Social Responsibility in Advertising Creativity

An Ethnographic Study of a Dutch Advertising Agency

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ABSTRACT

Social responsibility is increasingly more and more relevant in the circles of advertising creative professionals as the consumers' demand for businesses to take actions grows. In recent years, this has become integrated into the customer demands to the point where brands and their advertising agencies are expected to produce ads with positive impact on the society, consumer culture and the planet. As a result, creative professionals in advertising agencies are increasingly presumed to generate creative outcomes with social responsibility initiatives at the core of their creative conceptualization. This becomes continuously more difficult, as they also have to juggle client and monetary expectations at the same time.

The aim of this thesis is to explore the connection between social responsibility initiatives of advertisers and its role in their creative processes. This was researched by means of the motivations of ad professionals to produce creative outcomes rooted in social responsibility and the internal and external factors that weigh in on their creative process. The research was conducted in one of the international advertising agency networks in Amsterdam, using semi-structured interviews and ethnographic participant observation in the field. To gain an insight into the understanding and role of social responsibility in the creative production of the agency teams, seven interviews were conducted and participant observations were carried out during the span of three months. The results develop an overview of the individual role social responsibility plays within a creative process of an advertising practitioner as well as the various aspects that determine the extent to which such initiatives are free to be present in a brand campaign. Moreover, the data suggest that there are specific factors, internal and external, that are required in order for creative advertisers to develop SR-driven campaigns. These findings reveal that the way social responsibility emerges within the creative process of advertising agencies is unclear and there are specific characteristics that are required for both agency and clients to produce such campaigns in order to have a positive impact within the society.

KEYWORDS: *Advertising Creativity, Social responsibility initiatives, Advertising Practitioners, Ethical Advertising*

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1. Introduction

John Hegarty, one of the most influential pillars in the development of modern advertising, famously said that "the best advertising is not an ad, it's an idea" (Hegarty, 1963, p.5). This statement highlights advertising in the 21st century where the aim of the adverts and campaigns is not simply just rooted in selling products & services - a successful campaign requires moving far beyond that to not only capture the attention of consumers, but also provide contextual meaning to the work itself (Champlin & Sterbenk, 2018). This opened up discussions amongst industry leaders and consumers about the societal responsibility (SR) towards the bettering of the society and the planet due to the novelties, products and services that are constantly being developed, especially for commercial purposes. The audiences are motivated by their incentives to hold industry leaders accountable for their actions and their impact on the economic, social, political and environmental states of the society (Taylor, 2013). This caused significant changes for the advertising industry and transformed the creative products they publish for their clients.

With the changes in the marketplace and constant shifts in the culture of consumers, not only is there pressure for brands to create something new while staying true to their brand identity, advertising agencies and their professionals experience increasing demands for innovative concepts and creative executions (Belch & Belch, 2013). It is also true that advertising as an industry has long been receiving criticism due to its nature which has often been seen as deceiving, manipulating or promoting excessive consumerism and materialism (Stafford & Pounders, 2021). The capitalist nature of the industry has led to a question of whether advertising is here for the well-being of the "consumer societies" (Caro, 2014, p.39) or if it has the opposite effect.

In 2022, a former winner and jury of the Cannes Lions Festival of Creativity, the most prestigious awards ceremony in the land of advertising, stormed the stage demanding advertising agencies stop working for fossil fuel companies that accelerate climate change. With a sign saying "No creativity on a dead planet" (Greenpeace International, 2022), the greenpeace activist sparked a lot of controversy among the industry professionals as well as consumers about the responsibilities advertisers hold in their trade. The advertising awards themselves recognised the shift within consumers, and developed multiple award categories to motivate creative workers in the advertising industry to develop campaigns oriented towards innovations in the fields of sustainability, equality or diversity (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023).

Due to "advertising's influential role in shaping societal behaviour" (Stafford & Pounders, 2021, p.487), it is necessary to look at the practice through a critical lens of its past and current direction in order to determine its purpose in society and potential power to influence cultural communities across demographics and shape consumers' lives for the better - when it comes to the planet, personal relationships, genuine connections, or safe environment.

The industry itself evolved during the Industrial Revolution, a long time before the development of technology and digital media; however, when mass production became available, new

products entered the market and "advertising was needed to make a sense of the choices - and also to help create the needs for the different choices" (Pardun, 2013, p.1927). The debates have gotten seemingly more controversial when advertising stepped further and started to actively appeal to the emotional side of the consumers with little to no regard whether the promoted products or services are beneficial to anyone besides the brand/company (Stafford & Pounders, 2021). Therefore, questions and discussions opened up about the effects of advertising on society, behaviours, habits and consumer well-being.

McDonald et al. (2021) noted there are two different dynamics when it comes to the debate of advertising versus society - "advertisers influence society and changes in society influence advertisers" (p.585). They note that even small individual changes of advertising practitioners can have prompt impact on both the lives of consumers and the market, which is a result of advertising's "formative influence in our culture" (Pollay, 1986, p.18). The content of production includes images, sounds and language which is familiar to the audiences, and during this exchange of messages the society perceives the current trends or desires in a wider context of the culture and the market (McDonald et al., 2021). It is undeniable that advertising is a reflection of the times - for example, looking back at the portrayal of women in advertising in the 1950s, they were positioned as mothers and maids in a discriminatory fashion while this type of on screen representation would never be socially accepted today. This approach to advertising in which "the aggregate marketing system is shaped by society even as the marketing system also has an impact on society itself" (McDonald et al., 2021, p.585) is oftentimes referred to as the mirror versus the mold theory. Within this research study, these theories are not mutually exclusive; on the other hand, they serve as a means of understanding the dynamics between society and the field of advertising.

Following these considerations, the aim of this thesis is to explore how advertising professionals in an advertising agency understand the increasing demand for social responsibility initiatives and what that means for their creative outputs. Therefore, the main research question of this thesis is: *How do advertising professionals navigate the concept of social responsibility?* This topic was explored on three different levels: agency and its employees; agency clients; and consumer culture from the point of view of advertising professionals. All three levels factor in significantly when it comes to the creative outputs of advertisers as they play a role in determining the motivations of creatives.

To go beyond the superficial level, three sub-questions were developed with a purpose of looking specifically at the creative processes of advertising professionals as well as relevant concepts connected to the topic at hand. First sub-question explored *what role does social responsibility play in the development of creative campaigns by an advertising agency,* researching specifically the position of SR within the agency's internal development of creative ideas and their production. The second sub-question investigated *what factors determine the involvement of social responsibility initiatives in creative ideas of agency teams*, diving deeper into the internal and external elements that determine

creatives' motivations for involving SR initiatives. Lastly, the third sub-question considered *what role do advertising awards play in this discussion*, as the aim of many awards festivals is focused on innovative ideas with meaningful impacts in communities (from inequality, rascim, homelessness, LGBTQ+ rights to awareness about menstruation, among many others).

These research questions were answered using qualitative research methods, specifically a case study conducted at a Dutch international agency by means of semi-structured interviews and ethnographic participant observations. These research methods allowed for a rich set of data with precise results in real-life contexts (Khan, 2018). The results were analysed using thematic analysis due to its flexibility in analyzing a large selection of data (Bryman et al., 2021).

This study is situated within the international section of the advertising industry in Amsterdam where advertising practitioners from all over the world operate on a global scale with international markets. Amsterdam is recognised as the "new creative capital of Europe" (Röling, 2010, p.830), with over 100 global advertising agencies and a multitude of creative talent across the country and some of the biggest global brand accounts. However, despite of the success of the creative industries in the local market, there is a significant lack of academic research within the development of Dutch advertising (Röling, 2011) as well as the process of development of creative ideas from the perspective of advertising professionals. While there has been a lot of research focused on advertisements and their messages, their effects on culture and society (Miller 1997; Moeran 1996; O'Barr 1994; Williamson 1978), there is a lack of anthropological studies on the actual creative process of advertising professionals within an agency setting (de Waal Malefyt & Moeran, 2003; Morais, 2007; Moeran, 2009). Moreover, the concept of SR is severely understudied from the perspectives of advertising practitioners which is a gap that this research aims to fill. Furthermore, this study contributes to the industry's understanding of creativity and creative processes while also giving a deeper insight into the inner workings of a global creative agency. The research provides a comprehensive overview of instrumental impacts on the development of a creative campaigns as well as social responsibility initiatives within advertising setting.

2. Theoretical Framework

This section of the thesis offers in-depth insights into the main concepts of the research, starting with a contextual embedding of the advertising industry and the role it has played in tackling societal challenges in the past. Furthermore, explanations are provided on the characterization of advertising professionals and on organizational structures of an advertising agency.

The notion of creative production process within an advertising agency is broken down and described in order to understand its operations - the ability of creative thinkers to solve problems has a history of working efficiently, which is examined in this part of the theorical embedding.

All of this theoretical framework is built on the theory of Mihaly Csikszenthmihalyi, a System Model of Creativity (1988), through which the dynamics between the agency (individual professionals), the culture (consumers) and the clients (brands) engage and navigate the concept of social responsibility. A comprehensive overview of relevant research and definitions of social responsibility are presented in the last part of the theoretical framework, together with the contexts in which social responsibility is understood in the frames of this research.

2.1. Advertising Industry

For the purpose of this study, advertising can be characterized as a specific type of marketing communication, with the intention of increasing purchases of products and/or services (Fletcher, 2010). It is a process which results in advertisements at its end as creative products in various forms (Fletcher, 2010) which carry symbolic messages across to their intended audiences. Thorson & Rodgers (2012) identified advertising messages as the prevailing feature within the industry and defined them as "paid communication from an identified sponsor using mass media to persuade an audience" (p.3). Furthermore, the forms of advertising messages depend on the media through which they will be promoted as well as the devices through which they are experienced (Thorson & Rodgers (2012).

While this definition of advertising serves the purpose of this study, it is also necessary to take into account that advertising in itself is not a "homogenous entity" (Fletcher, 2010, p.5), due to its challenge of a universally accepted definition. If we are interpreting advertising as an act of informing and/or persuading with the intention of selling, then the question of what exactly are charities or governments who promote safe spaces and blood donations comes to mind. Advertising in itself "covers a multitude of diverse types of communication, with equally diverse objectives" (Fletcher, 2010, p.5). This means that while the majority of advertisements out there were produced solely for the purpose of increasing sales and persuading audiences to buy what they are promoting, it does not apply to all ads.

Cultural/creative industries, in which the advertising practice is situated, are characterized as the drivers of culture in everyday lives, and actively produced by "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdie, 1984, p.336) consisting of practitioners offering products & services through symbolism and

aesthetics. This is an imperative point to mention within the context of advertising as "cultural industries raise questions about shifting boundaries between culture and economics, and between art and commerce" (Hesmondhalgh & Pratt, 2005, p.1) which is a tension often experienced within creative processes of exchange. With the progress of culture and media, Bourdie (1984) identified workers in radios, TV, journalists, and magazine and newspaper editors in the first group of cultural intermediaries. In the second group of 'new' cultural intermediaries he included workers participating in anything within the fields of PR, branding, design, marketing, sales, and advertising. Since the primary function of advertising agencies is to "act as intermediary between production and consumption" (Röling, 2011, p.8), the shift within the cultural industries and economies focuses on the 'experience' and entertainment of goods & services mandated changes within advertising as well. As a result, the advertising industry became a culture-driven industry.

At the center of the advertising industry is creativity, which is "seen to be the key to successful advertising" (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2015, p.1) even though there is no specific definition on what 'advertising creativity' actually is. Within the context of this research, creativity can be understood as "divergent thinking - namely, the ability to find unusual and unobvious solutions to a problem" (Reinartz & Saffert, 2013, p.2). These solutions are developed by creative advertising professionals, most often working within advertising organizations characterized as advertising agencies where they produce creative campaigns for their clients. Generally, agency clients are referred to as accounts, or a brand with which creatives are working with. When the term 'brand' is used, it is referring to a specific service or a product "that can be bought, sold, traded, aspired to, and so on, by consumers" (de Waal Maleyfyt & Morais, 2010, p.335). More importantly, within an agency setting, it is a "site of contestation that shifts between subject and object, between a focus that keeps it as an enduring aspect of client relations and as a beacon of forward change. It is a symbol through which creativity is produced" (Maleyfyt & Morais, 2010, p.335).

2.2. Advertising Agencies

Broadly speaking, an advertising agency can be defined as "the central unit involved in the planning, production, and placement of advertising" (Holm, 2023, p.148). It is an organization consisting of professionals skilled in advertising practices for the sole purpose of elevating products and/or services of their clients to be more attractive for the consumers (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019). They do so by creating strategy plans, studying and researching target audiences, developing the creative visualizations and copywriting alongside with the formats and platforms the campaigns will go live on. Everything is specifically curated to the product/service, but most importantly to the client in order to stay consistent with the brand values.

Advertising agencies are an interesting concept to study, for two different reasons. Firstly, they "serve as intermediaries between three key segments of society: companies with their brands of products and services, media organizations, and consumers" (Stuhlfaut & Windels, 2019, p.3). This

position provides them with the ability to exert a certain influence over the cultural production in the society. Secondly, creativity is the bread and butter of the advertising industry, and "the life blood of advertising agencies" (Lynch, 2019, p.847). However, creativity is also very individualistic and fluid, and oftentimes does not work within the boundaries that an organizational workplace, such as an ad agency, can put on it. This type of creativity is set to achieve certain objectives which are determined externally by clients, while the end goal is commercially driven which makes it different than other types of creativity (Dahlén, Rosengren, & Torn, 2008). Li et al. (2008) referred to this as 'agency creativity'; the creative skills of the agency to generate original advertisements and solve the issues of clients in the process. The source of this creativity are the internal creative teams and their efforts to support and collaborate together.

The dominant form of an advertising agency in the twentieth century was a so-called "full-service" agency, which means they were able to support, produce and deliver all the elements of the process of a creative campaign (Holm, 2023). Due to the shifts in technology and digital media as well as the economic conditions such as globalization and recessions, the type of ad agencies expanded into various shapes and sizes. The clients who are not in need of a full-service agency can hire a small agency who has a more specific niche and is able to support a different part of the advertising production of a campaign. For example, digital agencies who solely focus on providing social media content. Today, there are agencies on a smaller scale operating on local markets as well as "massive transnational mega-corporations that can incorporate multiple departments and constituents around the world" (Holm, 2023, p.154). These huge corporations are also sometimes called "networked agencies" (Mogaji, 2021, p.63), for example WPP or Omnicom, which are "product of the mergers of previously distinct companies" (Holm, 2023, p.154) for the sole purpose of matching the scope of huge clients such as Nike, Nestlé, Adidas or Coca-Cola. As a networked agency they are able to provide the client with all the necessary services across the chain of agencies. Opposite of the full-service agencies are specialist agencies that focus on a specific part of the creative production, for example strategy or design. Their competitive advantage lays in their expertise as well as flexibility in comparison to the large agencies. Furthermore, specialist agencies are also "more responsive and more willing to take risks and push boundaries" (Holm, 2023, p.154) which is why some clients may prefer them, on top of lower costs.

2.2.1. Advertising Practitioners

Perhaps the most known media that talks about the advertising professionals today is the show Mad Men, portraying the so-called 'golden age of advertising' in the 1960s USA, specifically Madison Avenue. While the show spurted a lot of excitement in the audiences with their portrayal of neoliberal patriarchy, consumerism and sexism of the times (Tudor, 2012), it does little to really introduce the wider population to what advertising professionals actually do beyond the stereotypes.

Within the field of academic research, advertising professionals were cast in various roles, focusing on creative personalities (West, 1993) or on the process and conditions of creativity (Hirschman, 1989; Kover, 1995). There are various ethnographic (Malefyt & Morean, 2020) and interview-based (Hadija, 2008) scholarly works conducted by anthropologists and sociologists studying the everyday lives of advertisers and their agencies as well as autobiographical works of "admen" themselves (Ogilvy & Horgan, 1963). While there are different viewpoints on creative identities of advertisers and their profession, within this research they are seen as "cultural intermediaries" (Bordieu, 1984), "who assimilate cultural meanings into branded commodity-signs" (Hackley & Kover, 2007, p.65). They are the ones who stand between the culture, the market and the clients.

2.3. Organizational structure of advertising agencies

Considering the diversity of advertising industry roles, no one is really called an "advertiser" in the day-to-day activities. There are various existing positions, all with different responsibilities and functions. Since advertising agencies are seen as "corporate entities" (Holm, 2023, p.147) within their industry, they have a structure when it comes to departments as well as a hierarchy of roles. This means that "people working in agencies will be responsible for different parts of the advertising process" (Holm, 2023, p.150). While there are different kinds of agencies in the creative media industries, there are three core departments that can be found in all advertising agencies: Account (sometimes also called Brand) management, Strategy (or oftentimes called Planning), and Creative. It is common for bigger agencies with bigger budgets to also include Design and Production, however to what scale is individual. While each of the three main departments - Account, Strategy and Creative - play their own role within the process of the creative production of an agency, the significance and prominence placed on them have changed over time. What follows is a detailed breakdown of the responsibilities and functions of each department, including the hierarchy which is illustrated at the end.

2.3.1. Brand/account

Account management is often referred to as account handling or sometimes as "the suits" (Holm, 2023). The account department is considered to be more on the business side of advertising where they are responsible for the development of the whole project, from start to finish. Initially, they receive a brief from a client concerning the product or service that needs to be advertised, which jumpstarts the project. From then on they are responsible for pulling agency resources, planning meetings and presentations, distributing the financial budget across departments, as well as recurrent communication with the client. They serve as a point of contact between the client and the agency, meaning they are the ones to build a close relationship with the client and all communication, including feedback or notes from the other agency departments on the project go through an account

person assigned to the client. As MacRury (2018) notes, "It is a major task, binding diplomacy and drive" (p.22).

Their everyday tasks include creating timeline plans, writing meeting reports, chasing the client or external hires for creative assets, holding weekly internal and external statuses with the teams on the project, and making sure everyone is clear on what their tasks are. Furthermore, since the nature of their tasks heavily leans towards project management, account managers get oftentimes less attention. Within an environment where artistry and clever conceptualization gets rewarded every day, the account department is sometimes seen as less important due to the fact that their priority is within the business side of projects rather than in creativity.

2.3.2.   Creatives

The creative department is where all the ideas for a campaign are born. After being briefed with insights, client needs, and given jumping off points by the strategy department, creatives will spend time coming up with the big idea. Traditionally, creatives work in teams, or more specifically pairs, consisting of an art director (focused on images and visualizations) and copywriter (focused on the words and phrases). This type of division remains the same, no matter whether it is a junior or a senior position. It is the art director's responsibility to direct how the campaign is translated visually at every touch point. Key points of this role include deciding on and directing the graphic design, photography, cinematography, color design, and layout of any campaign. This will usually start with scamps which lead to mockups, which are then handed over to the design department. The copywriter is responsible for deciding how the campaign comes across tonally, the headlines, the body copy, and any music which is used in the campaign. At the top of the creative department is the Executive Creative Director, or ECD, this will either be a sole creative, or a creative team. They oversee the final creative output from every team within the creative department.

2.3.3.   Strategy/planning

Media planning, also referred to as strategy, plays an integral part in the creative production of an advertising agency. As Holm (2023) explained, "media planners are concerned with the strategies that inform where ads will appear in order to gain maximum exposure and impact" (p.151). This means they conduct a lot of research, both online (articles, journals, blogs, social media posts) and qualitative (most often interviews and focus groups) to gain insights into the consumers' needs and reflections of their everyday experiences. In return, the gathered data is used to find problem consumers are experiencing, and search for a relevant positioning within a niche/community which would make sense for the brand. Within the creative process, strategists receive the client brief from the account management, after which they work on finding out as much as possible about the product/service and its potential audiences, figuring out where to position it within the market, the cultural relevance, and possible ways how they can take advantage of existing affordances. The product of this process is a

so-called "creative brief", which contains the topic of the project, key objectives, list of deliverables (assets that need to be produced and delivered to the client), and any extra relevant information required for the creative team. Moreover, there are different types of strategists, ranging from digital, creative, or brand focused. While they can dabble in all of these categories, they usually especially in one branch. Since "the media landscape became more complex, the job of the media planner had to become more specialised" (Colin, 2003, p.441).

Furthermore, larger agencies also contain a department called 'traffic', which is responsible for a distribution of work and hours, keeping track of the development of projects, assigning sources (workers) to where it may be necessary and on-time delivery to clients. An interesting part about this is that they do not do this for every department; this is something specific to the creatives and designers. Moreover, there are a lot of roles and/or positions within ad agencies that can be very specific to the nature of the agency. For example, TBWA is known for their 'Disruption®' philosophy, therefore they have created a position called Global Head of Disruption, whose role is to advise and train on Disruption practice. This is because "advertising professionals are very good at redefining themselves and inventing new roles and functions that reflect the next new thing" (Holm, 2023, p.150)

Due to the nature of the proposed research question, this study focuses on the three primary departments - Account, Strategy and Creative. For a better understanding of hierarchy of an advertising agency, a detailed breakdown is pictured in *Figure 1*.
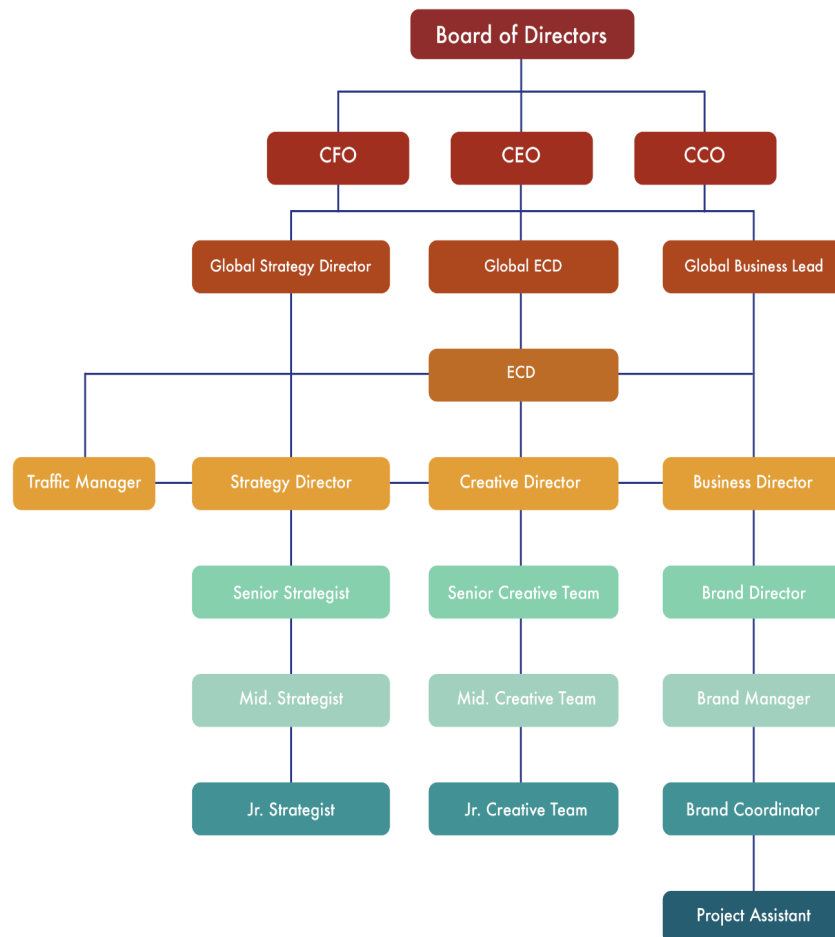
Figure 1. Breakdown of hierarchical roles in an advertising agency.

2.4. Advertising Awards

The advertising industry has its own measurement of success and outstanding creative output which manifests as advertising awards (Kilgour et al., 2013). The creative leaders of the industry gather to judge creative advertisements based on multiple criteria (West et al., 2013). For advertising agencies, winning awards is a strategy to attract new business (clients) and for their creative talent to showcase their "creative power" (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023, p.1) as they gain recognition

and prestige. This has been a tradition since the 1960s (Ogilvy, 1963) and does not seem to disappear anytime soon. One of the reasons this is necessary is because creativity is a fluid concept, and so 'measuring' it can be quite difficult, especially because the standard markers such as degree or resumé do not work in this business (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023).

There are multiple advertising festivals across various categories where advertising agencies can submit their creative campaigns/products to. The Cannes Lion Festival of Creativity is the most known one, followed by D&AD, Clio Awards, and, in the Netherlands, the Dutch Creativity Awards.

In the last decade, the advertising world has experienced a shift towards socially responsible motivated campaigns and ideas as a result of consumer demand (Taylor, 2013). This is also mediated within the advertising awards, specifically in the categories that were established. For example, Cannes Lions now has an award labeled 'Good', which is described as "going beyond brand purpose to use creative communications to shift culture, create change and positively impact the world" (Cannes Lions, 2023) and includes categories such as Glass: The Lion for change & Sustainable development goals.

Previous academic research in the field of advertising awards focused on either the accomplishments of advertising agencies (Helgesen, 1994; Polonsky & Waller, 1995; Tippins & Kunkel, 2006); the role of clients (Till & Baack, 2005); or the perception of creative ads by their audiences (Kover et al., 1997). However, there is significant lack of research when it comes to the role of advertising awards and their effect on socially responsible initiatives, despite the apparent shift into utilizing its power to drive change and innovation. As a focus for one of the sub-questions, this research study aims to provide insights into the role of advertising awards within social responsibility in advertising, and therefore contribute to the wider discussion on the role of social responsibility in advertising.

2.5. Creative Process of Production

Advertising is an attractive industry considering the fact that it is a "business of ideas that puts a very high premium on originality and novelty to produce" (Bruner, 1962, p.3), and its products grow to be deep-rooted into the culture. Audiences regularly find themselves referencing advertising taglines and slogans like "Whassup?" or "Just Do It", implying that the creative process behind the conceptualization and production of advertisements runs beyond the superficial level of a "bunch of writers and artists working in the relative anonymity to create the next memorable catch phrase or brand icon" (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006, p.374). Despite this, not much research has been done on the internal processes of creative production in an advertising agency, with a few exceptions; the process of idea conceptualization (Johar et al., 2001; Griffin, 2008; Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2014); the structure of agency decision-making (Na et al., 2009); and the processes between the agency and the clients (Hill & Johnson, 2004), for example.

Bernardin et al. (2008) detailed five steps that describe the advertising creative process - "problem identification, deliberate thinking, illumination, evaluation/verification and implementation" (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014, p.178). The authors state that having a structured procedure to creative conceptualization helps direct ideation and is more efficient than spontaneous advance (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2014).

A shared starting point that applies to all advertising agencies is that the creative process starts with the client brief (Baskin & Waters, 2010), which is a document written by the client (brand/company) and describes their aims, specific product/service/campaign, their target audience, and key goals. The literature indicates that despite their significance, client briefs are often insufficient, especially when it comes to their target audience (Sutherland et al., 2004; Koslow et al., 2006). When the agency account team receives the client brief, everything sets into motion by identifying what the client's problem/need is and who they are trying to target. Secondly, the agency strategy team creates a brand communications strategy by analyzing the issue and developing a plan on what angle to take on solving it. In the next step, they are required to present it to the client in order to receive an approval, after which they move on to brief the creative team and provide them with a creative brief - an internal document that communicates the brand strategy and any necessary information for the creative team (Koslow et al., 2006). In the fifth step, the agency moves to the "core concept of the campaign through internal presentation, translation to various traditional and interactive media prototypes, presentation of prototypes to clients for approval, revising and extending the concept into a full campaign, and taking the materials into final production" (Stuhlfaut & Kasey Windels, 2019, p.17). Stuhlfaut & Kasey Windels (2019) detailed a Structural Model of the Creative Process, which can be found in *Figure 2*.
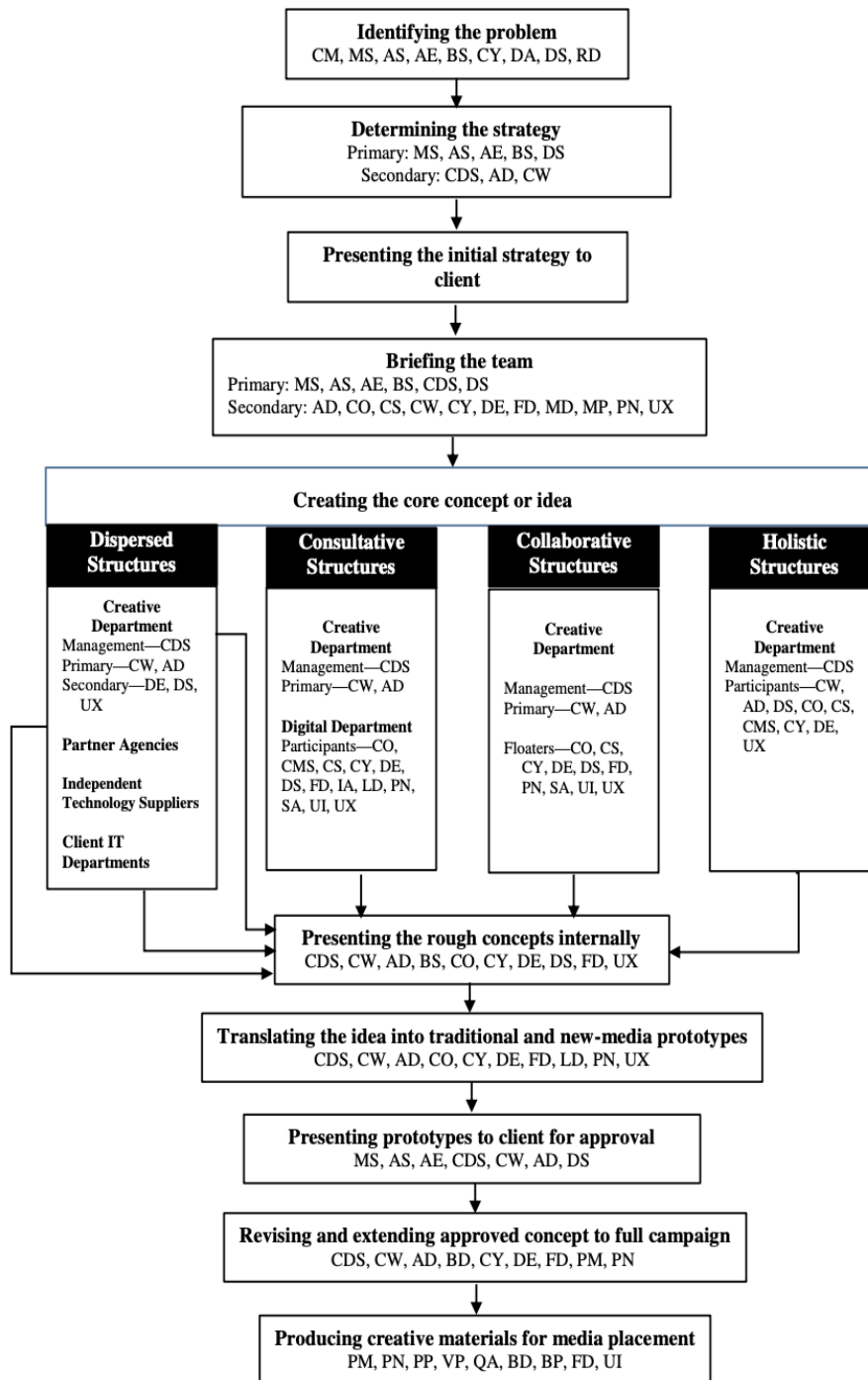
Figure 2. Structural Model of the Creative Process (Stuhlfaut & Kasey Windels, (2019, p.15)

2.5.1. Creativity as a tool for problem-solving

Creativity in its essence is a skill that can be used diversly and across many different fields, which is also why it has been "considered to be one of the most important 21st century thinking skills" (Calavia et al., 2020, p.1). While there are many definitions and understandings of what creativity is, within the context of this study, it is understood as the "ability to connect learned knowledge to solve problem and connect new things" (Calavia et al., 2020, p.1). Through this, society

can evolve, change, find new ways of existing and moving forward as well as improving life quality (Hernandez-Torrano & Ibrayeva, 2020; Spendlove, 2008). Creativity has often been connected to problem-solving because of the interlinked processes they share (Calavia et al., 2020), however, there are various debates about their specific relationship in the academic fields.

In the world of marketing and advertising, creativity is a prize and a skill most often sought after as brands and companies are constantly looking for new and original ways of solving their problems (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009). There are various definitions describing what creative thinking processes are, however, they have all been connected to two thinking processes - divergent and convergent (Guilford, 1968). While divergent thinking focuses on "opening unusual memory categories to use as the basis for idea development" (Kilgour & Koslow, 2009, p.299), convergent thinking is centered around classifying and integrating concepts in a specific domain that supports a bigger picture. Kilgour & Koslow (2009) conducted research looking at advertising creatives and account managers in order to recognize which type of thinking process is inherent depending on their role. The results showed that advertising professionals consider themselves to excel at solving clients' problems and that it is integral in their positions within the field of advertising.

2.6. System Model of Creativity

Creativity is the driving force behind advertising, and it is what distinguishes brilliant pieces of work from average. Outstanding creative ideas or solutions tend to be attributed to the "lucky ones"; individuals who were born creative or grew up in the right environment for it. Within the advertising industry, creativity is the force behind good campaigns that remain imprinted in the minds of consumers (Murad & West, 2003).

In the field of psychology, creativity is dominantly seen as an individualistic mental process (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2015). However, Csikszentmihalyi (2014) argues that creativity is a social process instead. As he explains, "an idea or a product cannot be called creative until and unless it is seen as such by society" (p.537). Essentially, it is the act of acknowledgement by the society that attributes a product or concept as creative where "the social environment is always a co-creator, without which the creation cannot happen, and the process of creation cannot be understood" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.537). Similarly, Twitchell (1996) notes that "advertising does not occur in isolation but within a broad societal context in which consumers and culture influence the creators of the ads, as much as they are influenced by the ads" (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006, p.374).

With increased research over the years (Stein, 1953, 1963; Simmonton, 1988, 1990), it is clear that the creative process cannot be examined without the political, economic and social influences. Csikszentmihalyi (2014) created a System Model of Creativity which offers a perspective on what creativity is and how it is communicated considering that it is characterized as socio-cultural. Furthermore, this theoretical framework offers a relevant insight into how meanings are created and distributed in the creative advertising process. Csikszentmihalyi's model situates the concept of

creativity within the paradigm of 3 elements: the *domain*, the *field*, and the *individual* (Figure 3) where they always interact with each other simultaneously (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988).

Figure 3. System Model of Creativity *(Csikszentmihalyi, 1988)*
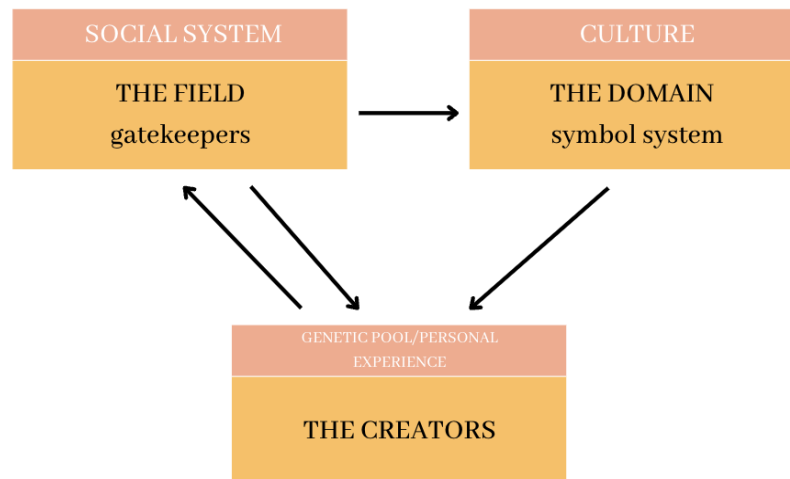
2.6.1. The Domain

While most often it is assumed that a creative idea starts in the mind an individual, it starts in "the symbol system of the culture, in the customary practices, the language" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.51). Within this framework, culture is defined as "as the system of learned rules regulating human consciousness (i.e., thoughts, emotions, beliefs, and intentional acts" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.538). Within the culture, each sector can have different 'domains' and 'subdomains' (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988) containing a set of laws, standards and procedures which are learned rather than inherited. Within the context of advertising, this is referring to the industry norms and practices as well as the "frame of reference that gives advertisements and products their social and cultural meaning" (McCracken, 1988, p. 79). Essentially, without the domain, there would be no contextual meaning to the products of creative advertising since this is where the ideas start based on the existing symbolical system. Moreover, the domain is the place where advertising agencies situate themselves between the commercial cultural contexts and the consumers.

2.6.2. The Creators

The second element of the System Model of Creativity is the person - the individuals creating the ideas/concepts source either from their own life experiences, motivations, or products of their environment. With access to the domain, they are able to produce "some variation in the information inherited from the culture" (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988, p.51). What triggers this process is their desire to create change (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2015), which can be either easy or difficult for them

to innovate depending on the construction of the domain. In this research, they are labeled as "the creators" since this is contextualised for the advertising industry (Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006). The element of "creators" includes the creative teams as well as professionals who are part of the creative processes of an advertising agency, including strategists and account/business directors.

2.6.3. The Field

Lastly, there is "the field" which "includes all the individuals who act as gatekeepers to the domain" (Abuhamdeh & Csikszentmihalyi, 2015, p.229), varying in position and power. They are responsible for choosing which product is good enough to be recognized and added to the domain. In the world of advertising, this can encompass the agency management, the clients and even the consumers, depending on the context. Essentially, the field serves to shift out the bad ideas from the good ones, especially for the products independent from the mass markets. However, it is also important to keep in mind that field can often be wrong, suggesting that "having a competent field is as important for the flowering of creativity as having potentially creative individuals, or a rich culture to draw from" (Csikszentmihalyi, 2014, p.540). Within the context of this research, clients (brands/companies) are the ultimate *field* by which the creative ideas are measured successful, which is done by their support, especially within the financial budgets during a creative production of a campaign.

Based on the System Model of Creativity as it was explained, the creative production of an advertising professional depends on the paradigm of the domain as well as the field where the creator operates. In order to meaningfully examine the concept of social responsibility within the creative process of the creator, it is necessary to also take into account the state of the clients and their relationships with the agency as well as the cultural relevance of the creative concepts in the domain.

2.7. Social Responsibility

Despite advertising's past of hyper-capitalism, radical materialism and promotion of all and any brands, the concept of social responsibility is gaining popularity. Its occurrence has been increasing alongside the consumer demand for brands and companies to be a part of solutions within the wider cultural and societal context (Taylor, 2014).

As a result of societal changes and market shifts, "the cultural expectations for a for-profit company's purpose, or reason for existence, are shifting from economic and transactional notions to pro-social ones that require organizations to also work toward the bettering of society" (LaVoi & Haley, 2021, p.372). Seeing institutions participating in and collaborating on taking action in political movements and social initiatives across cultures (such as Black Lives Matter or Extinction Rebellion), research reports and journal articles on consumers also reflect the audiences' demand for brands to take on an active role in the current affairs of social problems (Edelman, 2023, 2018; Gürhan-Canli, 2018; Dentsu Aegis Network, 2017; Horváth, 2016). Edelman's report, *Trust Barometer* (2023), surveyed that the public trusts businesses more than governments in certain countries and that

consumers desire more societal engagement from companies in terms of environmental issues, economic inequalities, access to healthcare, energy crisis, and more. Such actions transparently show the brand's purpose, which in return gets rewarded by consumers (Taylor, 2014) and simultaneously increases trust and brand advocacy.

This phenomenon of corporate social responsibility (CSR) can be understood as a "set of obligations an organization has to protect and enhance the society in which it functions" (Davidson & Griffin, 2000, p.127). It is also often interchanged with notions such as "business ethics, corporate philanthropy, corporate citizenship, sustainability and environmental responsibility" (Matten & Moon, 2007, p.179).

From an academic point of view, various theories and studies have focused on the perspectives of CSR since the 1950s, within the fields of philosophy, business, management, and ethics (Fisher, 2004). There are a plethora of approaches explaining the concept of social responsibility in various frameworks - as an extension of ethics in an organizational context (Davidson & Griffin, 2000); solely a natural result of actions in the process of business activity (Boatright, 2000); as a necessary act of social integration of a business into the society (Garriga & Melé, 2004); or a connection to the aspects of corporate citizenship on an individual level of a business employee, rooted in political action (Windsor, 2006).

Although Klonoski (1991) and Friedman (2007) argue that the sole responsibility of a business within the social sphere is to make profits while abiding by legal and ethical customs of the society in the process, this research focuses on the understanding of CSR as a construct based on a framework developed by Archie Carroll (1999). According to him, there are four types of CSR: economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic (Figure 4), and while it is placed in a pyramid, the intention is for a business to be fulfilling all these continuously rather than individually.
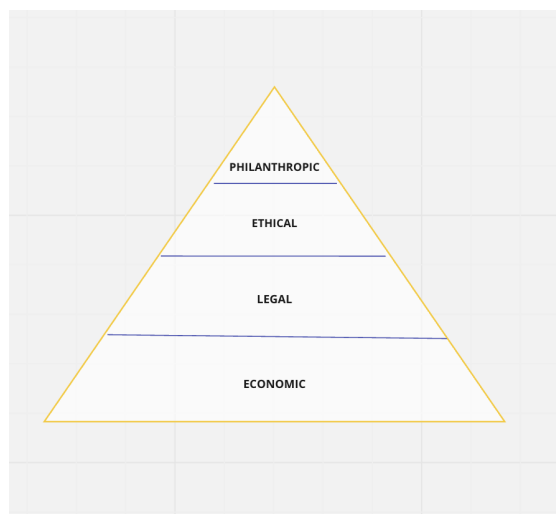
Figure 4. Pyramid of Social Responsibility (Caroll, 1999)

Economic responsibility refers to the responsibilities a business has towards its stakeholders, employees, and customers in terms of making profits, paying a fair constant wage, offering a good working environment, and producing quality products and services for consumers (Matten & Moon, 2007). Per the base of the pyramid, this is the first layer of CSR, regarded as a requirement for all organizations. What follows is *legal* responsibility, referring to an obligation of a business to adhere to the legal laws of the society. Above that is the *ethical* type, the responsibility of organizations to "do what is right, just and fair, even when they are not obliged to by the legal framework" (Matten & Moon, 2007, p.181). The argument Carroll (1999) states here is that ethical obligations are societal expectations of the business which are more important than the expectations within the field of law or the economy. Lastly, philanthropic responsibilities lay on top of the pyramid, consisting of actions such as donations, sponsorships, and direct actions of the business within the society. All of these types of CSR are understood as autonomous actions of the institutions, although the first two are generally taken as necessary responsibilities of every business for it to be valid. Not the same courtesy is applied to the last two levels, despite them being the fundamental aspects of CSR.

Additionally, it is necessary to state a clear difference between CSR and connected terms such as 'social obligation' as its understanding can be misinterpreted as social responsibility. Sethi (1975) explained that social obligation equals corporate act as a result of "market forces or legal constraints" (as cited in Carroll, 1999, p.279). In that case, it is solely dedicated to legal and economic principles. However, in CSR, the concept goes further than that, "bringing corporate behavior up to a level where it is congruent with the prevailing social norms, values, and expectations of performance" (Sethi, 1975, p.62, as cited in Carroll, 1999, p.279).

Looking at CSR within the advertising industry, there is a long history of creative professionals using their problem-solving skills to enact social changes and provide solutions to the issues the world is currently facing through ad campaigns (LaVoi & Haley, 2021). As the client needs shift due to the increased consumer demands involving goods & services that "enhance consumer well-being and social welfare through socially and environmentally responsible advertising" (Yoon & Oh, 2016, p.1), the creative work of agencies follows suit. Ad agencies have produced brand campaigns and promotions for socially impactful initiatives in the past, for example on topics such as equality in workplaces, anti-drunk-driving messages, recycling, toxic masculinity, the danger of running alone at night as a woman or educating about queer rights.

There is no shortage of academic studies on the relationship between consumers and the impact of advertising messages. Nonetheless, the sources of these messages - advertising agencies - are often understudied. The previous advertising-agency literature has focused on the workings of advertising itself (Rodgers & Thorson, 2012); the relationship between agency and clients (Turnbull & Wheeler, 2016); the specific roles of creatives and/or strategists; or the internal relationships developed between the various departments within an agency (Blakeman et al., 2020). The majority of

the academic research that has been conducted on these topics is situated within the structures of traditional advertising agencies where there is a lot of strain to keep pace with all the constant changes occurring in culture, society, innovation and technology. As a response, it is necessary for advertising to go beyond "just selling products: it needs to clarify for consumers how the brand makes the world a better place" (Champlin & Sterbenk, 2018, p.138). However, while this is a change that can be clearly recognised within the market and the advertising industry, its role within the internal workings of an ad agency is not as easily drawn. Stuhfault & Windels (2018) showed that external shifts can have a real impact on creative production as well as roles and frameworks within agencies; and since advertising professionals are seen as intermediaries between the market (consumers) and the clients (brands), this research explores their understanding of the social responsibility as well as the function it may or may not have within an advertising agency.

3. Methodology

This chapter of the study explains the methodological framework of the research, including the research design; sample criteria and sampling method; data analysis method as well as the operationalization of researched theoretical concepts. Furthermore, the credibility of this research is made clear, including the validity and reliability of the research study, as well as any ethical concerns that came up before, during or after the research was carried out.

3.1. Research Design

While the research into the power of advertising has significantly developed since the introduction of digital media, it is nowhere near close to understanding how "advertising affects our consumption, especially at a level of the individual ad and the individual consumer" (Belk, 2017, p.36). Furthermore, there is an existing gap between the reality of advertising's day-to-day workings and academic studies that have been conducted thus far (Pelsmacker, 2020). To shed light on the perspectives and opinions of advertising professionals in their natural environments, ethnographic methods were conducted for this research, specifically individual semi-structured interviews and extensive participant observations which allowed to go beyond a superficial level of advertising practitioners' comprehension of social responsibility in their agency roles.

Qualitative interviews are understood as "flexible and dynamic in nature" (Bryman et al., 2020, p.1597), which allowed the participants to freely share what they feel comfortable with and lead the direction of the interview. Moreover, the open format of semi-structured interviews supports spontaneous discussions, resulting in rich and detailed descriptions of the participants' thoughts and feelings on the topic at hand. The fieldwork also included observations as well as "the collection of organizational artifacts" (Schauster, 2015, p.154). Participant observations directly in the office of an advertising agency offered the real experience to understand the everyday social reality of advertising professionals and their relations to one another; to management; to clients; their own interpretations. Organizational artefacts refer to "the written representation of the social reality of others" (Schauster, 2015, p.154) which manifests in the field notes kept by the researcher during the duration of the ethnographic research. Field notes connect together the perception of agency workers, interpretations of the researcher and contextual embedding (Walford, 2009).

For the purpose of answering the research question, this data collection method was selected as there is an increasing need for anthropological methods of research within the advertising industry due to the lack of research in this industry. While quantitative research has gained a lot of affordable tools as a direct result of the development of digital media which allowed for access to mass audiences, qualitative methods have equally gained more attention (Belk, 2017). This is due to an increased consideration dedicated to lived experiences and interpretations of consumers and society - how ads are perceived, their role in the lives of audiences, the motivations of advertisers, and more.

Since this research focused on the organizational culture of an advertising agency and its workers, a combination of field experience, observations and field notes provided thick descriptions of the interactions between various internal teams, client relationships, department dynamics and individual attitudes that might otherwise not be noted in a simple interview.

This point of contact was possible due to an internship opportunity within one of the agency departments (account), during which I was able to not only interview advertising practitioners working there but also observe different relationships and interactions when it came to the client and internal teams working together. The research is based on the sensemaking theory in which the individuals construct their reality based on their own understanding of it and how they apply meanings to the events within the agency (Mills, 2010).

3.2. Data Collection

The research was carried out over a span of 3 months, from March 2023 to June 2023, during which seven interviews were conducted and 14 pages of field notes were written out. The interviews lasted approximately 45 to 70 minutes. They were conducted either directly at the agency offices where privacy was ensured, or through the online video platform Microsoft Teams. The interviews were audio recorded, with the permission of the participants, and transcribed. Two interview guides were developed for the semi-structured interviews with the participants, one for the department of Creatives & Strategy, and the other one for the Brand team. This was due to their nature of work and different involvement in the creative production of campaigns. The interview guides included ice breaker questions to put them at ease as well as questions concerning creative processes, social responsibility, and advertising awards. Naturally, each interview took its own course and demanded a certain degree of flexibility as the core of the research is in the participants' standpoints and personal experiences which demanded adapting during the conversation. The interview guides were followed for each interview to ensure the validity of the research. The interview guides can be found in Appendix A.

The field notes were taken in a form of word document notes, hand-written into a personal notebook or as a note in a mobile Notes Application, depending on the accessibility at the time of research. The field notes contain a mixture of personal notes, descriptions of the office, departments, company hierarchy, and internal relationships. There are two different projects that the researcher was able to follow closely, and the field notes reflect a combination of individual experience on those projects, and observations/conversations outside of that. For the purpose of data privacy and protection, some names and events have been removed or named under an alias.

3.2.1. Consent Form

All the participants of the study were provided with a consent form before the start of the interview. The consent form provided a short introduction to the topic of research, how the data will be stored

and used as well as who has access to it considering the fact that the research is anonymous. It also provided a detailed description of how the privacy of the participants will be protected. Lastly, the form contained information on participants' consent and their right to not answer a question or withdraw their participation at any given moment of the study without repercussions.

3.2.2. Sample & sampling method

The research focused to capture deeper insights and narratives of advertising professionals working in 3 different departments of a global advertising agency - Brand, Strategy and Creative. The sampling criteria of the interviewees were based on their relevant role within the agency - senior positions within the internal department, encompassing the teams of Brand, Strategy and Creative as they are all a significant part of the creative production process. This type of sampling is referred to as "purposive" (Bryman et al., 2021).

In terms of Strategy, they are directly connected to the consumer culture and stand as the 'guardians of the brand and consumers', meaning it is their responsibility to find the cultural relevancy of the brand, which can be rooted in social responsibility initiatives. On the other hand, the Brand department builds a close relationship with the client, which puts them in a position of trust where they are able to stir the client towards certain decisions of the direction of the project. However, this is only within the more senior positions such as brand director or business director, hence the sampling criteria encompassed solely brand and business directors of the department. Furthermore, the Creative department is in control of creating the ideas and concepts of the campaigns, thus the significance of their input had to be included in this research.

Additionally, the participants were also chosen based on the work relationships created during the fieldwork; this is due to the fact that agency life is very busy, and workers with whom I established a connection during my ethnographic research were more inclined to dedicate time to the interview to someone they knew. This was considered a favor as their time is both limited and expensive. Due to the limited time for this study as well as limited resources, the total sampling size is seven participants.

The participants were hand-picked based on the criteria above to make sure they met the necessary requirements of the study. After their confirmation of participation, a meeting was scheduled, and the consent form was shared.

Name	Gender	Role	Years of experience
Interviewee 1	Male	Senior strategist (strategy)	10 >

Interviewee 2	Female	Junior strategist (strategy)	2 >
Interviewee 3	Female	Junior Art Director (creative)	3 >
Interviewee 4	Female	Business Director (brand)	10 >
Interviewee 5	Male	Creative Director (creative)	15 >
Interviewee 6	Male	Executive Creative Director (creative)	> 22
Interviewee 7	Male	Strategy Director	10 >

Figure 5. Sample Composition

3.3. Operationalization

The theoretical concepts explored in Chapter 2 - creativity, social responsibility and System Model of Creativity - are defined in order to determine their measurements in this study. While it is not possible to give a specific measurement to these concepts (since this is a qualitative study), they are operationalized in order to develop a list of subjects that coordinates with the objectives of this research. Moreover, these definitions were drawn on in the data analysis as well as the process of coding the data.

The concept of creative production was operationalized with the usage of Stuhlfaut & Windels (2019) study of an agency's creative process of a campaign, from the start (identifying client's problem, developing the strategy,...) to finish (shoots and production). This structural model of the creative process was used in the interview guide to develop an idea of what role each department plays in the creative process, and to what extent goes their ability to influence/stir it. The purpose of that need was used to determine the possible extensions of social responsibility based on an individual in the chain of creative production.

The concept of social responsibility was operationalized by the development of interview questions established based on the theory of Caroll (1999), in which he determined the economic, legal, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities of a company/business. Within this research, social responsibility focused on the ethical and philanthropic responsibilities of individual advertising professionals within an agency setting. Therefore, the interview questions concentrated on personal understanding of social responsibility to examine their own perceptions. Furthermore, there were

additional questions to find out whether agency workers' perspective on the concept extends solely to legal/economic responsibility or ethical/philanthropic, and where the agency stands in that equation.

The theory of the System Model of Creativity was operationalized by developing interview questions based on the theoretical framework of Csikszentmihalyi (1988) as he recognized three different elements of creativity - the field, the domain, and the creators. To explore how these three aspects work together and their dynamics with social responsibility as the disrupting force, interview questions were developed focusing on the narrative of the agency (the creators); the clients and the advertising awards (the field); and the culture (the domain). Moreover, additional questions looked at how this determines the role of social responsibility by examining the clients' needs, the role of culture and consumers together with the scope of the creators' influence.

3.4. Data Analysis

In order to analyze the collected data, a textual analytical strategy tool called thematic analysis was applied after transcribing qualitative interviews of all participants. This form of data analysis, which is the most intricate part of the qualitative research process (Thorne, 2000), is a method for "identifying, analyzing, organizing, describing, and reporting themes found within a data set" (Nowell et al., 2017, p.2). Within the context of this research, a theme is identified as "a category of interest identified by the analyst" (Bryman et al., 2021, p.2024) while also contributing to the focus of the research and relating to the theoretical background found in the literature. The main advantages of thematic analysis lay in its flexibility to adjust depending on the research at hand while also being able to provide a rich and descriptive examination of data (Nowell et al., 2017). Furthermore, it is a useful tool for encompassing diverse viewpoints of participants, which is the case of this research.

Thematic analysis was carried out in three different steps: firstly, each line of the interviewee's responses was coded to recognize 'initial categories' (Bryman et al., 2021) or open codes; secondly, connected categories were combined together, which is called axial coding in this part of the process; lastly, selective coding was utilized to "confirm and verify the categories and to make changes where necessary" (Bryman et al., 2021, p. 2025). This three-step process was performed on all 7 transcripts, resulting in themes and sub-themes which illustrate the patterns and interconnections within the research topic. The open coding was carried out in the coding software called Atlas.ti which served to recognize initial patterns across the transcriptions. After that, axial and selective coding was performed manually in a Google Excel sheet.

The results and interpretations of recognized themes can be found in the Results & Discussion section of this study.

3.5. Credibility & Ethics

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, it is necessary to establish the quality of the data in order to provide credible results. The topic of credibility is raised in many qualitative studies due to

the fact that in its core, it is a creative process which is more flexible, while quantitative research has to follow a strict set of laws (Patton, 1999). The notion of credibility refers to an active role of the researcher to carefully follow the correct steps within the research guidelines, to describe events in an accurate, scientific way, and to ensure that the results of the study are valid (Noble & Smith, 2015). There are two significant concepts in terms of credible scientific research, validity, and reliability, which are explained below, including the ethical concerns that needed to be considered during the research.

3.5.1. Validity

The concept of validity is concerned with the success of measurement of the actual focus of the research, in other words whether the researcher focused on their aim of the study (Golafshani, 2003). LeCompte & Goetz (1982) suggested internal and external validity as a construct of ensuring the validity of the study. Internal validity is concerned with the coherence between the theoretical concepts developed alongside the research and the observations in the field (Bryman et al., 2021), which is ensured by a systematic cataloguing of the data as well as communication with the participants. Furthermore, this is strengthened in the ethnographic research by the direct involvement in the field under study which allows for "deep analytical insights between concepts and observations" (Bryman, 2021, p.1369).

External validity is referring to the act of generalizing the study results across various diverse environments (Bryman et al., 2021). While this study follows a very specific advertising agency and its current employees, meaning the available sample for analysis is small, almost all the participants have at least a decade of experience within the field. Moreover, there is a consistency within the interviews which is illustrated in the Results & Discussion section of this study.

3.5.2. Reliability

The concept of reliability can be explained as "the extent to which results are consistent over time and an accurate representation of the total population under the study" (Joppe, 2000, p.1, in Golafshani, 2003). To ensure the reliability and possible replication of the study, there was a consistent process of interviewing, following the interview guide, with a certain flexibility to ensure the natural flow of conversation. The first conducted interview served as a testing ground to make sure the open-ended questions were understandable and fit the topic of the study. Furthermore, thick descriptions of field notes are illustrated in the Discussion section available to the reader as well as long extracts of the data add to the overall reliability of this research.

3.5.3. Ethical concerns

Ethical guidelines were followed through all the steps of this research study. The participants were informed in a timely manner about their rights and gave their confirmed consent to the recordings and involvement in the study as well as their right to revoke it at any time.

4. Results & Discussion

In this section of the thesis, I present and interpret the collected data and their underlying meanings for this research. Since the main objective of this study is to gain insights into the role of social responsibility of individual advertising professionals and the agency's creative process, all gathered data has been analyzed, coded, and depicted into various themes and sub-themes based on the process of thematic analysis.

The research results show that there are three dominant themes within the discussion of the role of social responsibility in the creative production of advertising professionals in an agency setting: Social responsibility is already embedded in the cultural structures; Agency operations are determined by their assets; and Advertising as a carrier of societal changes. The main themes and their subthemes, showcased in Figure 6, are explained, and discussed in detail below. The coding book can be found in Appendix C.

Themes	SR already embedded in cultural structures of society	Agency operations determined by their assets	Advertising as a carrier of societal change
Subthemes	Culture serves as a central element of the advertising system	The quality of creative production depends on internal and external factors	SR initiatives carry commercial benefits in the advertising industry
	Consumers hold brands to higher moral standards	Advertising agency holds responsibility towards their clients and the society	The need for optimal conditions for the development of SR initiatives
	Advertising awards reflect current trends in the society		Values of SR initiatives

Figure 6. Description of themes and sub-themes found during the thematic analysis.

4.1. Theme 1: Social responsibility is already embedded into the cultural structures of society

The first theme identified from the analysis answers the proposed research question by illustrating that social responsibility is already a part of cultural embedding, which is showcased through culture, advertising awards and consumer demands.

This theme explores the subthemes of: culture serves as a central element of the advertising system; advertising awards reflect the current trends of the society; and consumers hold brands to higher moral standards. Each of these themes displays diverse ways through which the concept of social responsibility is already woven into the relationships, communities, and communication spaces of the audiences. As a result, social responsibility is impressed upon advertising professionals to a certain degree.

4.1.1. *Sub-theme 1: Culture serves as a central element of the advertising system*

From the interviews, it was disclosed that the element of culture is always present within the process of creative production, both for the advertising professionals and for the clients. It is the central connecting point where the clients, the agency and the consumers meet, interact, and influence each other. Interviewee 5 noted:

> Especially with advertising, a lot of the times it's born from culture anyway, so culture is super important because, whenever we are making work, we always ask ourselves very broadly, what's the cultural thing that we're trying to solve or the tension we want to tap into? So culture is super important, especially on [sports brand], sports culture, fashion, those are kind of...that's where everything we make lives. (Interviewee 5, Creative director)

Everything advertising professionals produce is derived from the culture, which is also where ads exist, and cultural values are at the heart of the creative production: "It certainly affects it, it has a role to play in everything that we do in terms of the ads that we make, you know, really simply put, will find its way into culture" (Interviewee 7). Culture determines what creative products are relevant to be created and published, which supports the theoretical framework in which "advertising is a central cultural institution through which 'much of what we share, and what we know, and even what we treasure is carried to us each second in plasma of electrons, pixels, and ink created by multinational agencies'" (Twitchell, 1996 , p.1, as cited in Vanden Bergh & Stuhlfaut, 2006, p.374).

For creatives, culture also serves as an inspiration - they are linking together already existing elements within the cultural structures to create novelty from that. This confirms the understanding of the relationship between the creators (advertisers) and the domain (culture) as explained by the System Model of Creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1988), and offers a deeper insight into how it influences creative production of a creative. This finding within the interview data was supported by participant observation from the fieldwork, where a junior art director shared her viewpoints on creativity and her processes. She emphasized the fact that it does not start with her; rather, it starts with the knowledge and cultural experiences she has gathered until then, including personal beliefs or hobbies.

In this case, the role of agency practitioners is to be the linking point between the consumers living in the culture and the brands (their clients) - "Personally, I'm bringing culture to convince my client and the agency is helping me to build that together because they are the relationship with the client." (Interviewee 3). Moreover, it was emphasized by the creators that staying connected to what is significant within society is necessary for the brands to gain and keep interest from their audiences. Respondent 2 highlighted:

> If the client and the campaigns are not speaking the language of the consumer, you are falling behind. And then probably you will be only catching up to the culture. You will be not far ahead and making the culture follow the brand. (Interviewee 2, Junior strategist)

Therefore, one of the necessities of the agency is to not only know the current trends and influences within the society but also to have the knowledge on how to use it best to their advantage based on their clients' brand values and their image. There was significant importance highlighted by the participants on the connection between the brand and the consumers, which can only be created by their relationship in the cultural spaces of the society:

> But if they [consumers] don't feel that connection with the brand itself, which, and the way for that connection is through culture, through understanding the consumer truth. And that's where businesses really fail. And if you don't catch up to the cultural truth or the consumer truth, as we say in strategy, you will be always lagging behind what competitors are doing. (Interviewee 2, Junior strategist)

While this is aligned with theories which see advertising as a "distorted mirror" of the society, where advertising reflects only certain significant societal values that are beneficial for the advertiser (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990), it also confirms the Mold theory, which states that the consumers in the culture also shape the operations of the advertising industry (McDonald et al., 2021). The implications of this show that the cultural relevancy, driven both by the advertisers and the consumers, has a significant role in deciding what those societal values are, and what is currently important to address/incorporate within the creative campaigns of the creators.

Financial elements also play a relevant role in influencing cultural products, and therefore, consumers. Advertising industry is "often given credit for contributing heavily to the economic success of both individual firms and national economies" (Pollay & Gallagher, 1990, p.359). The bigger the brand, the more money there is to influence the cultural trends that are currently happening. While brands today hold a lot of power to affect what consumers pay attention to (including social values), they need advertising professionals and their expertise to figure out how to do it in the most efficient and effective way possible.

To sum it up, advertising practitioners serve as "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdie, 1984, p.336) between the audiences and the brands/businesses, which is in accordance with the theories discussed in the theoretical chapter. This sub-theme established the various connections between the cultural aspects in society and the creative products of advertisers, and how necessary such connections are for the quality of creative outcomes.

4.1.2. Subtheme 2: Advertising awards reflect the current trends in the society

The results of the thematic analysis showed that the topic of advertising awards is very prominent within the advertising industry, and their mention came up naturally in a lot of the conducted interviews before I even had a chance to ask about them. The data showed that advertising awards play an important role in the industry due to the recognition they offer. Respondent 7 said:

> They are critical in attracting and retaining the best talent and clients, and they are also reflective of the top creative work in the industry as well, so it is important to see this shift in broader recognition of work that benefits the environment. This will result in more creative people being exposed to the best work in the world that also benefits the environment, which will hopefully inspire and encourage more people to come up with these kinds of groundbreaking ideas. (Interviewee 7, Strategy director)

The results of the fieldwork confirm these observations in multiple aspects - since my time within the agency, they entered at least 3 different advertising awards competitions, from Cannes, and D&D to the Dutch Advertising Awards. Furthermore, during my fieldwork, the agency has won 3 different awards in competitions which they proudly share all over their social media as well as internally - through all company emails and short celebrations in the office. It is clear that the advertising awards are considered to be a measure of creative success; for the agency in terms of creative talent and quality of their work, and for the clients by recognizing which agencies can deliver exceptional results (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023). It is a common occurrence to walk into the private offices of creative individuals within the agency and see their displayed awards. Even the conference rooms showcase multiple Cannes Lions trophies which communicate both success and capital, since even entering the awards is expensive as the agencies have to pay for each entry. It is evident that agencies as businesses care about it a lot as it lets them "measure each other up" (Kübler & Proppe, 2012). For example, during my fieldwork, a competitor agency won the award for Agency of the Year, which was briefly mentioned within the internal structures of the company as surprising and disappointing. The common attitude that I spotted was that the agency missed out on a lot of press coverage which is a great PR for the agency. However, it is important to note that advertising awards are explicit to the advertising industry, and consumers outside of it do not really care for the specifics of it as awards are

not widely known (Meléndez-Rodríguez & Roca, 2023). This means that the value they hold is recognized mainly internally in the industry and not in the social circles of consumers.

On the other hand, the discourse around social responsibility initiatives came up multiple times in the context of the advertising awards, regarding the available categories open for submissions as well as the underlying justifications. According to the gathered data, both from the interviews and from the fieldwork, social responsibility-motivated campaigns are the ones winning advertising awards. There has been a shift within the societal values embedded in a culture where an increased emphasis is placed upon brands, and therefore, the creative outputs of ad agencies, to have a positive impact and foster beneficial societal changes across their target audiences. Interviewee 2 stated that this is the result it has: "So that sends a signal to not just ad agencies, but also to the clients that hey, if you're not doing anything good for people or for the planet, you're not going to win an award". The causes behind this shift are rooted in cultural, economic, societal, and humanitarian paradigms as the values of audiences have undergone transformations as well as their demands and expectations (Arora et al., 2020). As described by Interviewee 6:

> That's what consumers want, right? And it's also [how] many marketers around the world look at their brands as inspiration tools for consumers and for people. So, I mean, they're demanding more and more of it, which means the kind of work that you do becomes more and more. (Interviewee 6, Executive creative director)

This is because consumers increasingly care about how, where and when they spend their finances, and the actions of the businesses that they support (Arora et al., 2020). This is relevant for both advertisers and brands, as they need to be able to recognize current consumer needs for which the creative products are tailored for. The audiences hold the generational spending power and are the primary targets of sellers (Southgate, 2017), and their usage of social media has helped increase awareness about topics such as sustainability, equality, human rights, and more (Mavrodieva et al., 2019).

Advertising awards hold a significant function in the advertising industry, as shown within this sub-theme. Importantly, award festivals illustrate to advertising practitioners which topics are relevant to address in their scope of work based on the what the consumers are currently needing. At the moment, social responsibility-powered campaigns are what audiences increasingly want to see, which also impacts the creative products of advertising agencies and their clients.

4.1.3. Sub-theme 3: Consumers hold brands/companies to higher moral standards

Within this sub-theme, the findings show that audiences hold brands to higher moral stands, and in order to stay relevant within the commercial and cultural structures of the domain, businesses have to adhere to certain expectations from the consumers through various initiatives.

Firstly, brands must be consistent with their values and the way they express them, which is one of the ways they stay relevant of their target audiences. For example, Respondent 4 illustrated how brands need to do that in order to be successful:

> You need to express something which is relevant and important for the people, transgender people, transitioning people, people's rights, you know. You need to be very aware of the social context you're living in, what the client stands for and what has not been said and told and shown yet. And that niche is a very uncomfortable place for everybody. But that's what makes the difference (Interviewee 4, Business director).

They went on further to illustrate that the creative ideas produced by the advertisers have to be consistent with the brands' truths and values they stand for in order to create quality creative work. It is necessary to do it the 'right way', as few participants emphasized, due to the emergence of 'cancel culture' and increase of the power of consumers (Norris, 2023). This shows how much advertising professionals need to be aware of the social contexts of their creative work (Barwise & Meehan, 2010). Particularly in terms of SR campaigns, brands need to exercise caution when integrating such initiatives into their brand identity and to what extent due to the scrutiny they undergo from consumers within these discussions. If they do not back up their stances with credibility and authenticity, they risk alienating their audiences, and therefore losing their profits. Respondent 4 explained that the key to this is consistency:

> If you stand for something, it cannot just be the first layer of surfaces. If you say we stand as a brand next to the Bangladesh textile worker, then all your business needs to build against that statement. So, you need to be super consistent in how you communicate and to be truthful to you to what you communicate because people do not forgive you or they tend not to. (Respondent 4, Business director)

Brands stay relevant by keeping with the culture but also understanding the consumers, speaking their language, and comprehending their motivations - what do they struggle with? They need to connect with their audiences to do that by establishing meaningful relationships and appealing to the consumers' aspirational aspects (Langer, 1997). One of the participants explained this on an example of a brand that does exactly that - Nike. They were the first brand to not talk about their products but directly to the consumers instead. They never advertised by making direct sales pitches, they tied their brand purpose to the aspirational inclinations of users - "...that they can be somebody more than they already are. Which probably they need to be, they need to hear this from their friend or their partner or their mothers or their parents" (Respondent 2, Junior Strategist). Research has shown that creating emotional connections with customers creates positive brand image, more sales and long-term

positively impacted brand perception which results in more profits (Magids et al., 2015). However, it is something that brands must continuously work on, but the possibility is there. Especially since consumers trust companies and businesses overall increasingly more than, for example, governments (Eldelman, 2023).

All these expectations and requirements are something that the advertising professionals have to keep in mind during their process of creative production as well as their own motivations for the purpose of social responsibility initiatives within a brand campaign. On top of that, this sub-theme showed that consumers hold brands to higher moral standards to look past their profit-making goals and provide benefits to the environment society as well.

4.2. Theme 2: Agency operations determined by their assets

The second main theme identified from the thematic analysis was focused on the agency's role within the process of the creative production of their creative outputs desired by clients and expected by consumers. The subthemes under this main theme are the quality of creative production depends on internal and external factors and advertising agency holds responsibility towards their clients and the society. These themes are relevant to discuss as the influencing factors of creative production tell us how creative process is approached internally, e.g. the various circumstances that are necessary in order to produce a creative campaign and the necessities of agency practitioners to adhere to certain responsibilities. This theme offers a perspective on the factors that have an impact on the creative outputs of advertising professionals. It accentuates the dynamic interplay between the internal motivations of ad professionals, the constraints from the agency, expectations from clients and the demands of consumers. Creatives operate within a complex ecosystem where they need to navigate all of this at the same time as ticking off necessary boxes in order to remain a business.

4.2.1. *Subtheme 1: The quality of creative production depends on internal and external factors*

The data showed that the creative process is not linear, and all relevant figures within the agency contribute to it depending on their role in the creative production. The participants highlighted the importance of team collaboration and internal trust among the creators because the best quality creative output depends on smooth processes of communication, distribution and production of information and ideas within the agency network of departments (Grant & McLeod, 2007). Interviewee 6 explained that:

> ... the comments that the account and strategy team will give you on the specifics of the client asks, it's good to have them in the room and talk about it and sometimes you make a collective decision to not do something because you realize that something else is better, so you do challenge the brief but you do it together as a team. (Interviewee 6, Executive creative director)

The element of trust in the internal structures of the agency determines conditions for the best creative products (Fang et al., 2008). For example, the creatives are considered to be the dominant leaders of the creative ideas within a project, and it is their responsibility to drive it forward, ideally without any internal conflicts. The old school advertising regarded the creative process as sacred, and it was very protected from the opinions of other coworkers who are not creatives (Grant & McLeod, 2007; Holm, 2023). This is not the norm today, however, if there is not established trust between the internal teams, the creatives close off access to their creative conceptualization from others. This means that a lot of information can get lost along the way, risking a project that may not be successful or high quality. Respondent 4 illustrated:

> And creatives are also amazing creatures. So, if they trust you, they let you in the creative process, which is something that we are super privileged to witness and sometimes to be part of. That's why trust is also something super important internally. (Interviewee 4, Business director)

Other participants emphasized this as well, further stating that the approach to creativity is flexible and individual to the creative person/team. The creative teams report to their creative directors and it is their decision of how much they want to be involved in the conceptualization part of the process. All creative directors who participated in the research stated their active involvement in the process of developing ideas for creative briefs, going beyond the typical managerial role of their position. They provide creative "check-ins" as they give feedback to the creative teams developing ideas and all creative rounds have to receive their approval before they are delivered in front of the client. This is an important rule which is strictly adhered to, as was observed during the fieldwork, and it is also one of the main reasons why internal communication is so important between the teams on a project. Everything needs to be approved internally to make sure everyone is on the same page, and only then creative outputs are sent over to the client for approval. Studies have also shown that "creative output is typically the result of a complex negotiation that is shaped by the predispositions and priorities of internal and external stakeholders" (Ghaffari et al., 2019, p.242). For instance, during my observations, there were instances during which the account team and creatives did not align internally, and music options for an offline edit of a product campaign were put in front of the client, even though the creative director on the project did not approve them and did not have a chance to provide his feedback. In that case, the account team had to go back to the creative team, get approval and then come back to the client again with the right creative options for them to approve. While it does not seem like a big issue, it is problematic because all campaigns follow a strict schedule which is also based on the budget client has at hand, and the hours agency dedicates to it.

Another integral part to make this whole process work is the trust between the clients and the agency (the creators) in order to develop the best possible creative work. This was not only emphasized during the individual interviews but also through first-hand experience during the fieldwork. The account team is the one to keep closest to the client, as it is their role to distribute the workload, check in with internal teams and provide day-to-day communication with the client. It is necessary to provide weekly statuses and check-in points to both make sure the client feels taken care of, but also for them to see where their money is going into and how it is spent. The brand/account director (Respondent 4) who was interviewed for this project stated that: "You're the client within the agency and the agency within the client." They serve as a middle ground between the creatives and the clients, and it is their responsibility to translate the creative conceptualization to the client in such terms that the reasoning behind the decisions is clear in order to "sell" their creativity to their client (Ghaffari et al., 2019, p.242). It is essential to establish a positive relationship between the account team and the client as that determines the direction and possibilities of the whole project, especially within the dimensions of the creative outputs. This is significant because "clients are frequently risk averse in making decisions about creative work and may favor work that us less creative and effective because it is easier to accept" (Bilby et al., 2023, p.57). An excerpt from the field notes illustrates the consequences of an unstable client relationship and its implications on the creative process & outputs:

> The division of work between [smaller independent agency] and [global network agency] is looking to be an issue. My understanding is that this is not a normal process during a campaign. This agency is used to leading the creative production on all assets that the client is looking to deliver for their campaign, however, this is currently not the case. During a campaign, the usual assets include 3D, so video edits (ranging from 6 seconds, 15 seconds and 30 seconds as the industry standard depending on the media) and 2D, which means still (so photography which will be produced for billboards for example). The client decided to give the 2D creative products to another, smaller agency, because they are cheaper and they can produce it within a shorter period of time than our agency. However this is unusual as [global network agency] normally does this. The client relationship is quite rocky at the moment, and it seems it has been quite intense since the start. They do not have the usual trust established, like I can see in another football project, which impacts the work quite a lot. We have had extra rounds of creative presentations because the client is going back and forth, and the account is having to make sure everyone is documented in the email threads in case they come back demanding something else. On top of that, the creative rounds are costing more money, and it has caused us to push out the delivery date to later than was originally established. I was told this is not a very usual process. The direct consequence of the division of 2D and 3D deliverables is that the campaign does not look coherent across all fronts which is a big issue as it also reflects on our agency. But we do not have any input on the products

that the independent agency is coming up with, so for the sake of keeping the client relationship in a somewhat good place (or at least not make it worse), we have to accept it and work with what we have. The brand director even said: "what's the point of doing so many key visuals, 3D and 2D stuff, when it looks all the same?" The brand director on the project fought against it, however, it was not her decision to make and ultimately what the client wanted was the deciding factor on that. (Field notes, p.6)

Another external factor that determines creative production is what the creatives called "watered-down ideas", where bureaucracy impacted the creative work. There were multiple instances during which this came up in the data; firstly, the fact that due to company hierarchy, creative ideas get 'watered down' by the time they reach senior leadership within the brand company. They went through so many rounds of feedback from the internal communication team of the brand that by the time the creative products get to their supervisors, it is a mashup of different opinions and ideas: "it's so watered down, so many people's opinions that it's kind of mediocre" (Respondent 6). At that point in the process, the communications team turns to their seniors within the company and makes decisions based on what they think their boss wants to hear in order to please them. This is largely something that the advertising agency cannot control, and there are instances where they have to "pick their battles" in terms of pushing the client on decisions they think are the best for the most apt products.

All these elements factor in during the development of creative ideas and the process of production, and they also determine the extent to which advertisers are able to protect their creative concepts and their purpose. The relevancy of these results lays in the fact that the creative products depend on the type of the client, the individual creatives and account managers on the job as well as the relationship they have with the client.

4.2.2. *Subtheme 2: Advertising agency holds responsibility towards their clients and the society*

This sub-theme contains various functions and purposes of an advertising agency, specifically the creatives, strategists and brand directors who ensure the client's needs are met successfully while producing a creative output that reflects their expertise.

The findings show that the advertising practitioners put a significant emphasis on answering the client brief - in other words, comprehending what the issue/problem client has, and coming up with proactive solutions on how to solve it in the most creative way possible (e.g. "what is the cultural tension we want to tap into?"). From both the individual interviews and my observations, it was clear that the strategists and creatives consider themselves to be problem-solvers, and they are using the power of creativity as a tool to get there (Koslow et al., 2003). As was suggest in the theoretical framework, using creativity as a means to solve problems is what is considered to be the highest regarded skill in the industry (Calavia et al., 2020). However, this is also an understudied concept.

Additionally, creatives want to stand out from the crowd by designing exceptional concepts which the client is happy with, the agency is proud of, and the audiences receive beneficial value from. This can be in a form of amusement, entertainment, or raising awareness about global issues. The results also showed that advertisers hold the consumers in high regard, and they consider themselves to be "the voices of the audiences", especially within the strategy department. They see it as their role to speak for the consumer needs and carefully guide the client to what they think is the best creative solution, presenting it in a way that captures the "essence of the brand". According to the participants, this is what the clients most often want to see - that the agency sees and understands the core of the brand and their values. However, oftentimes clients perceive their wants before the consumer needs. It is the responsibility of the agency to guide them through this by "packaging the creative ideas nicely for the clients" and "selling their creativity" successfully (Bilby et al., 2021). According to the strategists and creatives, the client-teams are often "too obsessed with their own brand and they think that everyone else is too, which is not true" (Respondent 1). It is often a psychological and sociological process during which the agency-teams figuratively hold the hands of the client and lead them through the process.

Nevertheless, this is not an easy or straightforward process and oftentimes requires a lot of compromise which is quite tricky in the situations with a lot of different voices (agency, client, consumer). While the agency fills out a lot of different shoes in order to produce quality creative work, it oftentimes requires sacrifice on the agency part. Respondent 1 explained:

> If you make a compromise for the greater good, a compromise for the client, a compromise for your audience, a compromise for the agency, then you're going to end up with something very generic without any impact. Maybe it was 100% sustainable and we are so happy, and cool, but at the same time, people don't care about it, clients don't care about it, and we don't care about it. So, it's not just about relevancy, but being distinctive as well. (Interviewee 1, Senior strategist)

Going beyond the existing understanding of advertising agencies, this section delved into the complex relationship between managing business responsibilities and the desires and expectations of producing effective creative outputs that the advertising professionals are proud to present. All this needs to come together while also adhering to the clients' needs and their contributions. This is an important part in the debate of what role social responsibility has in an advertising process as it demonstrates the fact that advertisers cannot just produce what they want, they have to follow both the clients demands in certain parts as well as take into account the obligations of the agency.

4.3. Theme 3: Advertising as a carrier of societal change

The last central theme that was a result of the thematic analysis is the role of advertising professionals as carriers of positive societal changes, from diverse angles explained below. The subthemes categorized under this theme are SR initiatives carry commercial benefits in the advertising industry, the need for optimal conditions for the development of SR campaigns, and the values of SR initiatives. These themes answer the research question by stating that not only does the advertising industry have the potential to drive innovation and solve societal problems, but it is also beneficial for agencies to do so as there is a huge market for it. Furthermore, this section of the results & discussion shows that social responsibility cannot always be present or that the advertisers of the campaigns are in control of that.

4.3.1. *Subtheme 1: Social responsibility initiatives carry commercial benefits in the advertising industry*

The data analysis demonstrated that there is a commercial value in SR initiatives promoted by brands and driven by advertising agencies. According to the interviewees, creating cultural impact is followed by financial benefits naturally as it means that the audiences and consumers pay attention to the products/services being offered. This is advantageous and profitable, and the brands recognize this notion to be true as well. Producing SR motivated campaigns brings prestige and profits, and it helps create a connection to wider audiences as research proves that consumers increasingly care about socially responsible lifestyles (Arora et al., 2020). Specifically, it is within the demographics of Gen Z audiences who have become the main targets of brands today as they "want to tap into the potential buying power of generations" (Interviewee 5). This correlates with the theoretical framework which illustrated that consumers increasingly care more about SR initiatives, especially when it comes to the younger audiences (Seemiller & Grace, 2016).

Few respondents highlighted the commercial opportunities within the aspects of SR and what it can do to create change since advertising industry is closely related to the economic elements of the society (Holm, 2023). Interviewee 7 noted:

> …. and that's something that I'm super keen for and also it should be seen as a commercial opportunity as well because they've said you know in the studies you know climate change is a commercial opportunity for these businesses if you do it in the correct and authentic way which is to go how do you prioritize all of these priorities around climate change and put that in your communication. (Interviewee 7, Strategy director)

There is a tangible tension between the ethical and moral aspects of the industry, which was also felt in the field work. This brings up debates about the commercialization of activism and marketized philanthropy (Kelly, 2020). While advertisers can recognize the potential profits that

lay within the SR-driven campaign initiatives, questions rise about the ethical side of advertising such actions. On one hand, it can be seen as an extension of capitalism where the original message of the pro-SR campaign loses its meaning due to its link to consumerism (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009). This has been identified as so-called consumption philanthropy which occurs when "there is a perceived charitable aspect associated with purchasing a service or product" (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009, p.975). The authors argue that because of this link, in which companies make profit by associating themselves with social causes and social responsibility, the actual problem becomes less visible and stabilizes the current system instead of actual systemic change.

On the other hand, advertising such initiatives is a powerful way to spread awareness to the masses about problems and conflicts in society. The social perspective on SR-driven advertising argues that rather than looking at the industry as a critical point, the issue stems from capitalism and its implications as a "larger social factor" (Philips, 1997, p.109). Rather than looking at the influences of advertising on individuals (which has been studied plenty), the critical studies on ethics of advertising need to look at the collective effects on society to examine a wider context in which it can be useful for social responsibility.

Furthermore, the participants emphasized the fact that from the brand's point of view, SR actions do not have to be carried out through advertising only. In some instances, it can pitch up as donations or activations (events), or all of it at the same time. It heavily depends on the projects as well as the consumer-research or the ambitions of the managers at during the campaign.

4.3.2. Subtheme 2: The need for optimal conditions for the development of SR initiatives

Social responsibility is a popular topic within the advertising industry at the moment. The data has shown that advertisers feel various degrees of responsibility to produce creative products that hold positive/beneficial impact on the members of the society, at least to a certain extent. For example, interviewee 3 remarked: "I have the voice of a brand in my hand. What can I do for the people with that?" It is worth noting that this interviewee holds the position of a junior art director, with a couple of years of experience and their individual approach was centered around SR purposes and values in all their creative work within the agency, to the best of their ability. The more senior participants, in the positions of ECD (executive creative directors) and CDs (creative directors), focused more on the commercial part of social responsibility and approached it from the other angle - how can we best sell this product or service, and can SR initiatives help with that? They all confirmed that they are heavily client-facing, which can result in more pressure to perform and delivery.
The strategy department, on the other hand, heavily leans on the cultural tensions within the society, linking the issues/problems of audiences when situating the client brief into a creative strategy. Participant 7 emphasized the importance of this process in relating to real life experiences of consumers as well as the beneficial impact it can have on social & economic prospects:

So, fortunately, I come from a developing market, South Africa, and I worked on a lot of developing markets across the African continent. And you know, again, using the word responsibility, because of all of the challenges that we face in those markets, there's a huge responsibility on the work that we do to alleviate some of those things. So for example, I was working in finance, in e-commerce…[they] are vital for people in terms of getting food in a healthy and clean way. In terms of banks, you know, loans, just access to finances, you know, financial education, you know, all of these things are so, so important, especially when, you know, money is literally just not there. And that's the reality, you know, some of the briefs that I worked on were to look at how do you tackle the 75% youth unemployment rates in South Africa. So you know, that was the brief. 70%? 75%. And so basically what that means is that if you're a young person who's just finished university and you've spent all that money on tuition, you're not going to have a job. And the majority of them were paying by student loans. So, what you have now is suddenly just a massive job market, who's a massive amounts of people entering the job market rather, who just don't have any jobs. So it's a jobless job market. So with that being said, those are some of the briefs that I was working on, just innately the kind of work that I was creating. And that felt really important to me. (Interviewee 7, Strategy director)

What was really emphasized throughout the interviews was the fact that this cannot always be the case, despite of the internal motivations of the agency professionals. The participants highlighted the reality that there is a right time and space for social responsibility initiatives in a creative campaign. In other words, many different elements have to align – the essence of the brand, the demands of the client, the individual motivations of the creatives on the project, the budget available from the client, the type of service/product that is being advertising. The dominant factor here is the type of brand they are advertising for; this is crucial because the SR-driven campaigns have to make sense in terms of brand positioning, their values and public image. For example, respondent 5 talked about Coca-Cola, and their campaign's initiatives to talk about access to clean water and water pollution. Since they are in the industry of beverages, this is a societal problem that feels authentic for them to address and contribute to the possible solutions. Interviewee 6 illustrated it on the agency's global client in sports:

What are clients giving us their money and their support, what are we giving back to them besides just the products? How do we make the sporting, in [sports brand] terms, more enjoyable, more fun, more accessible for people, more safe, etc. So that's when you can think of something like that for a brand like Adidas, it completely fits. You should be doing that because it feels authentic and it feels right for their business. So, in that instance, it's very important to do. (Interviewee 6, Executive creative director)

Moreover, agency - client relationships alongside the budget and resource allocation are also pivotal factors within the discourse around social responsibility as they dictate the degree to which socially motivated concepts are manifested within a campaign. Sometimes it can be too expensive, and the client is not inclined to go in that direction. Other times, the societal and cultural impact is at the heart of the campaign because of all these determinants coming together to create something that both serves client needs and adds beneficial values to the society. Interviewee 1 portrayed this on an example of Nike Japan, where they addressed cultural discrimination and bullying that was happening in the country to boost the self-confidence of Japanese youth. They created something meaningful for their audiences and helped them overcome those everyday battles, despite the fact that the sustainable footwear created for this campaign was not 100% sustainable. It still had social impact.

To sum it up, there are multiple **factors** that need to be present during creating and producing a campaign to allow for successful integration of SR initiatives. Interestingly, the agency only has partial control over that, and most often it all depends on the relationship that agency builds over time with their clients.

4.3.3. Subtheme 3: Values of SR initiatives

During the individual interviews that were conducted for this research study, all participants talked about the values and benefits of SR driven creative outputs, either by their agency or in their previous experiences. Firstly, it was clear that if their work resonates with their audiences, there is already an added benefit beyond the commercial values of sales, and that's exactly what SR work does. Participant 3 explained that:

> I've been working on train brand in France, and that was just like entertainment, there is no social responsibility with trains. But you can still do the good thing and not just sell things because people want to buy things, it's not a problem, people want to buy things, but they want to… they want to believe in things. (Interviewee 3, Junior art director)

This type of work always resonates with the audiences because they want to feel purposeful, and they want to feel that the attention is paid to the outputs that are making a difference to the world. Research supports this finding, showing that "consumers buy on beliefs" (Edelman, 2018), and they are willing to invest into a brand based on their stance on social issues because they believe companies have more power in creating societal changes than the government does (Edelman, 2023). Additionally, it means that advertising holds a lot of power to drive innovation forward within the society due to its significant role in the economy and markets (Holm, 2023). Advertisers also recognize their power and value in the position they have, stating:

And the beauty of our job is that many, many times advertising can make a difference in people's life by creating habits, by creating new ways to say things, and by showing the flip side of a situation. What I think it's most beautiful about our job, it's the wittiness that we can bring to people's life and two points of view when it's done well… when it's done well and when it's challenging and when it's uncomfortable. (Interviewee 4, Business director)

However, it is also important to note that this is an individual approach, and the opinions on this topic vary across the departments and agencies, or even countries. For instance, as one of the participants described his experience in a developing market as heavily focused on SR-driven campaigns because the agencies and their clients recognized that there are a lot of societal problems that they can help to improve.

As a result of this analysis, the System Model of Creativity (Csikszenthmihalyi, 1988) was adjusted based on the findings (illustrated in Figure 7). Social responsibility serves as a factor within the domain, the culture, as it is inherently a part of it due to the increased demand of consumers. The relationship between SR and advertising professionals is determined by three different elements – internal motivations of the creators, client-agency relationships, and internal bureaucracy on both sides. Creators all have their own approach when it comes to their creative process, however, it is a collective effort to produce a creative outcome at the end of the campaign, which means that there are many inputs, and many different variants to take into consideration.
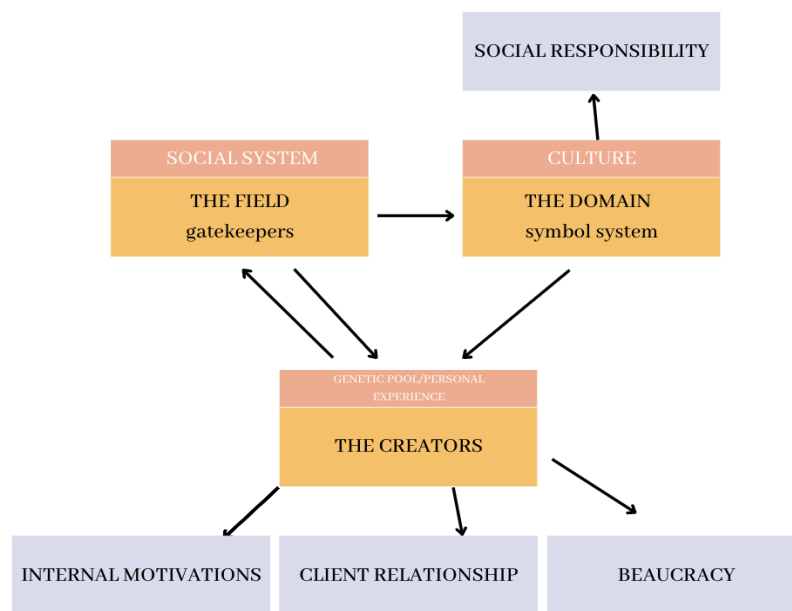

Figure 7. Adjusted Model of System of Creativity based on the results of the data.

5. Conclusion

This study aimed to contribute to the discussions and knowledge on the role of social responsibility and motivations of advertising professionals in an international advertising agency for purpose-driven initiatives. In particular, this thesis focused on whether SR is present, and to what extent, in advertising campaigns and how that impacts the process of creative ideation of advertisers. It was researched by means of seven semi-structured interviews and three months duration of an ethnographic fieldwork.

The theoretical framework offered to identify the contextual setting for creativity and the creative process initiated by advertising professionals. While the workings of an advertising agency and a offered a comprehensive setting on the internal relationships and structures, the System Model of Creativity (Csikszenthmihalyi, 1988) illustrated the theoretical insights into the dynamics between the creative professionals, the clients, and the consumer culture.

The results suggest that there are different ways through which social responsibility is already embedded within the cultural aspects of the society through consumer needs, which in turn determines what creative products are relevant for brands. As was suggested in the theoretical framework, culture serves as a starting point from which advertisers draw symbolic knowledge from (Chang et al., 2009). For advertising practitioners, cultural products serve as a starting point as they need to make sure that what they create is relevant for clients and their audiences (Holm, 2023). This places them into the position of "cultural intermediaries" (Bourdie, 1984), as was suggested in the theoretical framework. Taking that into consideration, advertisers naturally have to engage with social responsibility to some extent, since it is situated in the domain. This is also illustrated in advertising awards, as results showed the industry setting up the bar high for SR-driven creative products. However, to what extent it is visible in everyday advertising is determined by various settings.

Firstly, the role of social responsibility within the creative process starts with the creative worker – it is an individual motivation depending on the worker's personal approach to the campaign, the client, individual experience. Secondly, the flexibility that advertisers receive in their production is heavily dictated by the client teams as well as the type of brand and project they are working on. Due to an increasingly constrained relationships with clients, agencies and their employees are under more and more pressure to deliver quality work within tight deadlines (Bilby et al., 2023). This results in less flexibility when it comes to "selling" in SR-driven campaigns, smaller budgets, and less creative freedom. Advertising practitioners are forced to adapt their processes to all these elements, meaning they cannot guarantee SR-driven work even though their own motivations for it are present. Lastly, internal political imbalances have a huge effect on the content of creative production. Clients are more inclined to demand creative work that will appease their direct supervisors rather than looking at the collective societal impact they can produce. In that sense, it is the role of advertisers to serve as "voices of the consumers" and steer their clients towards choices they think are right (Bilby et al., 2023).

Additionally, tension between the moral and commercial side of advertising was present during this research due to the topic at hand. The question whether there even such a thing as ethical advertising is debated often, especially since advertising has a direct impact on social welfare (Nwachukwu, 1997). While there are diverse views on the influences of advertising philanthropic causes (Nickel & Eikenberry, 2009; Philips, 1997), this research offers an additional perspective that the industry is undergoing changes in this direction. The expectations of brands to stand up for social causes and have an opinion on political worldviews puts a lot more pressure on both businesses and advertisers to engage with the current topics and issues that the society is going through.

Taking everything that was illustrated into account, it is necessary to keep in mind that while there is a lot of value in SR-driven creative work in the advertising industry, and it can have a lot of positive effects (LaVoi & Haley, 2021), not all societal, economic, and environmental issues have an answer in advertising. In some circumstances, there is no creative way to support/advertise for good causes of a brand because they themselves first must invest into product/service improvements.

5.1. Limitations

Within qualitative research, it is necessary to reflect on the role of the researcher even though appropriate research steps were followed as well as a systematic procedure of the thematic analysis. Due to the fact that I was at the agency as an intern, it is possible that the results were affected by this, despite the measures taken to prevent it.

Secondly, an ethnographic study subjected to three months of interviews and participant observations has its limitations. Not only is it a labor-intensive research method, it also requires a lot of time. This study only allowed for a limited number of samples due to the tike constraint as ethnographic studies usually last for much longer (van Hulst et al., 2015).

Additionally, there are certain aspects of the research that had to be excluded due to agency and client privacy protection. However, there is no guarantee that useful data were not lost in the process just because certain elements cannot be shared.

5.2. Future Research

To confirm and expand on the results of this study, a quantitative research study across multiple advertising agencies would provide a larger number of creative professionals who could offer their insights into the role of social responsibility in advertising. Due to the constraints of time and resources, this study was confined to a certain number of possible participants. Quantitative research would contribute additional understanding as to what extent SR initiatives are motivated within the field and by what.

Another avenue to research further would be whether the diverse motivations of advertising individuals for the SR initiatives also depend on their position within the agency. The results of this study indicated that the practitioners on higher positions (more client-facing) leaned towards

commercial side of advertising campaigns, as opposed to focusing on SR initiatives. A deeper dive into the correlation between these two aspects would offer a richer comprehension of whether the motivations vary on how long they have been in the industry, their background or agency experience.

Lastly, there is a significant lack of academic research in advertising agencies, especially when it comes to the creative processes and advertising creativity. An anthropological study across agency networks would serve as a starting point into how these processes change and evolve with the development of digital platforms, and therefore, an increased awareness on social justice issues, climate change and more.

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7. Appendices

7.1. Appendix A - Interview Guides

7.1.1. Strategy & Creative Departments

Icebreakers
- Where are you from?
- What is your role within the agency?
- How did you end up at this agency & why?
- What got you into the advertising industry?

Core qs - creative production
- Can you describe your creative process to me in your own words?
- Do external changes within the society and/or industry cause any changes within the agency itself, as far as you can tell?
  - Do they affect your creative production as a creative/strategist?
  - What about the client needs? Have they shifted based on the changes within culture/society/maket?
    - Has this caused any shifts in your relationship with the client?
- When it comes to pushing creative agenda with the client from your end, how do you navigate protecting your creative ideas while satisfying the client (and ultimately "selling" a product/service successfully?)

Core qs - social responsibility
- What's your personal opinion on social responsibility within advertising?
  - E.g. Is the only purpose of the agency to make profits? Or does it go further than that?
- Have you ever been on a project where social impact was the goal of the campaign?
- Is social relevance/impact something you think about when you develop creative ideas for a client?
  - If yes, why?
  - If not, why not?
  - Does it depend on what agency you work at?
    - Share your experiences with the agency please.
- Do clients' needs determine what role social responsibility has in a campaign, if any?
- In your own opinion, does the agency produce impactful work?
  - If yes, how come?
  - If not, why not?

○　What is this driven by/dependent on?

Advertising Awards

- Why do you think advertising awards pay attention so much to social responsibility?
- Are advertising awards important?
- Why are they such a shaping force?
- How would the advertising industry look like if there were no awards?

Closing

- Would you like to add anything that has not been mentioned, connected to the topics at hand?

7.1.1. Brand Department

Icebreakers

- Where are you from?
- What is your role within the agency?
- How did you end up at this agency & why?
- What got you into the advertising industry?

Creative production

- What's your role in the agency's creative production process?
- Whats your relationship with the clients, whats the role of account in that?
- How do you balance meeting the creative quality of the agency standards and satisfying the client needs?

Social Responsibility

- Whats your take on social responsibility concept in advertising?
- Do clients' needs determine what role social responsibility has in a campaign, if any?
- Do you think this is something the agency needs to think about during the creative production?
- Can you think of a campaign you were a part of, where social responsibility was at the forefront?
- Do you think your agency produces work that is: socially impactful/responsible with human good in mind?
  - What is this driven by/dependent on?

- Why do you think advertising awards pay attention so much to social responsibility?
- Are advertising awards important?
- Why are they such a shaping force?
- How would the advertising industry look like if there were no awards?

Closing

- Would you like to add anything that has not been mentioned, connected to the topics at hand?

7.2. Appendix B - Overview of Interviewees

Interviewee 1 is a 31-year-old male from Hungary but currently living in Amsterdam. He works as a senior strategist at TBWA with over 10 years of experience in the advertising industry. His focus are different lines of brand strategy, sports brands in particular.

Interviewee 2 is a 30 years old female from India who works as a junior strategist in the international department of TBWA. She has 1 year of experience working as a strategist and 10 years of experience in digital marketing and start-ups.

Interviewee 3 is 25 years old female from France who is working as a junior art director at TBWA with 3 years of experience in the advertising industry. Her main focus are sports brands and visual communications.

Interviewee 4 is a 41 years old female from Italy. She joined TBWA in the Netherlands 2 months ago in a position of business director, within the brand team of the international department. Her focus is the Adidas Football team. She has 15 years of experience in all the large advertising agencies in Italy. She worked in production for 2 years, and after that switched to account department as a brand executive.

Interviewee 5 is a 37 years old male from South Africa. He has been working at TBWA for the past 2 years as a creative director in the international department, however his background offers 15 years of experience in the advertising industry. His focus is creative art direction. Some of his previous clients include Coca-Cola and The North Face. He currently oversees the Adidas Running campaigns.

Interviewee 6 is a 47 years old male from South Africa, with 22 years of experience and a background in animation and motion design. He previously worked in the local South African market and then moved to the global markets. He has been working at TBWA as an Executive Creative Director since March 2023.

Interviewee 7 is a 30 years old male from South Africa with 10 years of experience in digital and brand strategy. He started at TBWA in February of 2023 in the position of a strategy director, leading the brand positioning on the Adidas account.

7.3. Appendix C - Coding Book

Social Responsibility in Advertising Creativity

SR is already embedded in the cultural structures
- Ad awards reflect current trends of the society
- Culture serves as a central element of advertising system
- Consumers hold brands/companies to higher standards

Agency operations determined by their assests
- The quality of creative production depends on internal and external factors
- Advertising agency holds responsibility towards their clients and the society

Advertising as a carrier of societal changes
- Social responsibility initiatives carry commercial benefits in advertising industry
- The need for optimal conditions for the development of SR initiatives
- Values of social responsibility initiatives