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A discourse analytical approach to understanding institutional changes in the Irish Advertising Industry

Working Paper

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Abstract

The central objective of the research upon which this paper draws is to establish how technological, economic and socio-cultural change has impacted the structures, roles and processes of the Irish Advertising Industry. Institutional theory provides the central theoretical framework. The research takes an interpretivist, constructionist and inductivist perspective and employs the methodological approach of discourse analysis to explore how institutions are being shaped and arguably changed by social actors. It draws on a growing body of literature which suggests that language is central to the structuring of organisations. The empirical data and its fine-grained analysis has begun to reveal the ways that social actors are engaged in shaping the institution of advertising in Ireland in response to economic and technological change. New logics are emerging, although there is also some resistance from traditional agencies, particularly those working within the creative sphere. The research also enables us to examine the ways that new structures are emerging. Central to these processes are the active configuration of new roles which combine traditional creativity with technological skill – one such emergent role is that of the “creative technologist”.

Introduction

The central objective of the research upon which this paper draws is to establish how technological, economic and socio-cultural change has impacted the structures, roles and processes of the Irish Advertising Industry. In recent years the industry has undergone a painful transition due to the economic situation. Further, the challenges of integrating digital communication into established agency structures and processes and the changes brought about by the still evolving consumer roles in marketing communications have all impacted significantly on this industry in Ireland. Consequently the research aimed to explore how the industry is managing to survive and reinvent itself in the face of uncertainty and to examine how structures, processes and specifically new roles and competencies have emerged as a result. Given this interest then institutional theory has provided the central theoretical framework.

Institutional Theory

Institutional theory offers one a powerful means of understanding organisations (Greenwood et al, 2008) and helps us to understand how organisations embedded in social environments strive for legitimacy and support in the face of environmental uncertainty (Pache and Santos 2010). It also aims to give insight into how institutions adapt over time in the face of social, cultural and political environmental forces to gain stakeholder approval (Luhman and Cunliffe 2013). Centrally, “Institutions” are held together and stabilized by shared, taken-for-granted rules or norms known as institutional logics (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). Simply, here, logics encode what is appropriate behaviour and provide a guide for future action (Suddaby and Greenwood, 2005). Zucker (1983) suggested that it is during the process of institutionalism that certain actions or logics are deemed to be acceptable (or not). Norms or acceptable modes of behaviour are observed and thus reproduced by actors to constitute an institution and which become taken-for-granted and simultaneously institutionalised. Elements of the Irish advertising industry are inevitably institutionalised, but with the series of changes underway, research which gets close to the actors and institutionalising processes provides one route to understanding institutional change happening. From this basis, therefore the industry can be usefully examined and critiqued by employing the institutionalist framework.

Clearly too, this is not the first paper to consider institutional theory as an appropriate lens through which to examine the vagaries and complexity of the advertising industry. For example, the impact of digital communications on opportunities for creative women is explored in the work of Mallia and Windels (2011, p. 35). They characterise the world of the advertising creative department as “entrenched or institutionalized”. The abandonment of pervading institutional logic in the face of technological change has also been explored in the context of the French communications industry where the onslaught of digital communication has undermined and shifted accepted practices and logics within the industry (Suddaby et al, 2012). It is to this body of work that the current research hopes to contribute. Before exploring some of the central themes of institutionalism and their relevance to the advertising industry, a context of the institution of advertising is offered.

The Institution of Advertising

The traditional full service advertising agency provides expertise in the areas of strategic planning, consumer research, account management, media planning and buying, creative planning and execution. This typical full service agency concept was considered inviolate until the 1980’s, when the specialist media shop emerged (Horsky, 2006). At the heart of the advertising industry is creativity (Reid, King and DeLorme, 1998). It has a significant role in contributing to agency success (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010) as advertising agencies cannot expect to survive if their creative output is not valued both by their clients and within their wider industry. Creativity, as suggested by West, Kover and Caruana (2008, p.35) is what “sets advertising apart from the sales pitch”. Advertising agencies with a creative competence are better placed to withstand environmental uncertainty. Agency management is obliged to place creativity at the top of the management agenda as it is at the core of agency competencies (Verbeke, Le Blanc and Van Ruiten, 2008) and is one of the important factors considered by clients when they are evaluating new partnerships during the agency selection process (Griffin, 1998). Creativity permits agencies to compete for the economic success which Powell and DiMaggio (1991) contend is a driver of the institutionalism of organisations.

Art directors, copywriters and creative directors, those who work on the creative strategy within an agency, are known as “creatives” in the advertising industry (Stuhfaut and Windels, 2012). Creatives are often stereotyped as “mavericks or geni” (Hackley and Kover 2007, p.63) and can consider a test

of creativity to be how close the work comes to pushing organization boundaries (West, Kover and Caruana, 2008). Creatives prefer to work unimpeded by other groups (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan 2003) which may explain their reputation as mavericks (Kover and Hackley, 07). Some research has been conducted to explore the difficulties that creatives experience in their working lives (Kover and Hackley, 2007) as they must try to make sense of the contradictory elements which constitute their professional lives. On the one hand they must navigate the business objectives of both client and agency management and on the other hand they must create the kind of award-winning work that validates them in the eyes of their peers (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan, 2006). Award-winning creative work is difficult to achieve when clients profess that they seek creative work but actually accept only work that stays within organisational boundaries (West, Kover and Caruana, 2008). The creative professional is in a difficult position trying to create advertising that stays within normative boundaries while also producing work that can satisfy their professional identity.

In most traditional agencies creatives work together in a creative partnership (Stuhfaut, 2011). The art director and copywriter collaborate to bridge the gap between the marketer and consumer. Both Stuhfaut (2011) and Kover and Hackley (2007) emphasise the importance of this creative marriage. Stuhfaut (2011) recognizes how influential such a partnership can be, while Kover and Hackley (2007) discuss the importance of trust within the relationship, noting that a functioning creative team emotionally supported both parties, while a team which was not functioning would diminish creativity. Industry norms such as the creative team have been institutionalised within the advertising industry (Windels and Mallia, 2011). The creative director leads the creative teams within an agencies and in those agencies where excellent creative work is produced, the creative director is a highly prized and highly paid individual (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010) The creative director, given his role as leader of the creative process is perceived by his team as both a role model and also as an acceptable authority on what constitutes good creative work (Stufaut 2011).

The tension between the “Creatives” and “Executives”

Advertising as a practice represents the meeting point of two different ideologies – the creative and the managerial (Kelly, Lawlor and O’Donohoe, 2005). As such advertising agencies have been depicted as a locus of conflict. This conflict or tension exists within the creative individual in his quest to integrate his split identity (Kover and Hackley, 2007). It also is manifested in the gap that exists in traditional agencies between the creatives and the executive teams (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan, 2003). The account team represents the client’s perspective and they endeavour to maintain their relationship with the client and hence agency stability. Any suggestions relating to the creative work made by the account executive can often be perceived by the creative team as a personal affront (De Waal Malefyt and Morais, 2010). In the empirical work which follows, there are instances of this instinct of creative individuals to safeguard the creative integrity of their work. Although tension exists between creative and agency personnel, the creative still needs agency approval for their creative work to be accepted and have characterised the struggle to get their ideas accepted as a battle (Kelly, Lawlor and O’Donohoe, 2005). It is surmised that this ongoing tension between executive and creative practitioners is essential as it produces the optimum working conditions for all concerned (Hackley and Kover, 2007). This tension or lack of cultural understanding between the creative and executives is shown too in this research and has, arguably, become institutionalized within agencies.

Measuring Creative Work

Creatives resist the attempts of management to direct and judge their creativity. Hackley and Kover (2007) found that formalized systems of measurement only serve to alienate creatives and further distance them from others in their organisation. In addition, evaluating or rewarding creativity is a risky strategy as rather than increasing creativity, it can serve to encourage creatives to seek reward rather than follow new innovative creative directions (Amabile, 1997). Most agencies compete to win creative awards (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan, 2003). The winning of creative awards serves, in institutional terms, to legitimise the position of both creatives and agencies in their field. For creative departments, industry awards represent acceptance and validation by other creatives specifically for advertising creativity as distinct from advertising effectiveness. Creative practitioners are traditionally considered the best judges of creative advertising work themselves (El-Murad and West 2003, Reid, King and Delorme 1998). One of the most powerful weapons at the disposal of advertising agencies in their quest to achieve success, industry power and legitimacy has been their creativity.

Having a deeper understanding of the context of this research, we now return to our theoretical framework - institutional theory.

Coercive, mimetic and normative sources of isomorphism

One of the central tenets of the theory is that while organisations generally begin their lives as diverse and distinctive from each other, they become more similar in their structure, output and culture over time. (Powell and Di Maggio, 1991). This move towards organisational similarity occurs mainly in established fields and is attributed by Powell and DiMaggio (1991) to individual efforts to minimize the impact of environmental uncertainty. The need for an organisation to compete for power and legitimacy, in addition to economic success, also contributes to the phenomena (Hambrick et al, 2005). Hawley (1968) characterised this inexorable shift to homogeneity as isomorphism- the process by which organisations which face the same environmental challenges begin to resemble each other in structure, practices and processes. Pugh and Hickson (1996) warn, however, that the emergence of institutional isomorphism does not necessarily lead to greater institutional efficiency. New competitors may enter a field, new practices may emerge but “in the long run, organisational actors making rational decisions construct around themselves an environment that constrains their ability to change further in later years” (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991 p.65). Even when organisational change might drive potential efficiencies institutional actors remain constrained by their inability to abandon long-held institutional behaviour. Institutional theorists characterise this need to conform to long established norms as institutional inertia (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). There are certain norms and taken for granted behaviours that have shaped the advertising industry. One example of a norm within the advertising industry has been the traditional pairing of the art director and copywriter to form a creative team. Working together on an advertising campaign, the art director creates the visuals and the copywriter contributes the words or copy. Since the 1960's, the forming of creative teams is a taken for granted practice within the advertising industry and has become the gold standard of behaviour as roles have become embedded in the industry. Over time, organisations within this institution have become similar and the norms, practices and processes have become further institutionalized. These taken for granted behaviours are difficult to break free from (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996) even though established norms such as the traditional creative team are no longer perceived to be viable in the long term (Kieran, 2013).

There are three sources of institutional isomorphism (Lehman and Cunliffe, 2013; Slack and Hinings 1994; DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Slack and Hinings (1994, p.805) perceive coercive, mimetic and normative sources of isomorphism as being a “set” in that they each may all be present in an institutional setting and may work to reinforce each other. Organisations exert pressures on other dependent organisations within the environment. This coercive pressure is both formal and informal and combined with the existence of strong cultural expectation serves to drive conformity within the field, making organisations resemble each other in structures and procedures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991).

Mimicry is the organisational response to environmental uncertainty. An organisation can suffer from the pressures of economic, cultural or technological uncertainty. In an effort to resolve these issues and secure their future, an organisation may look to other more successful organisations for guidance (Pugh and Hickson, 1996). Therefore, organisations in their effort to imitate the practices and structures of more successful organisations drive conformity (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). Certain organisations in a field become the template for success and those seeking to legitimize their position model themselves on the top player. During the 1960’s an American advertising agencies known as BBDO was the template for success in the industry. Smaller, less powerful agencies followed their lead by adopting work practices such as the creative partnership model. Agencies in the advertising industry still imitate the practices and structures of more successful organisations but they appear now to be looking at organisations outside the traditional advertising agency for their template. In order to legitimize their position in a changing field, both traditional and digital agencies appear to be using more technologically orientated organisations such as Google as a model of success.

Professionals observing facets in their field constitute ‘organization’ and as such are subject to coercive and mimetic pressures (DiMaggio and Powell, 1991). For a career minded professional, it is important to define and nurture what constitutes good professional practice. Such professionalization is defined by DiMaggio and Powell (1991, p. 70) as “the collective struggle of members of an occupation to define the conditions and methods of their work, to control the production of producers’ (Larson 1977:49-52), and to establish a cognitive base and legitimation for their occupational autonomy”. Therefore professionals try to establish norms of behaviour for the profession in which they operate to ensure that their occupation and its workings are perceived as legitimate. The diffusion of norms and good practice causes all organisations within the field to converge (Pugh and Hickson, 1996). This is known as normative isomorphism. Interestingly, the convergence of good practice within an occupation ensures that professionals with similar training have more in common with their counterparts in other organisations rather than their own management cohort (Pugh and Hickson 1996). Relating this to the advertising industry, those working within the creative sphere of advertising have more in common with “creatives” in other agencies rather than those working on the business or management side in their own agency (Kover and Hackley 2007).

Organisational Responses to Institutional Pressures

Slack and Hinings (1994) demonstrate that although there was evidence of a progressive move towards conformity among the organisations they studied, there was also evidence of resistance to institutional convergence. The work of Oliver (1991) explores the strategic response of organisations to the environmental pressure exerted on them to conform. She develops a framework which questions organisational conformity and examines the alternative strategies that organisations employ to cope with institutional demands.

The table below outlines the framework developed by Oliver (1991) which illustrates alternative strategies employed by institutions to counter balance or in some cases to resist institutional pressure.

Strategies	Tactics	Examples
Acquiesce	Habit	Following invisible, taken for granted norms
	Imitate	Mimicking institutional models
	Comply	Obedying rules and accepting norms
Compromise	Balance	Balancing the expectations of multiple constituents
	Pacify	Placating and accommodating institutional elements
	Bargain	Negotiating with institutional stakeholders
Avoid	Conceal	Disguising nonconformity
	Buffer	Loosening institutional attachments
	Escape	Changing goals, activities, or domains
Defy	Dismiss	Ignoring explicit norms and values
	Challenge	Contesting rules and requirements
	Attack	Assaulting the sources of institutional pressure
Manipulate	Co-opt	Importing influential constituents
	Influence	Shaping values and criteria
	Control	Dominating institutional constituents and processes

Table 1: Strategic Responses to Institutional Processes

Source: Oliver (1991)

Oliver's (1991) typology of strategic responses to institutional processes identifies a possible range of five strategic options varying from passive acceptance to active rejection. Oliver's (1991) work could be utilized as an analytical schema against the data collected, however, space issues prevent this here and would also take us away from the focus of this research.

How might institutional change occur?

As institutions have traditionally been perceived as a staple source of conformity (Scott 2001), it is difficult to view them in the context of change. Deviating from institutional logics can be considered dangerous for an organisation as it may compromise their hard won legitimacy (Le Poutre and Valente, 2012). Organisations do, however, experience constant unfolding change (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). A significant issue to consider is why organisations differ in their responses to institutional conformity and what leads some organisations to deviate from institutional norms while others remain attached to them. Although institutional change may emerge from anywhere (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006), there is some evidence to show that organisations which are on the periphery of the institutional field and therefore less embedded in the context may be less attached to prevailing practices and hence are more open to change (Leblebici et al 1991). It is thought they lack the commitment to institutional norms compared to organisations located at the centre of institutional fields. They are also less likely to be penalised by more powerful central players for changing the existing order. Peripheral organisations are often less constrained by existing institutional

arrangements and are not subject to the same coercive, mimetic and normative pressures to conform. These less well developed organisations stand to benefit from change. In sum, change emits from the periphery of an institutional field as the organisations is less embedded, the actors are less powerful and institutional norms are less tightly enforced (Greenwood and Hinings 1996). Within the context of this research digital agencies are perceived as emerging from the periphery of the institutional field. The competencies of digital agencies are anchored in technological innovation rather than the creativity so highly prized in traditional advertising agencies. As a result, the professionals in digital agencies are drawn largely from technology rather than communications or creative backgrounds. They are therefore not subject to the same normative pressures to conform. As peripheral organisations, digital agencies are less constrained by existing institutional arrangements and have been less likely to be coerced into conformity by larger, more powerful players. Finally, while mimetic pressures may well exist for digital agencies, it would appear that they seek to emulate organisations in the technology sector, as mentioned earlier, rather than organisations in the field of advertising.

The role of the institutional entrepreneur

It should be noted that the role of actors engaged in creating, changing and maintaining institutions has emerged in institutional literature (Lawrence and Suddaby 2006). The concept of institutional entrepreneurship was introduced in an effort to understand how new institutions evolve (Di Maggio, 1988). Institutional entrepreneurs are essentially actors within an institution who seek to shape the context in which they operate and it is from this reconfiguring of existing institutions that new ones arise. Institutional entrepreneurship focuses on the importance of the everyday practices of individuals in shaping new institutions. What triggers individuals to enact institutional change? One widely agreed explanation (Le Poutre and Valente, 2012, Svejnova et al 2005) is that the dynamic interaction between institutional contradictions and human praxis or activity can under certain circumstances drive institutional change (Seo and Creed, 2002). The dialectical framework developed by Seo and Creed (2002) suggests that accepted institutional arrangements or logics can create inconsistencies which cause institutionally embedded actors to recognize the contradictions and become dissatisfied by the taken-for-granted institutional arrangements (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). Contradictions are defined as “these various ruptures and inconsistencies both among and within the established social arrangements” (Seo and Creed 2002, p.225). It has been argued that institutional fields may be prone to inconsistencies which lead to either deliberate or unwitting variation in practices (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). These contradictions allow the actor to move away from conformity and to deviate from the prevailing institutional logic (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). It is argued here that recent technological advances which allow for the accurate measurement of communication outputs have highlighted inconsistencies in the institutional arrangements of the advertising industry.

For institutional entrepreneurs to take change action, the actor must journey first from unquestioningly conforming to institutional norms to a more critical understanding that the present institutional arrangements do not satisfy their interests (Seo and Creed, 2002). Change may not come from the institutional actor themselves, but rather from the circumstances surrounding their relative position in the field (Suddaby 2012). Implicit in this journey is the notion that change will emerge where institutional inconsistencies are most notable and actors are most conflicted (Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). The pressure for change is related to the level of dissatisfaction experienced by groups within an institution. High levels of dissatisfaction among groups lead to intense pressure for change (Greenwood and Hinings, 1996). On the other hand, groups whose position are supported by

existing logic and are opposed to institutional change will search for ways in which to undermine new and emerging logics (Misangyi, Weaver and Elms, 2008).

The challenge for institutional entrepreneurs is to embed their desired changes in a recognisable framework that is acceptable to the old guard. Consequently, the success of any new emerging institutional logic will depend on how well it fits into existing logic (Seo and Creed, 2002). There is some evidence to suggest that those empowered by existing logics will adopt some symbolic token gesture of the new logic but only to avoid further change (Fiss and Zajac, 2006 as cited in Misangyi, Weaver and Elms, 2008).

Exogenous shock as a trigger of change

Exogenous shock has also been identified as a trigger of change (Svejenova et al, 2005). The global economic crisis, rapid technological advances and socio-cultural changes constituted a series of exogenous shocks for the advertising industry in Ireland. Such crises can instigate a shift in the collective understanding of institutional actors and lead them to disrupt existing logics and embrace change (Seo and Creed, 2002). These shocks might occur due to the aforementioned efficiency gap which, as discussed, has its roots in institutional conformity or because institutional arrangements are “suboptimal” (Seo and Creed, 2002 p. 235). A crisis may not always be enough to drive institutional change (Fligstein 1991). However, shocks do tend to encourage the entry of new competitors into an organisational field (Thornton 2002 as cited in Greenwood and Suddaby, 2006). The technological changes experienced in the advertising industry encouraged the entry of more technically orientated digital agencies into the competitive mix.

Methodology

In order to understand how traditional structures are being reconfigured in the Irish advertising industry and whether new roles and responsibilities have emerged as a result of prior and on-going efforts realising institutional change, semi-structured interviews were conducted with both creative directors and managing directors in both traditional advertising and digital agencies. It was considered important to capture the perspectives of those working in the creative realm (the “creatives”) and those working on the business side (“the suits”) of each agency. A set of general questions drawn from the relevant literature was developed to act as an interview guide, however the participants were given the opportunity to answer the questions in whatever way seemed appropriate to them (Fisher, 2010). All topics were covered in each interview, but as is acceptable in semi-structured interviews, the approach was flexible (Bryman and Bell, 2011). This allowed the participants to elaborate on areas that were of particular interest to them. The matrix below categorizes each participant by their position within their agency and whether their agency is traditional or digital.

	Creative	Suit
Traditional	Participant T4 , Participant T3	Participant T5, Participant T8
Digital	Participant D2, Participant D7	Participant D1, Participant D6

To facilitate identification within the findings section, each participant has been allocated a letter to denote whether they are presently employed in a digital (D) or traditional agency (T) and then given a

number to indicate their own particular contribution to the research findings. All but one of the interviews took place in the participant's place of business. The interviews took place between July and November 2013. Each session tended to open with an ice breaker about the weather or the latest industry news – for example if a new client account had been recently awarded to a new agency. The first interview with D1 was fully transcribed and themes were identified. The remaining interviews were then also repeatedly listened to, and the themes arising also carefully noted. Those portions of the interviews containing the significant themes arising were then also fully transcribed and then together, subjected to further systematic fine-grained analysis.

Following the advice of Fisher (2010), efforts have been made to ensure the credibility of this qualitative research by deploying a number of techniques. Firstly, all material has been archived so that others might re-visit the analysis. The interpretation of the material was reflected upon and reworked where necessary. In addition, efforts were made not only to affirm initial interpretations with those participating in the research but also with other industry experts who might share the same professional background. The researcher has endeavoured to ensure that her own personal values have not been allowed to overly colour the research findings. It should be acknowledged however, that the researcher too is an instrument of interpretivist research. In this case, the researcher has worked with practitioners in the advertising industry for over a decade. Therefore, she has formed her own impressions of the participants, their agencies and the industry in advance of the research journey. Whilst the “hand of the puppeteer” (Watson, 2000) should be acknowledged, the researcher has been vigilant to ensure that she has not “overtly allowed personal values or theoretical inclinations” to overshadow either the research or the resultant findings (Bryman and Bell, 2011 p. 398).

The research employs the methodological approach of discourse analysis to explore how institutions are being shaped and arguably changed by social actors. It draws on a growing body of literature which suggests that language is central to the structuring of organisations. Indeed, those who practice discourse analysis do so from the perspective that talk is more than just a way of exchanging information, it is a resource through which social actors make sense and create their world. Language is therefore “not just seen as reflective of what goes on in an organisation; instead language and organisation become one” (Bryman and Bell 2011, p.520). Discourse analysis, say Tietze et al (2003) offers one approach to understand the “creation” of organisational reality. From an ontological perspective, discourse analysis is constructionist (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The knowledge produced is also acknowledged as not value free but “partial, situated”; that is relative to a specific time and place and which cannot be universally applied (Wetherell et al, 2011). When making connections to institutional work then this too has been characterised as being language-centred by Lawrence and Suddaby (2006). As such they argue that discourse analysis is indeed an appropriate approach to employ in the study of institutional work. Kelly et al (2005, p.521) also contend that advertising as an “institutional practice” is constructed through language and consequently consider the advertising industry as fertile ground for discourse analysis. Others too have observed that discourse analysis is a means to understand institutional change (Phillips and Malhotra, 2008).

Findings and Discussion

The findings section begins with a focus on isomorphism in the Irish advertising industry allowing that although traditional advertising agencies may resemble each other as a result of facing similar environmental challenges (Powell and Di Maggio 1991), digital agencies seek to distance themselves from the structures, practices and processes of traditional agencies. Following on, the next section reports on changing institutional norms as the participants look back on their time in the industry. The third section explores how institutional change might have been triggered in the Irish advertising

industry through the efforts of institutional entrepreneurs and the effects of exogenous shock. Emerging institutional norms are then identified as are new creative processes and roles. The findings section concludes with a discussion of language use by the participants which was notable throughout.

Isomorphism in the Irish advertising industry

It is evident from this research that digital agencies are trying to distance themselves from the traditional advertising agencies. The managing directors and creative directors of digital agencies were at pains to demonstrate that while traditional advertising agencies may resemble each other, they are not similar in outlook, structure or processes to digital agencies. One of the dominant themes apparent in the analysis of this material is the personification of traditional advertising as brash, arrogant and lacking in subtlety. As an illustrative example, Participant D1, managing director of a large independent digital agency contended that **“traditional channels have always been very good about interrupting people”**. His perspective was that traditional channels such as TV and radio interrupt consumers when they are doing something else, talking up the benefits of a given product in order to persuade the consumer to purchase. Consumers are consequently treated as **“walking wallets”** by traditional advertising channels. This perspective was shared by Participant D2, a creative director in a digital agency who has spent most of his working life in traditional agencies. He described the **“inbuilt cynicism”** in above-the-line or traditional agencies contending that in traditional agencies **“there is an unspoken conspiracy where we know we don’t really care that much about the consumer we are just trying to flog ‘em stuff”**. In contrast, in digital or multi-way channels, according to Participant D1, people are not consumers, they are just **“people doing what people do”**. It was interesting to note too that Participant D1 strongly defended the notion that people can no longer be treated as consumers nor should they be interrupted in the midst of activities they are enjoying by unsolicited messages from advertisers. He warned that

“if you go into that conversation and you start shouting about your product, it’s like walking into a party and shouting I am f** great, let me tell you all these things about me and you know what at the end of the conversation you are going to want me!”**

His vivid description of the brash, arrogant “know-it-all” at a party can be interpreted as an indictment of a traditional advertising approach that he deems to be no longer appropriate and, in his view, no longer relevant. His use of an expletive in this context served a dual purpose, both to underline the vulgarity of the errant party-goer and also to demonstrate the participant’s own strong passion about his subject. However it would appear that traditional advertising is now the old roué, who having pressed his unwanted attentions on other guests, now refuses to go home. In terms of Oliver’s (1991, p. 8) work on strategic responses to institutional pressures, it can be interpreted that traditional agencies are adopting a “defiant strategy” and dismissing or ignoring emerging norms and values.

It is interesting albeit unsurprising to note that participant D1 used the metaphor of a party to describe the point where people and advertising come together. Metaphors are a useful mechanism, which due to their “generative” function (Tietze, Cohen and Musson, 2003 p. 35) enable the world to be framed in new and potentially fresh ways. However, Tietze, Cohen and Musson (2003) contend that there is an inherent tension or incongruity in the use of metaphors. Although a metaphor is not meant to objectively represent an existing reality, it does contain elements which are simultaneously similar and different from that reality. To elaborate, there are aspects to the interface between advertising and consumers that could be considered to be similar to that of a party. People attending a party will usually try to exhibit the best version of themselves and, as part of the social exchange, will endeavour to entertain and interest fellow party-goers. Similarly, advertising seeks to emotionally

engage and entertain consumers, often framing their social world in the most positive light. However, the party metaphor becomes less appropriate when one considers that the point at which advertising and consumers come into contact has a serious business objective motivated by profit and stakeholder expectation. Having noted that those working in the digital sphere interviewed for this research want to distance themselves from what they perceive as the out-dated practices of the traditional advertising agencies, we now move to consider suggestions of normative change within the industry.

Institutional norms within the advertising industry

The advertising industry has typically been characterised as a fun, exciting and glamorous industry and the institutional norms of behaviour and work practices in traditional advertising agencies are evident in the accounts of the practitioners. The loose structure of the industry is captured in the account of Participant D2 who recalled his early days in the industry describing the long lunches that were a part of his working day, **“there was always drinks cabinets, poached salmon if clients came in and Chablis”**. He asserted that normal standards of politically correct behaviour and appropriate language use were not applicable in advertising agencies. He concluded that **“it was a very loose working environment. There were no rules in terms of behaviour so we all shagged each other and drank a lot”**. While such behaviours are perceived as inappropriate or unethical in contemporary organisations, there was a sense of nostalgia for times past evident in the accounts of those who had lived and worked in advertising before the industry had irrevocably changed. Participant T4 succinctly described the industry as **“a lot less fun that it used to be”**. Participant T3 remembered that when he started in the industry **“it was one of the most exciting almost rock star-esque kind of things to be working in”**. He hankered after the **“devil-may-careness of it all”**. Both Participant T3 and T4 are creative directors in traditional agencies. Their nostalgia for the early days of their career can be interpreted as a resistance to changing institutional norms as the role and relevance of digital advertising becomes more embedded in the industry. As discussed in the literature review, the work of Oliver (1991) illustrates alternative strategies employed by institutions to resist institutional pressure to conform. It is posited here that the reluctance displayed by some of the practitioners to relinquish institutional norms are a ‘compromise strategy’ (Oliver, 1991, p. 152). Despite changes in the industry they have not quite surrendered old institutional norms. As such they are endeavouring to balance new institutional expectations with long-held but disappearing institutional norms.

So, as we have seen so far, and in such subtle ways, these eight interviewees convey both what is expected or fixed and that which has seemingly changed, alongside what continues to undergo change. For example we have seen how institutional norms of behaviour have reportedly changed within the industry and how perceptions of the consumer are shifting specifically in digital agencies. Attention is now turned to how institutional change might come about. Although Greenwood and Suddaby (2006) suggest that institutional change may emerge from anywhere, there is some evidence to show that organisations which are on the periphery of the institutional field and therefore less embedded in the context may be less attached to prevailing practices and hence are more open to change (Leblebici et al 1991). Digital agencies can be perceived as emerging from the periphery and this research suggests that institutional change has emanated from Irish digital agencies. The following section explores institutional entrepreneurs as change agents.

Identifying Institutional Entrepreneurs as change agents

The concept of institutional entrepreneurs was introduced in order to understand how new institutions might evolve (DiMaggio, 1988). Institutional entrepreneurs are social actors who seek to shape the context in which they operate and it is from this reconfiguring process that new or changed

institutions are born over time. This research has identified institutional entrepreneurs who are affecting change in the Irish advertising industry. Participant D1 is an institutional entrepreneur. His vision for the future of the industry was tangible and he almost seemed evangelical in defence of his position. For example, he discussed how he expects the brands he works with to adopt his vision stating:

“ they (the clients) can’t sit there and go yeah, yeah, yeah and they can’t sit there and go I know it’s changing, it not that it is changing or it is going to change – it has changed. You have to behave differently. It’s done. ”

The analysis of this account overall, suggests that Participant D1, became dissatisfied with taken-for-granted institutional arrangements (Greenwood and Hinnings, 1996) and has endeavoured to instigate institutional change. Another striking characteristic of institutional entrepreneurs is that they must frame emerging logics in a way that is acceptable to opponents of institutional change. During the interview, Participant D1 captured the changes wrought in the advertising industry by contending on several occasions that **“digital is the new operating system of the planet”**. This phraseology enables the changes to be framed in language that is technical but still accessible. Institutional entrepreneurs, as social actors with the vision to recognise when institutional arrangements give rise to technical or performance related efficiencies (Seo and Creed, 2002) and are also equipped with the skills to overcome adversity. In a further example of institutional entrepreneurship, Participant D1 emphasised the importance of education in disseminating the new logics of advertising. Realising that there was a lack of up and coming talent to facilitate change in the industry, he approached industry’s representative body and set up a programme to educate new talent. He found a way to spread his vision and bring about change. Institutional entrepreneurs can emerge from the periphery of an industry and often identify institutional inconsistencies simply because they are not institutionally embedded in the same way as institutional members. Participant T8, whose technology background gives her a unique perspective felt that the advertising industry was undervalued and could not understand why so much of the work was given away during the pitching process when agencies compete for new business. Coming as she does from a periphery of the advertising industry, she has arguably identified an institutional norm which creates institutional inefficiencies and will be subject to future change.

Institutional change is not only driven by institutional entrepreneurs, exogenous shock has also been identified as a trigger of change (Svejenova et al, 2005). The global economic crisis and subsequent recession constituted just such a shock for the advertising industry in Ireland.

The effect of exogenous shock on institutional norms

The role of creativity in advertising has been established earlier in this paper as an institutional norm. However, it would appear that the role of creativity is changing in the industry. Participant T3, a creative director in a traditional agency lamented how the recession had impacted his creative work. He noted that with shrinking budgets in many client organisations, the role of creativity had been diminished and he and his creative team found their **“aspirations being dashed on the rocks of realism”**. This dramatic depiction allows us to glimpse in to the world of the creative – a world in which creatives still aspire to create good work but where creativity is constrained by recessionary budgets. He described the disappointment of having to rework his ideas in line with reduced budgets, and admitted that he continues to try to inject creativity into even the most mundane work. He described his need to be creative in terms that were almost physiological. **“It doesn’t fill you as it used to, you did not walk away, walk away to home that night thinking to myself my belly is full,**

I have fed on creativity all day long and I am nourished by it". It is evident that to Participant T3, creativity is not just an aspect of his work rather it appears to be a physical imperative that helps make his life, not just his work, fulfilling. For Participant T3, creativity satiates him and it is clear the lack of opportunity to show his creative talent in his work now causes a tension within him. Participant T4 also credited the recession with changing the role of creativity in traditional advertising, contending that a **"culture of nerves rather than a culture of potential"** had emerged. Clients required assurances as to how the finished creative work would like at the point where it was only starting. He maintained that it was as though a level of trust had been lost in the industry. There was no longer recognition from the client side that **"you people know what you are doing and we are employing you for your expertise and your abilities within this field"**. Clients are no longer prepared to take creative risks with their budgets despite encouragement from creatives. Participant T3 reported trying to reassure clients with expressions such as **"we will jump off the cliff and build the wings on the way down"** or **"leap and the net will appear"** to no avail. He believed that clients were comfortable in allowing another brand to take a risk first and only afterward, depending on the success of the pioneering brand, would they consider emanating a new creative strategy. Participant T4 echoed this view, noting that a culture of me-too creative campaigns had emerged – where campaigns which have worked in other territories are rehashed for the Irish market. Any suggestion that diminished budgets could engender better or more imaginative creative work was roundly dismissed by Participant T3. **"I don't believe they (diminishing budgets) force us all to think better or harder. I think that they force us to compromise, I think it forces us to go out into the market for a fight with one hand tied behind our back"**. Changing economic conditions have clearly altered the role of creativity in traditional advertising. The recession has reduced marketing budgets. As a result clients have become risk averse and are reluctant to commit their budgets to untested work. The creative practitioners interviewed seemed to be adapting a "defiant strategy" (Oliver, 1991, p. 152) to the changing norms by attacking or challenging the emerging logics.

The following section discusses the emergence of new norms within the Irish advertising industry which may arguably be as a result of the exogenous shocks experienced in the industry in addition to the work of institutional entrepreneurs.

Emergence of new norms in the Irish advertising industry

New institutional norms appear to be emerging in the industry. Both Participant D1 and Participant D2 both work in digital agencies and their characterisation of digital channels and by extension a digital approach differs sharply from their depiction of the traditional advertising approach. Digital channels do not subscribe to interrupting people when they are involved in activities that are interesting to them. In fact, this approach is frowned upon in the digital domain. Participant D1 notes that **"when we try the interruption techniques in these channels people just say 'what are you at?'"**. He elaborated further by suggesting that **"we have to stop interrupting what people are interested in and start being interesting to them"**. The "we" is significant here as the participant is taking ownership and is referring to those, like him, involved in the business of communications, be they advertising or digital agencies. We have moved from a discussion of what is acceptable on **"digital channels"** to what **"we"** as advertising or digital agencies should do. Therefore, in the digital domain, brands and the agencies that represent them can not interrupt people in order to communicate with them about their brand values. Instead, a different approach must be used. Participant D1 encapsulated this change by suggesting that brands and agencies have to understand the culture of their audiences to engage and interest them. He evoked the party metaphor again and comments **"so that at the party you are essentially 'hey are you into this? That's really interesting we are too. Can I show you something that is really interesting and will spark a conversation?'"**. The emphasis

is declared to be more about building mutually satisfying relationships and adding value to a person's life rather than simply selling to them. Participant D2 was in agreement suggesting that digital agencies **“don't try to sell things, they build things”**. This is the antithesis of the brash efforts employed by traditional advertising to engage consumers. Participant D2 summed up the dichotomy of the two approaches by stating that in his opinion, **“traditional, above- the- line agencies are inherently cynical and digital agencies are inherently optimistic”**. Importantly, in institutional terms, it can be interpreted that as far as both Participant D1 and Participant D2 are concerned traditional advertising now represents the old model of advertising with its taken for granted norms such as interrupting consumers with brand messages. On the other hand, the digital approach encapsulates new norms of immersive consumer engagement and building long term relationships.

However, the differences in the representation of digital versus traditional advertising run deeper than this. Participant D1 credits digital advertising with having what could be described as a higher purpose. In discussing the work of his company, he stated that **“the work we create is designed to make people's lives better and we either do that by enriching their lives in some way.....or by contributing in some way to their culture and society”**. He also reported that he encourages the brands he works with to have a **“brand purpose”** which he described as **“standing for something that they (people) will get behind or creating a role for yourself in their lives”**. These sentiments demonstrate that the participant's belief that the role of digital communication and indeed his own role extends well beyond that of traditional advertising. He depicted digital communication as having a central role in improving people's lives – he claimed that up until now the true power of advertising has been unexplored – that digital communication is essentially a force for good in the world. An intrinsic part of this epic vision for digital advertising is that there is an innate integrity attached to it. He discussed in detail work his company is involved in with a very well known global brand. He suggests that if the brand slips back into old norms of trying to sell more of the product rather than making a space for themselves in people's lives, the whole project will fail. **“We will be busted if there is any kind of brand creep going on”**. It is in this vein, that he alluded to the failure of traditional agencies to fully embrace the new world of digital describing them as **“coming in basically writing cheques to get everyone at the party to listen to them”**. Clearly, in the view of Participant D1, traditional agencies are still using the norms of the old model of advertising to navigate the new world of digital communication. Participant D2 had a similar perspective as to the central role digital advertising plays in people's lives. Digital is no longer **“this kind of niche thing”** he stated **“it is how we live our life”**. He noted that it was key for brands to provide relevant content based on who they are to consumers. Brand content, he reported could be engaging, informative or funny but certainly not interruptive. Its purpose was in essence to **“to make my life easier”**. The power between brands and their consumers has shifted, he implied as **“brand content has to be engaging because all of us have the opportunity to decide whether we want be involved or not”**. A continuing thread in the talk of the digital practitioners is the perception of the consumers not as passive recipients of advertising messages but rather as people whose lives can be enriched by digital communications. In conclusion, one of the most significant changes in the advertising institutional logics identified by the researcher is that traditional agencies seem to construct their organisations in terms of being brand-centric. Their mission is to communicate brand values, persuade consumer to buy and make a profit for both the client and the agency. As Participant T5 put it **“I think that the difference people in this business can make to commercial outcomes is profound at times”**. On the other hand, digital agencies construct their identity around **“enriching people's lives”**. This analysis shows that institutional logics appear to be shifting subtly within the industry and that new norms are slowly emerging. The role of creativity described as at the very heart of traditional advertising (Reid, King and Delorme, 1998) is also evolving.

The new norms of creativity

An earlier section discussed the effects of exogenous shock on creativity particularly in traditional agencies, we now explore the emerging role of creativity in digital agencies. The research suggests that the central role of creativity in traditional advertising agencies has not yet been mirrored in digital agencies, but it appears that digital agencies are employing strategies to increase the creativity of their output. Participant D2 who transferred into a digital agency from a traditional agency noted that despite widespread technological innovation in digital advertising **“what they were doing wasn’t particularly interesting, inspiring or good ideas”**. He concluded that creativity in digital agencies is intertwined with technology and has so far been all about technical innovation rather than big creative ideas. Participant T3 is more robust in his dismissal of the creativity of digital work stating that **“I would say that 90% of digital work is crap, absolutely crap**. In his opinion the important role of the creative concept is disappearing to be replaced by well designed marketing techniques.

Participant T4 was in agreement with this contention, explaining that early attempts at digital advertising seemed to focus on the execution of campaigns or the novelty aspects of campaigns rather than the ideas behind them. Interestingly, Participant D7, a creative director in a digital agency agreed with the perception of the traditional creatives. He felt that creativity in digital agencies was in a state of imbalance, noting that there was a lot of **“samey, samey kind of work”**. This perceived lack of originality in creative digital work is an anathema to a traditional creative. Participant T3 and T4, both creative directors in traditional advertising agencies are resistant to this changing norm. They both have come from a creative tradition where originality is an essential component of creativity and are perplexed to be working in an industry where creativity with its inherent originality appears to be no longer prized. Participant D6 has a different take on creativity, he alluded to the new role of **“create-tech”** which is the fusion of creativity and technology. He elaborated on his theme by suggesting that **“it is not just about creative because creative is what traditional ad agencies do”**. Technology is what he termed the **“silver bullet”** which enables digital agencies to solve client problems. He spoke of the traditional creative team model of art director and copywriter as being **“a bit dated”**.

Participant T8, the managing director of a traditional agency with a technology background agreed with the premise of fusing creativity and technology. She commented that **“if you look at it from a creative perspective: any copywriter, art director, now needs to be a creative technologist of some sort”**. Again this fusing of creative and technology roles would seem to indicate that new and traditional roles are meshing in an effort to craft new competencies. Participant D7 argued that the traditional creative team model was not employed in digital agencies. He commented that **“in digital it is just myself and then I’d sometimes bring in teams either on a freelance basis or even interns, things like that”**. Participant T5 is still a believer in the traditional creative team. He surmised that contemporary creative teams are not necessarily comprised of an art director and copywriter. Now the team tends to be about idea generation rather than copy and art. He commented that his agency still had not found a better way to generate creative ideas than to put **“at least two smart people together and allow them the permission to play”**. Clearly, the institutional norm of the traditional creative team is evolving – the digital agencies seem to have abandoned the tradition – fusing the creative role with that of a technologist. While traditional agencies have changed the definition of the team to include not just an art director and copywriter but rather two people capable of generating creative ideas no matter what their skill set.

Coping with institutional change

The following section shows how agencies are coping with institutional change. Participant D1 discussed the changes that had occurred over the last number of years in the Irish advertising industry describing it as **“a perfect storm”**. He alluded to the rise of digital, the resulting changes in behaviour, the recession and the consequent reduction in media spend; all changes he characterises as **“cataclysmic”**. His company has undergone a major restructuring in the last year to cope with these changes. The restructuring of his company clearly was a root and branch culling, he described when he had to let staff go to ensure that his organisation would survive future challenges. He reported that the solution to the environmental and internal challenges lay in recruiting new people with key skills to his organisation. Interestingly, he hired people with a traditional skills set to enhance the knowledge already embedded in his agency. He referred to **“bolstering it with a lot of traditional people who are coming in from the cold”**. Yet, the traditional skill set is depicted as being isolated and detached from the heart of advertising. Arguably, the marrying of new competencies with old familiar skills can be seen as a means of crafting new logics for the industry. The industry, still clearly in a state of flux, is in the process of working out these changes. This analysis suggests that the transitional period involves a meshing of new and old skills. Participant D2, who as mentioned earlier moved from a traditional agency to a digital agency, can be seen as encapsulating this blending of old and new norms. He stated that he had been brought in as Creative Director **“on the basis that I know nothing about digital but I know about the creative process and I know about brands and I know about big ideas”**. His role, he continued was to widen the definition of creativity within the agency as he possessed the storytelling skills of an experienced creative in a traditional agency. Digital agencies are clearly importing traditional creative skills to complement the digital knowledge and skills that are already embedded in their organisations. This begs the question as to how traditional agencies are coping with changing norms brought about by institutional change. It would appear that a number of traditional agencies have bought over smaller digital agencies in an effort to expand their skill set. Participant T4’s agency employed this competitive strategy. He alluded to the challenges of meshing traditional creative sensibilities with digital skills stating **“it’s more to just find that ideal way of working”**. He was unsurprised that the process was not always smooth as **“a serious new medium requires a bit more understanding and a bit more thought”**.

Having considered the strategies that both digital and traditional agencies appear to be adopting to cope with institutional change we now conclude by exploring language use by the participants.

The discourse of advertising practitioners

One of the most noteworthy aspects to interviewing advertising practitioners was the way in which they described the work they do. Suddaby (2011, p. 40) described advertising practitioners as “relentless communicators”. They operate in an industry where language is used as an essential tool in engaging emotions. The persuasive discourse of advertising, viewed in this research as an institutional norm is evident from the very first interview. Participant D1 discussed his agency in terms of being a creative agency **“that helps people fall in love with brands again in the connected world”**. This is a sleek and beautiful way of describing an organisation’s mission. It is also persuasive and seductive; people (not consumers) are given the chance to experience again the heady pleasure of falling in love. The familiar vocabulary of marketing and advertising was also evident. For example, the word brand is used to convey a myriad of meanings not confined to just products or product benefits. In addition, a new found respect for people was implicit. People are people and not just consumers. Brands must immerse themselves in the **“dynamic nature of their audience’s culture”** if they wish to **“enjoy the pleasure of their company”**. The language used conjures up a world where brands and those who

love them appreciate a symbiotic mutually beneficial relationship. Participant T5 also used persuasive language to explore his company's mission referring to the ambition of **“getting better at what we do, doing more of what we do and doing new things”**. His account is peppered throughout with this mantra and he employed anaphora as a rhetorical trope to engage his listener (and presumably his employees). The persuasive use of language has been briefly reviewed and was evident in the talk of both the traditional and digital advertising practitioners.

Conclusion

It is evident from the analysis of the research conducted here that social actors are engaged in shaping the institution of advertising in Ireland in response to economic and technological change. New logics are emerging, although there is some resistance from traditional agencies, particularly those working within the creative sphere. New structures are emerging as are new roles such as that of the creative technologist. Institutional entrepreneurs have been identified and those with the vision to uncover institutional inconsistencies have effected change.

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