insights of the target groups, the creative simply makes them up.

In the previously mentioned start-up meeting, situated in the medium sized meeting room this process takes place. Present is the creative, the project manager and the CEO. The target group document, that now takes form on a TV hanging on the wall, is written by the creative and air-played from the computer. It covers three made up target groups and their life situations in relation to the product sold by BAWS. The CEO and project manager help out from the top of their heads, based on their own experience. The created target groups were drawn upon stereotypes, i.e. averages of the population. Characters who just recently were known only by age and relationship status, suddenly get names, work situations, life goals and most importantly, feelings that puts them in relation to BAWS' product. Later when reflecting on this process, the project manager highlights that, *we cannot say that all is done, since it's not. But we still cannot say it is not done.* What (s)he means is that they have to show that this is what an emotional approach could look like if the characteristics of the target groups were accurate. But if they argue that this is the final solution, there is a risk that BAWS would like to buy the films produced by MAW. This would be problematic because of two reasons. First, the pitch work has been done for free and by giving away the films BAWS could argue that the work is already done and there is no reason to pay for further adjustments. Secondly, if they were to implement this solution it would imply that MAW provide BAWS with something based on guesses and stereotypes. Even if they would want to use the films they would not be anchored in reality and therefore considered as inaccurate advertising, moving away from the strategic partner perspective.

How the agency present

The creative is in charge of outlining the actual pitch and on the week before (s)he prepares the key note-presentation. The agencies are asked to send their presentation slides in advance to BAWS, something that is unusual to MAW. As described by the creative:

> *The challenge is that thanks to my experience and people-skills I can usually lead the presentation into a fitting tonality. It is like walking on eggshells in the beginning of the pitch.*

Therefore (s)he need to decide whether to send the presentation without some context or to include everything that will be presented. Furthermore (s)he also need to decide which parts of the campaign that are to be included. BAWS expects all the pitch material and the creative expects the other competing agencies to fulfil this requirement. However, the creative decides to only send them a limited version of the presentation. BAWS receives information of the competencies, KPI's and reference cases of MAW. To show that they have an understanding of their market they include some insights gathered through shallow market research supported with references from third party reports. But (s)he excludes all the proposed solutions, i.e. the mood film and target group films. *To save some shooting power for the pitch*, (s)he says. Providing the non-essential information now, results in being able to cut most of it in the actual pitch presentation.

In the preparation meeting a few hours before the pitch the project group consisting of the CEO, project manager, agency director, creative and art director discuss strategies for the pitch presentation. They are gathered around a big table in the largest meeting room of the office. Everyone are looking at the presentation on the wide screen TV hanging on the wall. No one at MAW know who is going to be in the room representing BAWS during the pitch. What they are convinced of though is that most of the representatives, whoever they might be, they will not have any knowledge regards advertising. This issue is something that concern the agency director:

> *They will look for solutions instead of reviewing our insights. You know what it is like, 'get to the solution goddammit!' We want to talk strategy, but they will feel like it is tedious!*

That is the first reason why not to linger on strategy. As elaborated by the creative:

> *We need to get to the first film quickly, everything before that are gathered from their own material, it will only create a risk that questions will be raised.*

By this the creative implies that all of the insights based on the information sent by BAWS are things they already know. This could only result in opinion differences and waste of valuable time. One part that they will briefly stop and mention is the best practice model, as described by the project manager:

We do not want to spend time on describing our process, they have already got it in the presentation we sent. We should pass through quickly and say that we assume that they know what it takes when it comes to planning.

MAW will argue that they do not have to do all the steps, just check that they are all there. This short stop at the best practice model will also show that: *the work MAW do is science, not rough estimates*, as clearly stated by the CEO. With their prior knowledge about clients' unwillingness to pay for planning, a discussion about why it is needed and part of the model is only a potential risk. The group rather get to the first movie quickly. By avoiding misconceptions regarding company information and investing money in planning they will have a smooth process on their way towards the big idea of emotional advertising. To really state the value of an emotional approach to advertising, they decide to show the homogeneous and rational advertising of BAWS' competitors. The images that were found on the competitors websites by the art director earlier are presented on the slide prior to the one with the mood film. By illustrating this contrast it will result in an effect that they had used in another pitch, as described by the agency director:

We will be straightforward with them, stating that this is something positive and should be considered an opportunity. But if you don't do this, someone of your competitors surely will!

The project group arrives at the first mood film in the presentation, shown on the TV hanging on the wall. The creative argues:

It is a great tool to lead the room, it is almost cheating… impossible to defend oneself against. They don't know it but they are manipulated in the room when we use the film, to control their feelings.

With the mood film at hand BAWS representatives would be more likely to like MAW and its ideas. The creative continues:

It does not solve their advertising problem, but is solves ours. This will have an enormous impact as the film ends, because once seen they cannot argue against that advertising is emotional. It is just been proved!

In the following part of the presentation MAW will reason that all targets groups cannot be addressed in the same way. In order to succeed there is a need for communicative actions. Those actions are the individual target group films. As stated by the creative:

When the films are being played with different music and different imagery their brains cannot rewind, rewind to a state of doing either pamphlets or doing homogeneous advertising to the target groups.

When the representatives of BAWS are hooked on the emotional approach MAW is able to reconnect to the notion of planning as they briefly mentioned earlier. Then they highlight the importance of understanding the target groups, to have an accurate tonality and a distinct advertising concept, as introduced through the best practice model. *The conclusion in the end is that then someone has to come up with this – 'and those are the people to do it',* the creative says by referring to themselves. When this is done it is only the requested reference cases left to be presented. To highlight the experience MAW has within the industry by which BAWS is operating.

Two weeks later, the news arrive that MAW has won the pitch. Everything in the presentation went according with strategy and the project group had succeeded. Thus, we will assume that the pitch unfolded according to the plan as we proceed to discuss the empirical findings in the following section.

Discussion

In the empirical findings we have presented a narrative of how the work preceding the pitch presentation unfold at MAW. To fulfil the purpose of this paper we will structure the discussion in four parts. First, by relating the structure of the pitch in the case to the practical issues presented in the previous research. Secondly, by discussing how this influence the work conducted at MAW, and third how they manage to transfer their knowledge to the client of how to solve their problem. Lastly, we discuss the implications of our findings to previous research and our contribution to the field of advertising creativity.

The structure of the pitch

Through the deadline, detailed requirements and lack of payment, BAWS defined the framework of the pitch preparations, and thus established an asymmetrical relationship. When it comes to advertising services, the client have a pre-determined problem that needs a solution (West et. al., 2016) and to succeed they need the specialist knowledge of an advertising agency. However, since the agency and client have different domain-specific knowledge, and due to the intangibility of advertising services, it is hard to evaluate before they actually started working together (Van der Valk et. al., 2005), which is something that did not happen during the pitch. The domain-specific knowledge of BAWS is to develop and sell their product in the specific market in which they operate. Due to their experience within the domain they have a specialist knowledge in developing products that serve the demand on the market, which implies knowledge of their end consumer base. MAW's domain-specific knowledge is to analyse the market and come up with creative ideas to sell the product (Moeran, 2005), thus separated by a distinct knowledge boundary between their domain and BAWS'. To evaluate the competing agencies, BAWS define the problem through the need of a product launch campaign. But also the framework in form of the brief by which the solution needs to be presented, in this case a limited time frame for the competing agencies to present their creative ideas without payment. The brief was thus established as an obligatory passage point (Callon, 1986), that the competing agencies needed to accept, in order to be part of the pitch. BAWS, thus established themselves as gatekeepers in order to enrol participants to fit

their own goals (Star & Griesmer, 1989). In our case MAW was enrolled due to their belief in winning the account and grow their business, thus willing to take the risk of working without payment. Through this coercion by BAWS it was possible to depart from the integrity of the actors' interests (Star & Griesmer, 1989) where the competing agencies needed to work for free in order to participate. Therefore, the asymmetrical agency-client relation (Kelly, et. al., 2005) became apparent due to the agencies need to win the pitch in order to get any return on invested time. The time, economic, and competitive aspects of the pitch structure results in a tension where the competing agencies need to decide whether to present the solution they believe in, or simply what they perceive the client will think is appropriate (Earle, 2007). The question is then whether the role of MAW is to present the solution they think BAWS wants or the one they believe that they need.

In order to know what solution to present there needed to be a common meaning of what problem to solve, i.e. the request of a product launch campaign. This purpose of creating common knowledge across boundaries was at a syntactic level (Carlile, 2004) which implied that information was transferred through the brief. Therefore it can be viewed as a common lexicon since the information of the problem only needed to be processed and did not involve any novelty that MAW had to learn. A common lexicon implies that the knowledge can be efficiently managed across boundaries (Carlile, 2004), accordingly with the purpose of sharing the pitch requirements with several agencies. Thus functioning as a designated boundary object-in-use (Levina & Vaast, 2005) at the syntactic boundary since it informed about the need of a campaign. Due to BAWS being a powerful actor with an established asymmetrical relation through the structure of the pitch, the smaller agencies competing would have a lesser tendency to question the brief. For the smaller agencies, who are happy as long as they got work to do, the main focus would be to win the pitch in order for their business to survive. Thus forced to present a solution they believe BAWS would perceive as appropriate, where the creative work is generated strictly from the knowledge in the brief. By translating the brief and relying simply on their tacit knowledge, the creative solution would be strictly subjective inherent with BAWS vague definition of the target audience, i.e. age span and relationship status. In this scenario the client will remain the powerful actor due to the smaller agency being economically dependent on the pitch. Thus, in line with previous identified tension where powerful actors enforce their creative judgments to receive the advertising they perceived to want (Koslow, et. al., 2006). In this scenario the primary purpose of evaluating the agency would be to extract their knowledge and get a solution for a product launch campaign. However, it is still the client's domain-specific knowledge that dictates the rules upon which the creative work is constructed. Thus, the smaller agencies are primarily following their economic interests accordingly with being a production partner.

The pitch work unfolds
MAW aim to depart from the production partner relationships, and therefore they negotiated the brief. Apart from the scenario described in the previous section, MAW is aware of their capabilities and is decisive to not be suppressed in production partner relationships. Instead they aim to be a strategic partner that delivers according with their purpose of creating successful advertising, even if it means questioning the information provided in the brief.

Thus, following their best practice model is more important than their short-term economic interest, and will assure that they have the opportunity to make their collective knowledge explicit in order to succeed. To find a solution to the problem, MAW had to translate the brief into their knowledge domain. However, during this process there was a realisation that the brief lacked end consumer insights which led to a pragmatic boundary, with the need for additional knowledge to solve the pre-determined problem. Thus, a negotiation and transformation of both the common knowledge and domain-specific knowledge took place (Carlile, 2004) through the creation of a target group document, that together with the brief, resulted in common knowledge for the project group of how to solve the problem. Thus functioning as a network-organising device due to the enrolment of group participation and accumulation of collective knowledge towards a common goal (Henderson, 1991). Without the target group document the creatives could not continue to conduct their work. This distinction between the designation and actual use of the brief as a boundary object illustrates that it do not necessarily have proper uses in practice, but rather that it may serve different purposes for different users (Spee & Jarzabkowski, 2009). Thus the brief functioned at a syntactic boundary to create a common meaning of what problem to solve, but did not function as an object-in-use in the local domain of MAW. Therefore being an effective boundary object in one setting, but less effective in another (Doolin & McLeod, 2012). By transforming the brief MAW could move away from the path of becoming a production partner and rather work according with their best practice model towards becoming a strategic partner. However, to succeed they needed to transfer their knowledge to BAWS' domain of how to solve the pre-determined problem in the brief.

Negotiating at a boundary
When MAW had a common knowledge of how to solve the pre-determined problem they needed to transfer their knowledge across the boundary by making it explicit. In the pitch MAW was evaluated on the level of creativity in their proposed solution of the product launch campaign. Due to creativity being highly subjective (Nyilasy & Reid, 2009) the project group spent time to assess the level of knowledge of the representatives of BAWS. MAW was aware that they would look for solutions since the representatives did not have the knowledge to evaluate the strategy or the insights. Instead MAW needed to discover and satisfy the likes and dislikes of the key decision makers to succeed (Moeran, 2005). The representatives present at the pitch are the gatekeepers who are looking for novel creativity, but are more comfortable in taking decisions on something they are familiar with (Earle, 2007). This pose a great challenge for MAW who needed to avoid to comfortably present a solution that the client would want to see, but might not need. By avoiding it they cut the path towards becoming a strategic partner. However, this implied that MAW was taking a lot of risk in presenting what they believed was the solution BAWS needed. The subjective nature of advertising (Kover et. al., 1995; Koslow et. al., 2006) results in an increased novelty which implies an increased effort to share and assess knowledge at a boundary (Carlile, 2004). In the process of making knowledge explicit and to translate domain-specific knowledge different interests are often revealed (ibid.). MAW and BAWS had a common knowledge of the pre-determined problem to be solved, but different viewpoints on suggested solutions and ideas due to their domain-specific knowledge. When an actor need to change the knowledge

and interest from their own domain a negotiation arise at a pragmatic boundary (Carlile, 2004). MAW wanted to avoid getting stuck in negotiations and rather have a smooth process throughout the pitch. By using their experience and subjective reasoning in what to present (Earle, 2007), MAW ended up outlining a presentation including several objects, each with a distinct purpose.

MAW's solution to the pre-determined problem was to follow their best practice model, but they were still enrolled by the client as a focal actor in the asymmetrical structure of the pitch. However, they challenged BAWS by transforming the brief outside their local domain (Bechky, 2003). In order to succeed they deconstructed the best practice model into several knowledge boundaries that needed to be managed. After the short description of MAW and their competences, they briefly mentioned the best practice model in order to establish their work as professional and scientific. Thus, fostering an impression that MAW is a professional organisation to safely conduct business with (Moeran, 2005). By doing this, MAW position themselves as strategic and scientific, rather than working with rough estimates that more easily could be questioned. However, they could not linger on explaining the model. At this point the best practice model was not an effective boundary object, because it had not been proven locally useful (Star, 1989). It would rather put the client's knowledge at stake (Carlile, 2002) and MAW would not be able to name it symbolically valuable (Levina & Vast, 2005). Due to this they needed to return to the best practice model later when its usability had been proven. After establishing their professionalism and scientific approach MAW created a common knowledge of how BAWS' competitors advertise. MAW presented the competitors rational approach through their use of product pictures. The mobilisation of the competitors into the pitch presentation was a way to gain power towards the proposed solution (cf. Callon, 1986). By bridging this knowledge boundary they moved closer towards establishing the best practice model as a focal actor, through the use of insights and aligning BAWS' interests with MAW's own. There was a reason for the mobilisation at this point of the pitch, where MAW's intended purpose was to create a sense of urgency. By contrasting their emotional approach, resulting in a differentiation with the competition, the effect of the following mood film would be even more powerful. Thus aligning BAWS' interest to always have an edge on the competitors and aim of becoming a market leader.

BAWS asked for mood boards in the brief and therefore defined the framework for the competing agencies. However, MAW chose to move away from the requested mood boards. This was made possible due to MAW possessing the competence and resources available at the time of the pitch to create a substitute through a mood film. It was strategic in order to differentiate themselves from the competing agencies and to showcase their competences regarding film. However, the choice of a mood film was significantly better when it came to fulfilling the purpose of presenting an emotional approach in the suggested campaign. This is due to the interpretative challenges of moving knowledge across boundaries (Carlile, 2004). While mood boards demand knowledge of the recipient in order to understand how it would translate into the campaign, the mood film is easier to understand. With mood boards, MAW would need to speak on behalf of the end consumer, by describing the feelings they would get through the campaign. However, with the mood film the recipient is mobilised into the role of

the end consumer, seeing and feeling the same things as they would. As a boundary object it is thus of scale and flexible (Star, 2010), since it is useful across knowledge domains. It thus solve MAW's problem of communicating their advertising to the representatives who lack knowledge regards advertising production. By successfully managing this manoeuvre MAW enrolled BAWS with their emotional approach, by focusing on them as the recipient of the pitch, rather than the end consumer as a recipient of the advertising (Moeran, 2005).

To create common knowledge of the need to address the different target groups in different ways MAW presented three additional mood films – one for each target group. Since they were created from the target group document they were not based on insights derived from planning, rather stereotypes based on the defined target groups in the brief. Since the different target groups were stereotypes, i.e. averages of the population, they were recognisable by BAWS and resulted in a common knowledge to differently addressing the target groups. The target groups were initially received as information on a paper, then transformed from age and relationship status in the brief to be deeply described through motions graphics and emotional sound in a mood films. Therefore, the target group document was both flexible and of scale since it acted as a foundation to grow an infrastructure upon and was transformed into further processes (Star, 2010). MAW used multiple objects to bridge the knowledge boundaries at BAWS and made their knowledge explicit. Through the use of these objects the best practice model became the solution to the product launch campaign. Thus, designated by MAW and established as an obligatory passage point. MAW constructed a powerful network where they successfully aligned the interest of different actors towards the best practice model. The previous asymmetrical relation shifted as MAW made their knowledge explicit and thus established themselves as a powerful actor in the network. The best practice model was proven locally useful and when MAW returned to it the second time in the pitch presentation it became the solution to the problem, instead of the creative work presented. MAW enrolled BAWS, in order to fit their own goals of doing planning according with being a strategic partner. However, this present a paradox since doing planning in the first place might result in a higher degree of novelty. Novel insights would challenge the common knowledge of who the target group were in the campaign. Thus implying an even bigger challenge for MAW to negotiate the pragmatic boundaries that would arise. MAW want to work according with their best practice model, but in a new client relationship they benefit from as little novelty as possible. That clients are more comfortable in taking decisions with something that they are familiar with (Earle, 2007) is well known, but how to translate novelty in practice demand a thorough understanding of what the decision-makers need in order to make educated decisions. Thus, we have shown the need to study the production of advertising (McFall, 2004) to understand advertising in a wider perspective. If the advertising agencies cannot make their knowledge explicit they will simply serve the clients' needs, which may overlook the needs of the end consumers in the market. Instead they need to manage the knowledge boundaries and align their interests towards a shared goal. As we have shown, this is possible through the use of boundary objects.

They got 99 problems when a pitch ain't won

In this paper we have shown how the tensions inherent in the pitch structure have implications that advertising agencies need to manage. However, due to the pitch being the starting point of both an agency-client relation and a campaign these tensions can lead to further implications. The lack of cooperation in the pitch structure set a standard for the relationship and the following projects if the pitch was managed successfully. There is no reason for the client to question the way of working, with a lack of cooperation in the future. Therefore, it is important that the winning advertising agency renegotiate the standard of how the following work should be conducted together.

Another important aspect to consider in relation to the pitch structure is the foundation upon which the campaign is constructed. Without enrolment of end consumers in the presented solution of the pitch, there is a need for planning before realising the campaign. Insights of the end consumers within the market is needed to align their interests with the campaign. If they are successfully enrolled through the established obligatory passage point (Callon, 1986) the campaign will gain power through the network of actors within the market. If successful the solution to the problem will be considered appropriate and result in a return on marketing investment for the client (Earle, 2007). However, if the agency do not manage to create a common knowledge of how to solve the pre-determined problem, the solution will be based on the client's knowledge. This will not only reduce the value created through the advertising service, it might also affect consumer culture. Since advertising reflects reality back at us while combining familiar elements in novel ways (Hackley, 2009), it is rather a question of whose reality it reflects. The client will impose an idealised projection of their target groups which will influence the advertising produced, since their knowledge determine what is appropriate for the end consumer. Without end consumer insights the creatives need to incorporate their interpretation of contemporary culture (Kelly, et. al., 2005), thus resulting in advertising that represents the norm of the professionals (i.e. at the agency and the client) involved in the production (Schwarzkopf, 2011). The agencies need to be aware of the implications present in the pitch structure, but more importantly prepared to manage them in relation to the client and the inherent tensions.

We are aware that all the arguments presented in the discussion about the client's knowledge also can be found within the advertising agencies. Being evaluated and working in a knowledge intensive industry is challenging when meeting highly knowledgeable advertising buyers that put the creatives knowledge at stake. There is more than one side of the story and it is easy to be victimised when others do not fully understand the work produced. However, the problem may rather be packaging and transferring the creative ideas and solutions at the boundaries. It is thus important for the advertising agencies to reflect on how they are advertising their own solutions and ideas to the client. By successfully managing this we would see more exciting and appropriate advertising in our contemporary market. Connecting back to the subjectivity of advertising creativity, there is no model to predict the success of a campaign (Nyilasy & Reid, 2009) and therefore there is a need to study the context in which advertising is produced (McFall, 2004). The pitch is the starting point where the advertising agencies meet new requirements and new actors in a new context every time. Thus, we have

shown that the agency need to focus their knowledge on how to transfer their solution to the client, rather than presenting the final advertising. In the end, advertising is a sponsored creativity (Kelly, et. al., 2005) and whether the client follow the industry agreements and pay the agencies for their work or not, it is up to the agencies to decide whether to participate. However, our results pave the way for agencies to invest time and set their own rules.

Our ethnographic study have combined the academic disciplines of both marketing and management, where the results show how an advertising agency manage tensions within advertising creativity. This was done through a sociomaterial perspective where we traced how the pitch work unfolded. Thus, we have contributed to the field of advertising creativity by adopting the concept of knowledge boundaries to study how advertising services are sold. Through this perspective, the inherent tensions identified by previous research is due to different specialists' knowledge domains. Therefore, the tensions are not to be solved, but rather to be negotiated at a boundary. If managed successfully it will result in an accumulated knowledge from different domains in the creation of advertising. The production of advertising creativity cannot be understood through descriptive methods due to its subjectivity. Following our study we hope to see future research contributing to a further understanding of how advertising is produced through a sociomaterial perspective by adopting the concept of knowledge boundaries. The pitch is only the starting point of a campaign, that is followed by further negotiations and translations before the advertising reach the end consumers.

Conclusions

In this paper we have presented an ethnographic study of how the pitch work unfold at a Swedish advertising agency. The previously studied practical implications of the pitch structure was apparent during the time at the agency. They have shown to create tensions due to the asymmetrical agency-client relation, which is particularly conspicuous during the pitch where the competing agencies work without payment. This make the agencies gravitate towards presenting what they think the client want, instead of what they need. However, it is less interesting to be constrained in a strict production role, since it diminish the agency's use of their knowledge. The brief is important for creating a common knowledge of what problem to solve through transferring information at a syntactic boundary between agency and client. The inherent tensions in the pitch and the fact that the brief represents the framework, implies that the client's domain-specific knowledge dictates the rules. The agency was evaluated based on their knowledge and their solution of the pre-determined problem. Therefore implying a desire to use their knowledge upon which they constructed the creative work. To manage this the first step was to transform the brief and thus endeavour against the asymmetrical power of the client.

The agency made their knowledge explicit through the use of boundary objects. They presented their best practice model as the solution to the problem defined in the brief accordingly with being a strategic partner. To succeed they deconstructed the best practice model into several knowledge boundaries, since its effectiveness was limited in the beginning

of the presentation. These knowledge boundaries were managed through the use of several objects. By establishing common knowledge of the competitors advertising, the agency aligned the interests of an emotional approach. The agency created an effective boundary object by mobilising the recipients of the pitch to the role of the end consumer through the use of a mood film. Irrespective of previous experience, anyone would understand the emotional approach through the mood film. The representatives at the client were thus enrolled with the emotional approach and the agency could therefore continue to create a common knowledge regards planning. Since the target group films were based on stereotypes, a common knowledge was created of who the target groups were and the need to address them in different ways was established. Thus illustrating the need for planning and insights of the target groups, connecting back to the best practice model. Through the use of different objects the agency made their knowledge explicit in order to create a common knowledge of how to solve the pre-determined problem, i.e. a campaign for a product launch. They managed this by transforming the knowledge provided in the brief and enrolled the actors involved through their best practice model.

Our results show implications for advertising practice and how advertising services are sold. Agency managers need to be aware of the inherent tensions within advertising creativity in general and in the pitch structure in particular. These tensions need to be managed in relation to the client, where we have shown that managers need to focus on negotiating and transferring the agency's knowledge, rather than presenting the final advertising. By adopting the concept of knowledge boundaries and studying how the pitch work unfold through a sociomaterial perspective, we have contributed to the field of advertising creativity through a combination of the academic disciplines of both marketing and management. In this perspective the inherent tensions are not to be solved, but rather to be negotiated at a boundary in order to accumulate the knowledge from the different specialists' involved in the creation of the advertising. When both agency managers and advertising buyers realise the importance of negotiating creativity, the advertising that reach the end consumers will improve.

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