Can theory guide praxis? – Theoretical considerations and empirical findings on academic research's relevance for the advertising process

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Abstract

This paper analyses the influence of academic research and theory on the praxis of conceptualizing advertisements and concludes that the influence of academic research and theory actually is very limited. Theoretically speaking, theory as well as praxis remain more efficient each on its own and are less impaired when they are not compelled to influence each other.
Furthermore, it can be shown empirically from a case study with German advertising agencies that the value of theoretical and research insights for praxis mainly consists of legitimizing and / or post-rationalizing decisions which at the same time are both necessary and impossible.

Keywords

consultancy research, advertising research, advertising consulting

Problem Outline

"Nothing comes in as handy as a good theory." This highly quoted aphorism by Kurt Lewin is a plea in favor of the practical relevance of theories. However, can this pretense be maintained as concerns communication research's findings? This question shall be pursued using the example of advertising.

The academic interest in advertising as the object of investigation has been noticeably growing recently. Nevertheless, advertising agencies look on theoretical-academic approaches warily. From an academic institution's viewpoint one could say: "They take our graduates, but they don't consider our research very much." Why is this possibly the case? Superficially, the little actuality and difficult comprehensibility (due to theorizing) are pointed out while the advertising process demands for fast decision-making. Additionally, advertising agencies currently have to deal with a 'displeasing' form of academic research: It happens more and more often that their clients do not decide through reason, but rather consider impact tests to be the basis for their selection process as concerns advertising strategy and creation.

Thus, the fact that the advertising industry has searched for an academic home' in the area of (industrial) marketing is taking revenge. In Germany over the last decades, research on advertising has mainly been represented by the DWG (German Advertising Research Association), a circle traditionally recruited from prominent marketing scholars. Perspectives from behavioral sciences and 'social engineering' approaches (Kroeber-Riel et al., 2000, pp. 127f.) make for the mental framework of this kind of advertising research. Kroeber-Riel et al. explain the analogy of technical engineering by means of the metaphor of building bridges: Just as a bridge constructor applies technical knowledge to build a bridge, advertising also must contribute by systematically applying the laws of social or behavioral sciences ('social engineering approach') (Kroeber-Riel et al., 2000, p. 127). Thus, it would simply be the task of advertising praxis to apply social techniques 'correctly' in order to create the bridges towards the consumers. Based on such trivial comparisons, one could at best arrive at the conclusion pacifying advertising's critics that advertising has not yet exhausted its manipulative potential (Schierl, 2002). However, it is obvious that the attention to 'social engineering' is not a sufficient condition for bridging to the consumer.

Therefore, the question is whether theory can at all guide praxis or by no means can causally or temporally hurry ahead of praxis much less guide it. The alternative would be an approach to research and theory which does not even raise the claim to produce applicable theory. Equally worth considering, is thinking of a relationship where praxis guides theory. From the

latter perspective one hits on a not unproblematic position as concerns the relationship of theory and praxis where theory engulfs praxis in order to rationalize and legitimize decisions (Weingart, 2001) and where one cannot but differentiate between theory / research versus consulting with some academic coating (Kieser, 2002).

1. About the relationship between theory and praxis

The differentiation between theory and praxis is a relatively new phenomenon probably of the 19th century. The theory-praxis-debate replaced prior modes of differentiation such as theory as remote knowledge on everyday cognition and praxis as manufacturing handiwork (Luhmann, 2000, p. 473).

From system theory's perspective, the importance of theory mainly relies on its usefulness for defining a working program for the academic sciences. Noticeably, theory is present on both sides of the poles between theory and praxis. Apart from the accomplishments of theory for the sake of theory, an always-greater tendency to have praxis engulfed by theory can be observed. Therefore, not only do institutions of applied sciences stress 'applied sciences', but more and more universities do the same in order to demonstrate their practical relevance. Up to now, this has also held true for the area of communication and media research as one can see from examples such as 'applied communication research', 'applied media research', or 'applied media science'. It becomes clear that this is but a linguistic periphrasis for praxis when one replaces 'applied' and 'science' when speaking of the praxis of communication research, media, communication, culture and so forth. Luhmann does not consider this duplication of theory to be a blessing for the production of theory, since theory cannot give an answer to the question whether, at what cost and with what side effects praxis will reach its goals with the help of theory (Luhmann, 2000, p. 474).

Jullien locates the theory and praxis origin linking to European tradition: "We develop an ideal form (eidos) that we set as target (telos), and then we act in order to turn this form into reality." (Julien, 1999, p. 13; all translations by the authors). Referring to the impact of advertising, Kroeber-Riel's social engineering approach "strategy and techniques of advertising" would be a good example of an image of theory and praxis where praxis is guided by theoretically-defined strategies.

1.1 Advertising between academic research and consulting
The difference between academic research and advertising can be explained according to system's theory. Advertising agencies act upon the binary code of the economic system

(Luhmann, 1988, pp. 101ff.); thus, they are oriented towards economic criteria for success such as turnover and profit, while academic research works on providing for new knowledge and on differentiating between true and not true (Luhmann, 1988, pp. 150f.). The peculiarity of the advertising industry consists in the fact that its clients can acknowledge the agency's contract performance; by the same token, they cannot foresee whether the advertising measures themselves will result in the desired outcome.

Despite numerous options to measure communication's effects, ultimately the impact of advertising on the consumers' behavior is not unambiguously deducible. In this context, Becker speaks about a "means-end-presumption" (Becker, 2001, p. 87). Since big advertising budgets cannot be based upon presumptions, explanations for the unavoidable decision must be found. This decision-making situation is paradoxical for both the principal and the agent. In principle, decisions are only necessary when they are intrinsically impossible. Any inevitable decision-making process determined by social techniques does not have to be decided on, since it is already predetermined (Foerster, 1992, p. 14). Real decisions are exposed to an insecure future where the impossibility consists in the fact that the normal decision-making processes do not lead to solutions while decisions still need to be taken. In terms of a double persuasion, agencies must then convince their clients that the proposed campaign will also convince the addressee.

The art of the agencies' business lies in knowing the power structure of the client in order to find smart ways of convincing communication that play with the client's fear of losing control over their consumers. The methods applied have a clear similarity to the persuasion strategies of classical business consultancies as defined by Kieser (2002) and are often times mistaken for academic research. Heretofore, Kieser has found the following indicators: the simplification of contexts (pp. 25-31), the reference to proven problem solving and best practices (pp. 31-33), problems of evaluation (pp. 33-40), and rhetoric capability (pp. 40-43), for instance by way of metaphorical name-giving for the consultancies' instruments and facts. Nevertheless, one could get the idea that consulting was based on scientific insights or was indeed applied research. What exactly, then, is the difference?

The difference becomes clear based on the imperatives of scientific research as postulated by Merton – universalism (claims for truth are independent of the researcher's personal influences), communalization (accessibility for all), unselfishness (integrity), and organized skepticism (critical rationalism) (Merton, 1972). The application of these norms is problematic even within the business of science and research itself. There are especially

tendencies to excessively draw upon scientific insights for political, economic or social decisions (Weingart, 2001).

In assessing advertising agencies' performance in consulting according to the standards mentioned above, the differences between scientific research and consulting become obvious. Scientific insights that are applied during the decision-making process in advertising can never be objective and universal because businesses are usually in a competitive situation. Thus, advertising agencies are compelled to differentiate themselves through their approaches, i.e., through their academic foundation. Advertising agencies' knowledge also becomes more attractive since it is not common and, thus, is not at everybody's disposal; only partial knowledge is offered as an incentive to generate new business. The stronger a consultancy's reputation as a knowledge provider, the better it can sell its services to individual firms (Kaas & Schade, 1995).

While researchers complicate things by constantly criticizing, consultants need simple solutions and patent remedies in order to better master praxis. Therefore, they carefully consider their metaphorically-named tools and methods, which ultimately remain untransparent. An example of this jargon is the advertising industry's expression 'consumer insight' articulating the idea to crawl into the brain of the recipient – just as in the movie *Being John Malkovich.* In this respect, one could also talk about motives instead of insights; however, this term would not generate the same metaphorical fascination (Simmel, 1905; Luhmann et al., 1989, p. 211; Kieser, 2003).

Consulting services are no less selfish either. They cannot be, since business goals and fierce competition by other agencies do matter. Also, there is no skepticism towards insights that have been already successfully applied in the past; questioning them would endanger one's own credibility and, thus, profits. Additionally, selecting and processing eventually depend upon organizational conditions, framework and routines on the part of the advertising agency as well as on the part of the client. Not finding the (scientific) truth is critical, but goal setting and deadlines. Normally, the analysis by an advertising agency must be carried out within an unrealistically short time.

Not only do academic research and consulting shoot for goals, but also different methods and different rhetoric depending on their respective purposes. While academics are always anxious to increase the complexity of their theories and methods, advertising consultants search for simplification, even though it needs to be linguistically mystified in order to hide the perceived impression of triviality (Kieser, 2002, pp. 41f.). The ready impression that

academic research had - at least rudimentarily – a finger in the pie is even helpful and accepted in order to make the advertising concept plausible to the client and within the agency itself, as long as the closeness to praxis is apparent.

1.2 Production and validation of knowledge: An analysis of the term 'advertising impact'
One can approach the concept of the 'impact of advertising' from different angles with different precision. Some authors speak of a separation of psychological impact on the one hand and economic success on the other (Pepels, 1996, pp. 103ff.). The former assesses impact by conducting diagnostic tests; the latter controls success by evaluative testing. Evaluations are for measuring the efficiency of advertising, i.e., whether and how many more products and services an advertising measure sells. Diagnostics is to scrutinize the causes for a potential success (or failure) (Kroeber-Riel & Esch, 2000).

Other authors differentiate between economic impact, psychological impact and diffusion whereas the terms impact and success of advertising are used synonymously. In this context, economic impact describes advertising's relevance for economic factors such as sales volume, turnover, profit and / or market share; psychological impact means the change in, for instance, brand awareness, advertising memory and / or purchase intention; diffusion impact means the effectiveness of advertising tools as concerns criteria such as reach and / or contact intensity and quality, respectively (Fantapié Altobelli, 2007, p. 434). However, neither definition values advertising indicators as proof for advertising success.

Nevertheless, unanimity exists when psychological impact is differentiated in cognitive, affective and conative dimensions of influence. In the case of the research mentioned above, indicators such as awareness, recall, public profile, sympathy, purchase intention and usage / ownership are taken as a given without questioning their meaningfulness. For instance, the reproductive quality of complex emotional patterns of assessment via the factor sympathy is to be seriously discussed. As well the linear correlation between high value of the indicator and 'good' impact is not being second-guessed: Is it a good thing in any case when a brand is widely-known? Could brands that allure by the homogeneity of segregated user groups not lose their attraction when known among a mass audience? Or: Does a brand necessarily have to be likeable? Human beings build up long-term relationships with others even though they may not find them likeable; nonetheless they respect and may even fear them.

However, how can these questions be answered as long as the recipient remains an outside factor to these considerations? The basis for the measurement methods mentioned here are still linear impulse-reaction-models. Here, impact is only a matter of doses and choosing the

right medium. What do complex experiences, values, and action motives as well as strategies on the part of the recipient matter? Or: How could they matter?

The media industry needs sales arguments for agencies and companies. These arguments are delivered by the research mentioned – in colorful graphics. Also, the advertising agencies themselves do not demand new research insights. They need simple recipes and quickly effective arguments for their daily business, i.e., the placement and filling of advertising space. By the same token, decision makers in companies have only a very limited interest in highly complex research models as well. Having clear maxims makes individual and committee decision much easier.

So far, the relationship between theory and praxis has been trivial. Communication, media and advertising researchers work on communication models that reduce complexity and are free from interfering variables. The mediators between the research and the economic system, i.e., the consultants and agencies, formulate handy recipes and action guidelines based on these models which in turn are taken up willingly by the decision makers in the business sphere. Models gain an intoxicating impact on rationalizing or, even more so, on post-rationalizing risky decisions that have already been made.

However, it is unclear whether this supply-chain use of the companies involved is actually being perceived in this way and whether this might even be desired at all. Since it is to be assumed – as mentioned at the beginning of this paper – that different actors have different demands, it makes sense to analyze them separately. As a first step, the following primary analysis concentrates on the actual producers of advertising, i.e., the agencies.

2. Building hypotheses and research method

Based on the theoretical considerations concerning the strained relationship between academic research and consulting, the following research hypotheses based on Weingart (2001, pp. 139ff.) can be presented:

1. Due to the decision-making dilemma in praxis, academic research is instrumentalized as contract research in order to legitimize or post-rationalize decision, respectively.
2. Praxis determines the selection of scientific insights.

In accordance with Kroeber-Riel et al. (2000) and Kieser (2000), one can also defer:

3. The guidance of praxis by theory considered to be necessary by the advertising industry is at the same time dismissed as being practically impossible.

These theses shall be reassessed by way of empirical research among the advertising industry in Germany. A research project, running since summer 2007, has been conducted to formulate an idea about the ideas, motivations, the thinking and reasoning as well as the procedures of the actors responsible for advertising. The relationships between academic research vs. advertising and theory vs. praxis are at the core of the qualitative analysis, related to the question of what meaning research and scientific insights can have for the advertising industry at all.

Since there are almost no known quantifiable dimensions related to the intention of this research proposal, an explorative-qualitative model of investigation seemed obvious. Across Germany, 27 decision makers in the advertising industry (CEOs and directors of sales, consulting, strategy and planning) were surveyed through in depth face-to-face interviews; the interviews were based on question guidelines. For guidelines, the talks were structured according to four core areas:

- The relationship between research and advertising,
- The agencies' self-image, identity and philosophy,
- Terms in advertising, the notion of communication and of conceptualizing advertisements, and
- The conceptualizing process in advertising.

Since it was the intention to get information in relation to a specific, i.e., professional, role of the interviewees, the subjects functioned as experts for a certain field of action. Because of their professional reference, these 'expert interviews' were conducted at the interviewees' working place.

Guaranteeing the psychological plausibility of the expected results was important in choosing the sample. Therefore, it was critical to recruit experts with long-term experience in their fields. Even though this study does not claim to be representative, some structural properties within the sample were to be reproduced. Thus, the three main departments in classical advertising agencies – consulting, planning, and creation – were represented. Within these, agencies' CEOs as well as representatives of the middle management were interviewed as they stand for big German full service and network agencies as well as for small specialized

service agencies such as strategy consultants. All interviews were digitally recorded and transliterated. The texts obtained could then undergo a qualitative, software-supported content analysis.

3. Results

The agencies' representatives were asked about their ideas of academic research (translation from German into English by the authors of this paper). Initially, the answers were respectful:

> "For me, research is simply a systematic procedure according to rules, i.e., gaining knowledge along scientific rules." (CEO consulting)

> "I think academic research must be defined as creating knowledge. This means understanding things and systematizing them to some extent, working through them and then publishing. This is extremely relevant no matter for what area." (CEO strategy)

Subliminally, science stands for stable rules and maxims:

> "It is directed towards the classical academic principles […]." (creative director)

Some interviewees were aware of research's potential for their consulting models. But they qualified that creation itself could not derive any benefit from it, since creativity does not work along strict rules, but *must* produce variations. They were very cautious when it came to the transfer from theory into praxis:

> "Research, in any case, is theoretical model building, which is, initially, a mental exercise and tends to find general patterns, which most of the time are so general that they are not transferable to the concrete case any longer." (managing partner)

Skepticism towards theory on the part of praxis is also expressed in schematic images of researchers themselves ("full-theoretician" vs. "praxis-advocator" as one creative director called it). Apart from that, many interviewees expressed very simplistic ideas despite their own experiences in academia:

> "Well, I can imagine somehow that new models of thinking somehow come out of research." (director strategic planning)

The reservation about academic research and its insights was stressed by almost all respondents. While research and researchers were paid tribute to, it was also clear that this praise is only valid as long as research does not disturb agencies' daily business. In order to draw the line noticeably, one's own everyday experience is stylized as a scientific method. One CEO of an agency network said:

> "Our task is to concretely prove that we are the best agency in the pitch and, in the next step, that we can drive the client's brand best with what we develop. It is not the task to have the best theories or to have learned how to acquire the best theories." (CEO consulting)

The same person criticized theory for being without relevance as concerns the decision-making necessity of praxis. In other words, research cannot relieve the practitioners from decision-making:

> "Since in advertising, we don't do anything else the whole day through but trying to change attitudes, mindsets, insights and behavior, we are geared to always do so. Research stops somewhere in the middle. Research has different goals."

Even more apodictically, a creative director in a big advertising agency said:

> "I believe that research and advertising don't have anything to do with each other."

From agencies' perspective, the relationship between research and advertising praxis is defined by a clear chronological hierarchy – probably analog with the actors' biographies: Theory first, praxis after. In their view, research means universities far from reality, whereas agencies are everyday realities. This difference is also shown in the separation between private business authorship and originally academic authorship and, accordingly, between academic science and research results:

> "Of course, we work a lot with studies, with research results. However, these primarily come from the private sector, also typically from consultancies that also do industry studies, in any case: organized as private businesses. Well, falling back on academic research is rather the absolute exception than the rule." (CEO creation)

Asked about his expectations from academia, the CEO of an agency specializing in strategic communication consulting, first and foremost wants methodically and theoretically well-educated employees:

> "I expect [from universities] nothing but that they teach solid empirical tools of the trade and an inspiring overview on contexts mainly in the social sciences and in social psychology."

Furthermore, he is strictly opposed to praxis being engulfed by academia:

> "I don't want academic education to try to put on a praxis overall in order to pretend to have a relationship to praxis, since this would be – in my view – taking the second step before the first."

In addition, advertising's blind spot as concerns academic research is highly visible:

> "I think the problem is that advertising agencies don't grapple with the term or the phenomenon of academic research at all." (strategic planner)

What are the reasons for this detachment of advertising praxis from academic research? The following positions can be extracted from the interviews:

3.1 Academic research is often difficult to understand

> "At some point, I realized after reading German business administration publications that sentences went on for half a page and were hard to understand. Sometimes, I had to read a sentence two or three time in order to understand what the person wanted to tell me." (CEO consulting)

The complexity of academic texts' linguistic form re-enforces the underlying problem, i.e., that a conclusion with a concrete guide to action is missing. Academic research behaves contrary to advertising's self-image by reducing everyday complexity, especially linguistically:

> "I personally have much more respect for people who know a lot and are able to condense this knowledge and get the major points across, especially in a way so that the other side can understand it." (CEO consulting)

3.2 Academic research does not do justice to the complexity of the problem

As explained before, academic research favors to work with only a few variables or large and uniform objects of investigation that can be managed statistically in order to design theories. However, advertising praxis claims that reducing complexity cannot be reached by scientific methods but only intuitively. According to this view, the genius of the practitioner stands above the possibilities of academia. At the same time, the expression 'pseudo-scientific' points to acceptance problems:

> "The problem is simply just as with many complex systems – and communication is complex – that it can never be ascertained scientifically. This would never work, since there are just too many variables. This makes it also very difficult to assess advertising based on scientific methods. […] Of course, you can switch off certain variables, but overall it becomes difficult. And I think this cannot be measured and dealt with scientifically. The tragedy is that a lot of things are being tried in that is scientific in quotation marks, well, you try to ascertain and then you state that it won't work this way. Then, the problem is that those who work in such a pseudo-scientific way in turn offer it as the *ne plus ultra*, they base their recommendations on it or their decisions, respectively." (head of planning)

> "In a good planning agency, I think it is a good mix of gut feeling and scientific foundation, since in the end there is always a lot of common sense involved, one must simply be good at what one's doing." (group account director)

These arguments are opposed to the criticism expressed simultaneously as concerns the perceived over-complexity of scientific insights: Research and science are too complex and, by the same token, not complex enough in order to cope with the problems at stake.

3.3 Work styles at universities cause time and resource problems relating to the coordination between theory and praxis

The particular work styles of academic institutions and agencies result in, at least in the eye of the latter, insurmountable barriers to cooperation:

> "I think it would really be quite interesting to consider cooperation where one tries to have scientific insights flow into one's work; however, this would mean that one has to cooperate very closely in order to dissolve the high frequency and adapt it to the academic slow frequency. […] In any case, it is additional effort. It is extra work, and

it is most of the time hard to approach this idea without the scientific partners being willing to do so." (CEO of an agency network)

3.4 Research does not produce usable additional insights

In the course of the interviews, it became clear very quickly that the term 'usefulness' is defined very differently by academia and by praxis. While the academic side sees its purpose in discovering and analyzing a problem, agencies see problems as an unnecessary creation of complexity as long as the problem does not, by the same token, come with a potential solution – or even better: an unequivocal guide to action.

"I find that scientific research contributes relatively little, and if it contributes something then on an extremely high level of complexity." (CEO)

Also, the idea of a scientifically-based expert system in order to develop, for instance, concepts for pictures in ads belongs –according to the interviewees' opinion – to the past. At most, the scientific contribution consists in an ex post analysis. A role in creative direction was not seen.

"It is quite exciting when you read that expert stuff; however, interestingly enough, neither the clients nor the agencies want to know about it. The problem is that you can analyze lots of things scientifically, with what statistical significance a thing functions and how, or what elements were used and so forth. Unfortunately or maybe luckily, it never happens that one can enter these factors into a computer and the computer in turn coughs up sensible results. […] So, it is a priori of no help for developing good advertising. At least, I do think so." (CEO consulting)

3.5 Academic research is more or less equated with quantitative research

The core tendency within empirical social research, i.e. to admit only mathematically statistical reasoning, means for the agencies to categorize scientific insights as unsuitable for praxis. It is only qualitative approaches to research that allow for a scientific study of reality and whose results can, at the same time, be used for praxis.

"Well, yes, it always depends on what kind of research one does. Well, I think that there is the strict, i.e. the theoretically-quantitative research or rather hermeneutics, and the natural sciences or the approach of humanities. I believe that humanities help a lot with understanding consumers, since it also strongly employs cultural studies; the latter helps to understand consumers and also to reach the core of why people do

certain things by way of a special method that we use as well, i.e. ethnography, of course psychology, psychological methods and exercises. What is always much more difficult is to tell the whole story in figures and patterns." (managing partner)

3.6 The evaluation of agency-internal methods along scientific lines points out inadequacies
The interviewees did not understand the work routines - often named 'tools' within the advertising industry – to have scientific foundation.

"When you approach strategy or account planning with a really scientific claim… I think it is far away from any form of academic research. And our industry can be blamed of it. And rightly so." (director strategic planning)

"We are far away from real science. Most of the time, we have more solid techniques and methods that are more substantiated than in other departments. We try to have some validation by way of core findings of academic research with anything we do. However, it is rather rudimentary and stays on the level of basic insights. […] Well, it is frighteningly little. […]" (chief strategist of an agency network)

It remains obscure whether this insight is being understood as a chance to optimize work processes or rather as a threat to the agency's existence. It can be assumed that the allegation of being too un-scientific is not made by the scientific community, but by the commissioning companies.

3.7 Scientific research is often times equated with research about the impact of advertising
Recently, the phrase 'research on the impact of advertising' seems to have become a 'red flagg' for the agencies. Openly or implicitly, the agencies accuse scientific research of having opened up the opportunity to the commissioning companies to measure creativity without forming their own opinion and using their reasoning powers with tools measuring impact of advertising (as described above). Ultimately, this development would forestall creativity and, thus, quality. Also because of this, there are currently reservations towards the research about advertising impact.

"Well, research on advertising's impact is naturally a thorn in the side. […] Especially, clients work with it, and then we have to deal with the results. That's the world we live in, and also the creative department loathes such a research on impact, since it always assumes that research on impact cannot understand the creative ideas. […] And the client […] does use it as a basis for decision-making – will it work? will

it not work? -, and the client tries to stop arbitrariness and to find a secure foundation for decision-making. Well, research is indeed an important part of our work here." (director strategic planning)

"Well, as I get to know market research on a daily basis I would not name this kind of market research as scientific research. The market research we deal with pretends by way of pretests – will the thing we propose work? What part will work? How will it work? Or even posttests – how did it actually work?" (CEO consulting)

Conclusion: Consequences for the relationship between theory in praxis

The following assumptions were confirmed by means of the secondary as well as the primary research:

1. First and foremost, the use of scientific models contributed to legitimize decision-making on the part of the companies advertising. Or to re-iterate in the words of a representative of the practitioner's world:

   "[…] Scientific research functions as a stepping stone for specific lines of argumentation. […] At the end of the day, in all these soft areas it is never about right or wrong, but about plausible or not plausible. And being completely honest, research does support my own thesis or it doesn't. And if not, then it is nonsense, and you can easily re-interpret or falsify it, or generally devaluate it." (CEO strategy consulting)

2. The agencies tend to formulate very concrete requests as concerns academic research. Scientific insights allow for the complexity of advertising's praxis; at the same time, they are supposed to be simple and formulated understandably, since in case of doubt they serve as a sales argument. This claim manifests itself, for instance, in the usually indicator-driven measurement of the construct 'impact of advertising'. Praxis significantly determines the selection of scientific insights.

3. As the examples of communication consulting and the target value 'impact of advertizing' have shown, scientific research is often times instrumentalized and used to legitimize the not always unselfish interests of contract communication. Often times it happens that science is feigned in order to increase connectivity to praxis.

The term 'pseudo-science' used in this context cannot hide the fact that the enactment of science dissolves the difference between image and being. Thus, it becomes clear that a

performance increase of theory cannot be expected from the claim that science delivers practical benefits, at least as far as the area of advertising sketched above is concerned. Also, from the empirical findings it can be concluded that an increase of theory production would not encounter resonance in the advertising industry; in turn, performance increases of praxis by way of more theory cannot be expected. Even though the third hypothesis demands for both aspects, they are at the same time incompatible. This antagonism to be seen in the interviewees' answers can be valued as indicators for the paradox of decision-making.

The phenomenon stated by Weingart (2001, p. 140) for the area of politics, i.e., scientific research defines the problems for whose treatment and solutions politics wants to come into play, can be observed in advertising consulting as well. A current example: At conferences on marketing and communications, neuroscientists both expound the problems of cognitive processes outside the neurosciences and recommend their solutions for the development and rationalization of marketing strategies. However, advertising agencies themselves use a skillful rhetoric with which they point out current changes to their clients and are mindful of the danger of losing control in light of these changes. Advertising agencies and research institutions close to the advertising industry, for instance futurology institutes, can be seen – without a negative undertone – as their clients' "parasites of insecurity" (Ortmann, 2001, p. 89).

According to the findings in this paper, theory's throughput in the advertising industry is marginal. Theory cannot offer recipes, but only differentiations to the praxis of advertising, thus serving as an inducement for further differentiation (Ortmann, 2001, p. 89). Whether academia's theoretical offers are used to differentiate terms, ideas, perspectives, models, or methods is a decision made by praxis.

To use a term from system's theory, 'loose coupling' would a good description for the relationship between theory and praxis where the performance of each system is least threatened. When theory gains influence on processes in agencies at all, it is often labeled as a 'crutch' for reality:

> "Whether I use the Icon Brand Navigator, or whether I use other models, these are all crutches to find the truth, these are crutches to, let's say in principle, work on communication more systematically. But there is no ideal scenario." (director strategic planning)

However, one should not underestimate the function of research as a 'crutch' of objective reality for praxis. In collective decision-making situations, scientific foundation is a way out of the impossibility to decide. In other words: For praxis, theory and research fulfills first and foremost the function of legitimizing and post-rationalizing. Decisions about content and strategy are left to praxis and are often times completely unaffected by theory.

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