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Towards a triadic creative role: Hong Kong advertising creatives' responses to the rise of social media

Pui Yuen LEE

Doctor of Philosophy
The University of Edinburgh

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Declaration

I declare that this thesis which I submit for examination for the award of PhD is composed by myself, that the work contained herein is my own work except where explicitly stated otherwise in the text, and that this work has not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification except as specified.

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Abstract

The rise of social media has significant implications for the advertising industry, particularly for the relationships between marketers, consumers and advertising agencies. In fact, the entire advertising landscape has been developing in response to the emergence of digital technologies and advertising media, and the roles of these key stakeholders of the advertising industry and how they perform in the social media era are still not clear. Most previous research on this topic has focused on Western countries and adopted a macro perspective. In contrast, this study contributes to knowledge by focusing on an Asian context, and by exploring how social media are shaping the working lives of individual creatives who play a key role in the development of creative ideas and their expression across an increasingly diverse range of media.

This study aimed to explore how and to what extent the work roles and identities of Hong Kong-based advertising creatives are changing in response to the rise of social media. As the study focused on creatives’ experiences, a qualitative, interpretive approach was taken. This involved 32 interviews with advertising creatives in agencies differing in size, digital focus and ownership, supplemented with participant observations in both a multinational full-service advertising agency (Agency-M) and an independent Hong Kong digital agency (Agency R). The study has provided insights into creatives’ perspectives on their roles, identities, skill-sets and beliefs in relation to the rise of social media, and on the ways in which their relationships with clients and agency colleagues were changing as social media became more important.

In particular, the study identified three key experiences of Hong Kong advertising creatives in relation to the rise of social media. First, they were found to have divergent role identities linked to their identification with traditional and digital communication agencies. Second, the rise of social media led them to experience new tensions in their relationships with clients. Finally, across both traditional and digital agencies in Hong Kong, the role of advertising creatives is beginning to transcend the digital/traditional distinction. This new hybrid role was found to involve creative switching between three identities over the course of the advertising development process: creative strategist, creative facilitator, and creative producer. Each of these role identities required more from them than the merging of ‘digital’ and ‘traditional’ creative skills; in particular, the creatives increasingly found themselves having to work closely with a broader range of stakeholders within and beyond their own agencies, requiring them to develop their interpersonal and negotiating skills.

This research contributes to understanding the role and role identity in creative industries. It explores the many ways that social media are shaping advertising creatives’ working practices and identities, and it highlights the importance of cultural context to advertising practice. The triadic structure of contemporary Hong Kong advertising creatives’ roles identified here has implications for theorising advertising creativity, agency practice, and social media as a catalyst for individual and organisational identity and practices in the creative industries. The findings also have implications for advertising agency structure and practices, within and beyond the creative department.
Chapter 1 Background to the Study

This chapter provides readers with an orientation to the background of the study as a whole. The scope of existing knowledge is identified and introduced. First, the chapter outlines the changes that have occurred in the advertising landscape with the rise of social media. Then it discusses how advertising agencies are adapting to the growing importance of social media. Finally it examines how the rise of social media has potentially influenced the advertising industry, advertising agencies, and creatives in particular. The research gap in the existing literature is also identified in this chapter.

1.1 Origins and overview of this study

The main aim of this study was to explore how Hong Kong advertising creatives (the common term for creative experts in the advertising industry) experience their working lives in response to the growing importance of social media. This research topic stemmed from my personal and professional interest in advertising practices in relation to the evolution of digital media for communication. This study interest was interwoven with my previous experiences in advertising agencies and academic institutions. I worked as an advertising creative in diverse multinational agencies in Hong Kong for nine years from 1995; during this time I experienced how technologies were influencing the advertising industry and the creatives’ working lives. I witnessed, and experienced, radical changes in the advertising industry that seemed to be influenced largely by media technology, especially the growth of the Internet and mobile technologies. I became conscious of how advertising creatives - the ‘life-blood’ of advertising agencies given their responsibility for the creative expression of advertising strategies (Pratt, 2006) - experienced acute challenges to our roles, skill sets and identities in a rapidly changing media environment. This research interest was developed further with my engagement in teaching and research in academic institutions after 2005, when I began to research digital media development, including social media and their relationship to the creative industry of
Hong Kong. Since 2008, I have published refereed journal articles and conference papers focusing on these areas (Appendix A). In the continuous search for academic accounts of this development, however, I found little research on the advertising creatives’ role development in advertising organisations, and how they are coping with the growing importance of digital technologies. Moreover, there has been a strong Western focus in much of the previous literature that explored creatives’ working lives and agencies’ challenges (e.g. Hackley & Kover, 2007; McLeod et al., 2009); little attention has been paid to the experiences and perspectives of the individual creative from an Asian viewpoint. My industrial and academic experiences led me to ask questions about the changes that I was observing and experiencing as a creative faced with the increasingly important role of social media, particularly in recent decades. More specifically, I wanted to know more about advertising creatives’ experiences in their working lives in response to the growing influence of social media.

The growth of the Internet and mobile technologies has had significant implications for media and communication (Heath & Bryant, 2000; Lewis 2010) and for advertising; it has contributed to such occurrences as media concentration, fragmenting media audiences and the further development of integrated marketing communications (Hackley, 2009). The Internet and technological developments in media have led to higher levels of interactivity, customization and social interaction (Hill & Moran, 2011). The interactive and inter-personal characteristics of digital communication have also allowed marketers to have closer and more direct relationships with their consumers. At the same time, consumers have become more interested and involved in contributing ideas about brand building and promotional activities (Garfield 2005; Jaffe, 2005). The interactive nature of communication has empowered consumer participation in brand activities by selecting the content, timing, and communication acts that appeal to them personally (Li, Daugherty, & Biocca, 2001), and by interacting with each other as well as with marketers. As the Internet has evolved, its capacity for community-building and social interactions has come to the fore. Various platforms have been developing on the Internet (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) that connect people, even strangers, to each other. Social media
provide people with opportunities to produce and share content with others, and to extract and process community knowledge through sharing (Lewis, 2010). The increased empowerment of consumers has also led to the formation of an online society, and this consumer-dominated scenario has also shaped a powerful networking media (Muntinga et al., 2011). According to Social Media Futures, the 2009 report from the UK-based Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA), consumers are increasingly mediating messages between brands and other consumers in the social media arena, using platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. Such changes in both technologies and consumer behaviour have had significant implications for the advertising industry, giving rise to the need for marketers and advertising agencies to revisit advertising strategies and to develop new ways of engaging consumers during the communication process (Willott, 2011). Engaging with consumers in marketing and advertising activities has opened up the possibilities for co-creation with consumers, which has brought challenges to advertising agencies (Deuze, 2005; 2007). However, our understanding about the growing importance of social media in the advertising industry and work practices of advertising practitioners is still far from clear, either in the academic or practitioner literature (Allen, 2009). Moreover, the research on creatives’ roles and their identities within advertising agencies in response to the growing importance of social media has also been limited (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2011; Lee, 2013).

This study aimed to provide understanding and insights concerning creatives’ roles and role identities in response to the growing importance of social media. Adopting a qualitative, interpretive approach, it drew on 32 in-depth interviews with Hong Kong-based creatives as well as participant observations in two types of advertising agencies in Hong Kong. The interview sample was purposively selected to include 4 different types of Hong Kong-based advertising agencies, namely (1) multinational full-service agencies; (2) independent full-service agencies; (3) multinational digital agencies; and (4) independent digital agencies. The interviews were supplemented with participant observation in both a multinational full-service advertising agency and an independent digital agency. By examining advertising through the lens of the Hong Kong-based advertising creatives’ work lives and the experiences they
encountered, this study aimed to provide some insights into their roles, identities, skill-sets and beliefs in relation to the rise of social media. The findings of this research were intended to contribute to a deeper understanding of creatives’ roles and identity in advertising and organisational studies, exploring the importance of cultural context to advertising practices. The study also sought to provide useful insights to advertising agency managers concerning creatives’ skill-sets and their implications for agency structure in the social media era.

The following sections of this chapter introduce the key areas of literature that informed this study and the identification of the research gap.

1.2 Changes to the advertising landscape in the social media era

Typically, ‘traditional media’ are understood as print, radio, television, billboard and ambient media; and ‘new media’ as the media content available digitally on the Internet and mobile network (Burton, 2009). Since the last decade, media technology has undergone significant development and enhancement, including increasing levels of Internet access and usage, the global popularity of broadband, wireless networks, and the rise of computer and Internet-enabled mobile devices such as smartphones and tablets. Technological enhancement has led to diverse forms of media usage and online activities for people all over the world. Consumers’ use of these technologies has transformed society by creating a powerful network of digital media, known as social media.

1.2.1 The rise of social media

Social networking is not a new phenomenon in our society. For a long time, people have formed social groups with common interests and shared their ideas with each other. Social networks have existed online in the form of email, discussion boards, blogs and so on, since the beginning of the Internet (Hawkes & Gibbon, 2008); but
these online networks have developed rapidly in recent years. Media became ‘social’ with the development of what O’Reilly (2004) referred to as Web 2.0. O’Reilly described the openness of content construction and sharing by users on the World Wide Web as reinventing the Web itself. By facilitating information exchanges between users, Web 2.0 made media social (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Thus, social media are not an additional set of media or sub-form on top of the networking system, but have rather become an integral component and a way of using digital media as a new social phenomenon on the Internet, processing the meanings of the users themselves (Deuze, 2006; Hawkes & Gibbon, 2008). Technologies such as Ajax and Flash, with broadband and WiFi connections, made it possible to access any Web 2.0 resources freely, for example Wikis, YouTube or blogs, along with the proliferation of mobile devices such as PC, mobile phone, PDA, or game consoles.

Social media now encompass a wide range of communication forms, including blogs, chat rooms, social networking sites, forums and discussion boards. According to Nedelka (2008), these can be grouped into three categories: content syndication, content sharing and community building. Examples of content syndication are blogs, podcasts and videocasts; examples of content sharing are user-generated content, wikis and widgets; and social networks and online communities are the examples of community building.

The essence of social media is about content, sharing, conversation, openness and interaction (Hawkes & Gibbon, 2008). Through social media, users produce, design, publish and edit content. Thus, consumers are no longer passive, but participate actively in shaping and sharing the media regardless of time or geographical boundaries. They have become creators, publishers and producers (Lewis, 2010; Alexander, 2006) and are encouraged to contribute their creations and access any content whenever and wherever they want, across a range of social networking sites (Boyd and Ellison, 2008; Shao, 2009; Utz, 2010; Walker Rettberg, 2009). These features of social media appeal to human nature, since individuals want to feel a part of something bigger, and to feel important (Krishnamurthy and Dou, 2008). In other words, audiences want to feel that they, as individuals, have voices to be heard and contributions to make.
Social media have undergone tremendous development and growth. They are now influencing every country and consumer segment, both regionally and globally (Nuytenmans, 2009). The Global Web Index 2013 (GWI, 2013), which analyses social media usage and users’ behaviors around the world, points to a shift in user habits from email to social networking. For instance, Twitter and Facebook are the dominant social-networking sites, and a significant growth in Facebook users each year meant it reached more than one billion users worldwide in 2013 (Mindshare, 2013). By 2012, the world’s social network population had reached 1.33 billion, accounting for 65.7% of global Internet users (Stone, 2012). Apart from playing video games and downloading music, users engage actively in social networking activities such as reading and writing blogs, wall posting, status updates, and reading other people’s posts; these activities account for nearly 90% of the activities of social networking sites (GWI, 2013). It is apparent that people of all ages have been engaging continuously in ‘forwarding culture’, spreading ideas through social media (Jones, 2009). Ofcom (2013) reported that 64% of adults in the UK used social networking sites and that the largest group of users belong to the 16-24 age-group; the report also shows an increasing number of older people, aged 55-64, using social networks. Globally speaking, 21% of worldwide Internet users are reported as using social media actively, with an increasing numbers involved in online video content viewing and downloading figures (GWI, 2013). On the other hand, there has been a decline in viewing traditional television media channels; GWI (2013) reported an increase in Internet video viewing, for example on YouTube, which reached an audience of 1 billion audience spending more than 6 billion hours of viewing during the month of May, 2013. Consumers are engaging in multiple activities across online and offline platforms, using different devices such as smartphones, tablets, laptops and television (Google, 2012). For instance, consumers can watch programmes on television and shop using a tablet at the same time.
1.2.2 Social media and user empowerment

Some researchers, including Gere (2002), have highlighted the importance of understanding how social media have changed people’s social interactions and shaped their lives. The rise of diverse digital media devices and platforms has contributed to a new form of network society, and to what Deuze (2006) has described as the ‘digital culture’ (Deuze, 2006), in which people act and interact with each other using a new set of values, practices and expectations. In this digital culture, people are not passive receivers of messages from mass media. Instead, they have become active agents, processing meaning as well as making and assembling their own sets of values and expectations through participation, remediation and bricolage (Deuze, 2006). Some research (e.g. Colliander & Dalhen, 2011) has reflected how publicity from consumers through blogs and other social media platforms can have a strong impact in generating positive attitudes towards brands. Moreover, some consumers perceive information about products and brands on social networking sites as trustworthy, and this often affects their purchase decision-making (Chu and Kim, 2011). In other words, the digital culture has brought a strong sense of individualisation, engagement and reconstruction of meaning by consumers. For instance, bloggers have become media producers; they define what they do in their own voices and they add their own comments and perspectives to the news they share. This notion also echoes Jenkins’ (2004) reflections on the increasingly blurred boundaries between the roles of media producers and consumers of today.

Cooke (2009) suggested that social media have democratised the Internet, and allowed individuals to express and share freely, moving to a new era of sharing and collective creativity. However, there are in fact restrictions with respect to monitoring online users’ information sharing, and a recent outcry over the monitoring of social media has brought negative repercussions for online users in information sharing. For instance, a BBC technology reporter, Zoe Kleinman (2013), reported an interview with Ed Snowden, a former technical worker for the CIA, revealing that the US government had established a scheme called ‘Prism’ to monitor individual smartphones and online social activities over Yahoo, Facebook, Skype and Youtube. In China, King et al. (2013) argued that Chinese people are
‘individually free but collectively in chains.’ They noted that the Chinese government manages to eliminate some of the news and discussions shared on social media, such as child pornography or images of beheading and other information that might potentially affect the stability of the power and sovereignty created by the collective action of Chinese citizens (King et al., 2013). The Chinese government blocks social media platforms during sensitive periods. For instance, during the 18th Communist Party Congress the government blocked all Google services in China (Miller, 2012). Online searches of politically sensitive terms on information sharing networks are blocked on micro-blogs. Even though users are far more connected, informed and empowered than ever in the social media, the negative consequences of adopting social media cannot be ignored.

Although the democratic impact of social media can be overstated, digital technologies have changed the relationship between marketers and consumers. Consumers have long engaged with advertising meaning and product information as part of their everyday lives (McCracken, 1986; Mick & Buhl, 1992; Ritson & Elliot, 1999), and social media enable consumers to express, participate in and co-create marketing activities for brands (Cappo, 2003; Jaffe, 2005; Deuze, 2007). There has been a prevalence of online communication-boosted, consumer-generated content in diverse online platforms (Blackshaw & Nazzaro, 2006; Kahney, 2004) and consumers regularly initiate, create and circulate information and opinions about brands through social media channels (Garfield 2005; Jaffe, 2005). This scenario is even more significant when information shared on social media is considered by users to be a credible source (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011), and peer-to-peer conversations are trusted to influence purchasing decisions (Flatt, 2009). This all creates the potential for consumers to subvert, challenge and undermine brand stories and images circulated by marketers and advertisers, making it difficult for marketers to exert control over communications between consumers (Mangold & Faulds, 2009).
1.2.3 Confluence culture and implications for the advertising industry

The evolution of digital technologies, particularly with the rise of social media, has changed the ways in which people interact with each other. Internet users participate in the production of their social activities, and actively influence the popular culture through digital platforms (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006). It is inevitable that changes in people’s interactions have led to the emergence of new value systems within the digital culture. According to Deuze (2006), digital culture is characterised by a value system and shared expectations. People remix old and new media information and engage with it, their individual voices forming a participatory culture which is increasingly individualised and yet globally connected.

Changes in people’s values relating to the media pose both opportunities and challenges for creative industries such as the entertainment media, marketing communication, the advertising industry, and film and television production. Focusing on the advertising context, the media environment has altered the relationship between marketers and consumers. Jenkins (2004; 2006) described the phenomenon of ‘media convergence’, where content is communicated and connected across diverse media within a digital network, and where content flows in two directions: top-down from the corporate world and bottom-up from the consumers. Jenkins further suggested that there are three principal components of convergence culture: media convergence, participatory culture and collective intelligence. All three of these components indicate that the importance of participation and the collective nature of culture has required marketers and advertisers to rethink the role of consumers in relation to media production and the consumption of messages (Jenkins, 2004). Building upon Deuze’s (2006) and Jenkins’ (2006) concepts, Sheehan and Morrison (2009) described a new phenomenon which is more than a technological shift. The ‘confluence of culture’ embraces traditional and interactive forms of communication as well as consumers’ increasing engagement with mediated content, and is in the process of drawing technological, cultural, economical and social impacts together.
Many advertisers believe that the digital media platform is due to become a dominant one in the next decade (Coghlan, 2007). Overall, it seems that both technological and behavioural changes in consumers have had significant impacts on the advertising industry, requiring marketers and agencies to develop new ways of engaging consumers in the communication process. Both large and small-scale advertising agencies are paying increasing attention to social media for marketing and advertising activities, particularly on platforms such as Facebook and YouTube, in order to be more competitive in this changing market environment (Li & Bernoff, 2008; Kaplan and Haenlein, 2010). Social media are also attractive to advertisers because of the relatively low cost of reaching consumers, the potential for greater efficiency, and the ability to engage in more timely and direct-contact communication than is offered by most traditional media tools (Choi, 2011; Muntinga, 2011).

The question of how advertising agencies need to change in response to this changing environment has been discussed extensively. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) highlighted the creative challenges faced by the advertising industry in the evolving confluence culture. They suggested that confluence culture requires traditional advertising agencies to expand their ranges of services and to seek new ways to increase audience engagement in communication. They identified four major challenges to the advertising industry, in the areas of message design, consumer engagement, integration of social media, and the development of creatives’ talents and skill-sets. Based on these challenges that advertising agencies have been facing, Sheehan and Morrison (2009) argued that agencies have to move beyond the model of the ‘mass message’ and to recognize the importance of one-to-one communication and consumer interactions. They highlighted the importance of connecting and creating conversations between consumers and brands, with social media being a useful platform for both marketers and consumers to disseminate content and collaborate in creating rich and engaging brand stories.

For instance, in 2011, Domino’s Pizza, which is a quick service restaurant based in the USA, created a Facebook page to serve as a social hub in order to foster engagement with consumers and communicate the brand’s commitment to offering
better quality food (WARC, 2012). This advertising strategy from Domino’s Pizza utilised multiple social channels including YouTube, Twitter and Facebook to supply videos, capture consumers’ comments and promote conversations about the brand. By adopting social media as an advertising tool, Domino’s Pizza increased its revenue by 14.3% in the first quarter of 2010. Social media, in this case, helped the marketer to listen to consumers’ comments and suggestions for improving product quality, and it also served as a social media hub to enhance brand credibility through two-way communication with consumers. Social media have encouraged marketers to listen to customers’ feedback and comments instead of seeking one-way communication as in the past (Smith, 2009). Another case of social media being used successfully in an advertising campaign was demonstrated in Hong Kong in 2011. The advertising agency developed a social media strategy to help McDonald Hong Kong, another quick-service restaurant, to create a campaign featuring stories of a fictional created character called Dim Jack. The campaign featured illustrated stories of Dim Jack’s cravings for Chicken Agency Nuggets, which drove him to commit crimes. His addiction led him to be chased by Officer Mak. This campaign used Facebook and YouTube to encourage curiosity in consumers aged 18 to 25, the heaviest social media users. McDonald’s adopted Facebook and YouTube as the main channels to activate audience curiosity about the stories of Dim Jack. The campaign was also supported by other public relations activities. The stories of Dim Jack became popular as they were circulated and co-created among young adults and their peers. The results showed significant success in sales, with 19 million Agency Nuggets sold in four weeks, exceeding the sales goal by 26%. This social media campaign achieved a 64% increase in profits over the previous year’s Agency Nuggets campaign.

These cases illustrate how social media can not only provide advertising tools for brands, but can also help to increase consumers’ engagement, create interest and stimulate word-of-mouth communication. The new form of consumer culture created by the rise of social media has significant implications for advertising agencies however, as discussed in the following section.
1.3 Advertising agency responses to the rise of social media

The rapid growth of social media has provided both opportunities and challenges for advertisers (Taylor 2009; Truong et al, 2010). On one hand, social media have permitted advertisers to interact with consumers and provide them with a richer experience through attaining direct feedback and content exchange. They also provide valuable platforms for viral advertising and relationship building (Golan & Zaidner, 2008; Utz, 2009). On the other hand, social media have led to a fragmentation of consumers, making it more difficult in some respects for advertisers to reach their target audience (Ranchhod 2007; Scherf & Wang 2005), and negative word-of-mouth can spread rapidly among consumers (Brown, et al, 2007). In general, advertisers have not had a good understanding of how to develop effective appeal and strategies for brand-related interactions on social media (Cova & Pace 2006). A more complex and blurred line has been found between media, production and agency services in traditional and digital spaces, so that clients and their advertising agencies have had to revisit brand strategies in the digital age (Burton, 2009). Moreover, digital and social media are seen to have fundamental strategic implications for the organisation of advertising agencies and the industry in general (Benjamin & Wigand, 1995; Deighton, 1996; Creamer, 2012).

Before considering how agencies are adapting to the rising importance of digital and social media, this section first outlines how advertising agencies are structured.

1.3.1 Advertising agency structure

Typically, in the last decade, a full-service advertising agency, whether multinational or independent, functioned with five major departments: account services, account planning, finance, creative and production. Media department had unbundled from the advertising agencies since the 80s’ (Horsky, 2006). Some large-scale advertising agencies might also have included human resources, research and development and traffic departments. Each major department had its own function and they worked
collaboratively with each other, aiming to provide integrated marketing communication services for their clients - even though academic studies generally described a degree of conflict rather than collaboration (e.g. Kover, 1995; Kover and Goldberg, 1995; Hackley, 2003; Hackley and Kover, 2007). An account services department comprised account executives, account managers and account directors. They performed as a communication link between the clients and the agency and were often referred to as ‘the suits’. Account planning embraced strategic planners, whose role was to draw input to creative strategy with consumers’ insights (Crosier et al, 2011). The creative department was the creative engine and lifeblood of the business (Huws, 2006; Pratt, 2006). A creative team was usually comprised of an art director and a copywriter, and was responsible for the generation of creative ideas, creative presentation and creative production management. Some researchers (e.g. Young, 2000) studied the relationship between the creative copywriter and the art director. Creatives also worked closely with production departments that comprised TV and print producers.

1.3.2 The impact of digital and social media on advertising agency structures

Rust and Oliver (1994) pointed out that the form of advertising has always been affected by technology. In other words, changes in technology have always had significant impacts on advertising strategies as well as on the organisational structures of agencies. Although advertising agencies have been required to reinvent themselves continually, the rise of digital and social media has brought particular challenges. Indeed, Malefyt and Morais (2012) argued that the major challenges of advertising agencies in the twenty-first century are concerned with the technological impact of the media.

In 2013, global Internet advertising budgets more than doubled compared to 2007 (Ofcom Communication Market Report 2013). Moreover, WARC’s International Ad Forecast 2013/14 (WARC 2013) indicated that Internet advertising, globally, had overtaken television and had become the key driver of ad-growth in 2013/14.
According to Martin Sorrell, Chief Executive Officer of the WPP group, clients had directed around 12% of their worldwide budgets to digital channels in 2009 and consumers were spending greater proportions of their time online (Whiteside, 2009). This reinforced the need for advertising agencies to pay attention to the digital platforms, and to be concerned about consumer insights, planning strategies and creative work relevant to digital and social media. This does not mean that traditional advertising relying on communicating mass messages, such as TVC and print advertising, no longer has a place in the digital era, even if consumers rely increasingly on friends’ and family members’ recommendations about purchase decisions rather than on advertising selling messages (Morrissey 2008). As digital advertising has grown in importance, however, it has brought challenges for advertising agencies; advertising strategies based on traditional media models and experiences have had to be reviewed (Truong et al, 2010) and organisational changes in the advertising industry seem unavoidable in an era where social media are pivotal to survival for many brands and campaigns. As Benvenuto (2007) argued, the advertising landscape has changed, so advertising agencies also have to change. Baker & Handyside (2010) pointed out that the current ‘one size fits all’ model of advertising agencies has become vulnerable. Agencies need to become more diverse, offering individual specialties and added value to their clients. In general, agencies have been advised to integrate digital experts into agency structures (Hipperson, 2012) and to adopt holistic strategies to embrace consumers’ participation across social networking sites (Yakob, 2012).

Globally, most multinational advertising agencies are owned by major holding companies, with the ‘Big Four’ being Omnicom, WPP, Publicis and Interpublic. O’Malley (2009) reflected that large agencies owned by holding companies could benefit from the digital media era as they cover large geographical networks and have international clients who deliver comparatively stable revenues. However, it has also been contended that there are potential weaknesses to these groups that may constrain them, such as being unwieldy and slow to change. Large organisations can be unwieldy and slow to change due to their solid-built company cultures and beliefs. They may also lack digital talent (O’Malley, 2009). Some of their clients have taken
advantage of outsourcing trends to seek new insights from digital experts, making multinational agencies vulnerable when competing for business. In the face of these challenges, major holding companies have reported extensive plummets in profits and acute layoffs in 2013 (Sweeney, 2013).

As Chris Wall, Chief Creative Officer of Ogilvy New York, pointed out, the problem of integrating different disciplines of creative advertising involves both technical and cultural issues (O’Leary, 2008). Technical concerns include the skills required for task-completion among different processes, while cultural concerns refer to the lack of creative leaders who can embrace the knowledge of the entire process, from traditional and digital perspectives. Organisational legacy issues and profit concerns have also become obstacles for traditional advertising agencies making digital transitions (O’Leary, 2008).

Some advertising holding companies have carried out initial organisational reviews and made appropriate adaptations to their organisation structures (Hipperson, 2012). For instance, Crispin Porter + Bogusky moved from out-sourcing digital services to building them in-house. Saatchi and Saatchi (S&S) put more focus upon its digital functions since 2006 and responded with a number of initiatives, including a global joint venture with a leading global mobile marketing agency. In order to facilitate the changes in different offices, S&S has disseminated the ‘Creative Agenda for 2010’ to employees in February 2010. This document provides a useful overview of the changing directions build upon the agency’s goals and mission and the changes on strategic direction in facing digital challenges. This document put emphasis on creative directions that enhance consumers’ participation and experience with diverse human senses such as sight, sound and motion in digital platforms. It also calls for attention about the need to recruit digital production specialists and digital planners to engage consumers with digital platforms. These suggestions aim to guide agencies to achieve sustainable and profitable growth for the company themselves as well as for their clients while responding to changes in the media landscape.

1 ‘Creative Agenda for 2010’ is an internal agency document provide by industry contact
Some researchers, such as Beeching and Wood (2007), have offered advice for advertising agencies for responding to digital challenges, including the improvement of practitioners’ skill sets for increasing competitiveness, and the examination of agency procurement for minimising costs and maximising benefits for clients. However, these suggestions offer little guidance to advertising management and practitioners in terms of how they might be implemented. Furthermore, Kocheilas (2008) noted that agencies could be hampered by practitioners’ responses to change if they lack the ability to understand what ideas work and how they work in the new environments.

So far, this chapter has explored the advertising industry and the challenges it faces from developments in digital and social media. The organisational challenges discussed above undoubtedly have implications for advertising creatives, and any changes to their working practices and organizational roles require an understanding of their current situations and perspectives.

### 1.4 The impact of social media on advertising creatives

Hackley (2011) reminded us that changes in the media and advertising environment have brought great pressure to bear on the careers of advertising professionals, including creatives. Since this study is concerned with how advertising creatives experience the changes brought about by social media changes, this section outlines existing insights from the literature in this area.

Advertising campaigns are typically created and produced by a large ‘motley crew’ of personnel within and beyond advertising agencies, including various contracted or freelance professionals (Moeran, 2009). Some researchers (e.g. Caves, 2000; McLeod et al., 2009) describe this ‘motley crew’ as a combination of different personnel with diverse skills and specialized areas of work, who also bring their own personal tastes and interests to their creative organisations. One group, the advertising creatives, including artists, copywriters, art directors and creative
directors, has long played an essential role in creative idea generation and creative production (Pratt, 2005; Townley et al., 2009), bringing advertising ideas to life as well as managing and maintaining control of the production process (McLeod et al., 2011; Malefyt & Moeran, 2003).

However, as explained earlier in this chapter, rapid developments in digital and mobile communication technology, and increasing levels of consumer empowerment and engagement, have led to the blurring of boundaries between different marketing communication disciplines, and between the roles performed in traditional advertising agencies (Hackley, 2003; Peng & Hackley, 2007; Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2011). Consumers, planners and account executives have all begun to contribute to creative content (Hackley, 2003c; Peng and Hackley, 2007). User-generated content with online advertisements consisting of the consumers’ video content have been adopted by agencies for their clients. For instance, Doritos launched an advertising contest named ‘Crash the Super Bowl’ in 2006 and invited people to create and upload ads on the web. The winning ads were determined by online voting and the winning consumer-generated commercials have been showcased during the Super Bowl every year since 2006. This is just one example of consumers participating actively in the creating, producing and judging of marketing activities. Social media have offered a multi-platform for consumers to share stories and for advertisers to incorporate consumer-generated content into advertising campaigns, so that the consumers become co-creators and producers (Lewis, 2010). Such interactions between consumers on social media platforms and the rise of user-generated content pose particular challenges to creatives in terms of their professional identities, skill-sets, creative-client and creative-consumer relationships (Hackley, 2011; McLeod et al., 2011). Creative control over advertising in both local and global advertising agencies is more contestable than ever (Deuze, 2007), but these issues are still under explored.

Some researchers (e.g. Grabhner, 2002; McLeod et al., 2011) have described the skill-sets employed by creatives in realizing advertising strategies as crucial in maintaining excellence in advertising. Sheehan & Morrison (2009) pointed out that there was a lack of training in responding to digital media changes and that this was a
major challenge for creatives. Moreover, many traditional advertising creatives have not been willing to change and, faced with the challenge of updating their skill sets, have been reluctant to leave their comfort zones (O’Leary, 2008).

Apart from creatives, the other traditional main players in advertising are the planners and the account managers, and these groups tend to have different standpoints on daily advertising practices within agencies (Hackley, 2003a). According to Kover (1995), creatives tend to see other account team and planners as enemies. In my previous working life in advertising agencies in Hong Kong, these tensions were apparent between creatives and account managers. I saw how account managers overrode creatives’ advertising ideas in order to satisfy clients’ requirements. These tensions often disrupted relationships between creatives and other agency staff, and this had a detrimental impact on advertising business and development. If the rise of social media has influenced the creatives’ roles and creative practices, there might also be impacts on the working relationships between creatives and account teams, planners and clients.

According to Ty Montague, co-president and CCO of JWT, it is essential to integrate creatives with professionals who have different expertise so that they can work as peers, and a new system of advertising management is necessary in order to prevent the traditional creatives from overruling the digital people (O’Leary, 2008). Benvenuto (2007) suggested a new concept for the structure of creative teams, which she called the ‘Creative Hydra’- a multi-headed, multi-brained monster. This concept involved the incorporation of new roles into the traditional partnership in addition to the traditional role of the copywriter - art director team, including a ‘technical creative director’ and ‘an interaction designer’. She also suggested that planners would have to work together with the creative team to provide direction and inspirational planning in order to meet particular advertising challenges. Instead of traditional advertising briefs, which include background information and the big ideas (Kocheilas, 2008) or a singular message, planners would need to provide the creatives with insights along four dimensions: perceptual, behavioural, technical and cultural. This reinforces the need for organisational restructuring in advertising agencies, in order to integrate communications and draw on digital expertise in order
to meet the needs of clients and consumers in this era of digital and social media (Willott, 2011). However, the implications of such organizational changes on creatives’ work roles, working practices, and professional identities are not well understood.

1.5 The importance of an Asian perspective

Although there have been some recent studies which have examined the impact of social media and digital culture on the advertising industry and advertising agencies, they have tended to focus on the western marketplace, and explorations in an Asian context have been limited. Indeed, with notable exceptions such as Moeran’s (1996, 2006, 2009) studies of Japanese advertising agency practice, most research on the work of advertising agencies is based on Western cultures.

Cultural differences raise particular challenges for the advertising business as well as advertising creative development in Asian markets such as Hong Kong. The emergence and rapid development of social media in the Asian market have prompted the need for research on how the Asian advertising industry in general, and Asian advertising creatives in particular, are responding to the challenges and opportunities posed by social media. Hong Kong is a particularly interesting context to study, because since 1998, the Hong Kong Commerce and Economic Development Bureau has been striving to develop Hong Kong into a leading digital city and promoting the adoption of information communication technology in all industries, paying particular attention to the creative and media industries (HKSAR Yearbook 2011).

Further research on agency practice from an Asian perspective is likely to contribute to knowledge by exploring the relevance of existing knowledge generated in Western contexts to a different culture, and by examining how an Asian culture might shape the experiences of advertising practitioners. There are some differences in social media uses between Asian and Western markets. Asian consumers’ use of social media tends to be motivated by a collective culture (Chi, 2011). For example, while
American consumers tend to be more active in online shopping and entertainment, Asian consumers tend to be more active in information sharing activities on social networking sites (Smith, 2010).

1.6 Summary and introduction to remaining chapters

This chapter has sought to provide the context and underlying rationale for the current study, and has described how the emergence of social media has influenced the advertising industry. It has argued that the rise of digital and social media has led to fundamental changes in the advertising industry in general and to the role of advertising creatives in particular. Advertising creatives work at the boundary between agencies, clients and consumers, so understanding creatives’ experiences in relation to the rise of social media will contribute to knowledge of how these media are changing the advertising industry and advertising work.

This study seeks to explore how and to what extent Hong Kong advertising creatives are coping with the rise of social media. It seems that we know little about how their work roles, working practices and professional identities are developing in response to the rise of social media. Moreover, it is clear that there is relatively little research exploring advertising agency practices, or advertising creatives’ roles and identities, from an Asian perspective, despite the rapid rise of social media in Asian markets and the value of exploring these phenomena within a collectivist culture.

The remainder of the thesis is structured as follows. Chapter 2, presents a review of recent literature, organised in terms of three key areas of knowledge (Figure 1): (1) toward an understanding of social media (2) the work of advertising creatives and advertising agencies (3) roles, role identities and role transitions. There is an interwoven relationship among these areas of inquiry, and the research gap becomes apparent from the discussion of them.
Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, including the aims and the research questions. This chapter also presents the reasons and the justification for adopting interviews and participant observations for addressing the set research questions. Interpretive, discourse analysis is used to analyse the generated data and the details are explained further in this chapter.

Chapter 4 presents the discourse analysis of the interview data extracted from the 32 interviews conducted with advertising creatives in the four types of advertising agencies in Hong Kong. It explains the process of data generation and the key findings generated from these interviews are discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 5 presents and discusses the key themes developed from the analysis of qualitative data generated from field observations in two advertising agencies in Hong Kong: a multinational full service agency and an independent digital agency.
Chapter 6 concludes the findings of this study. It outlines the contributions of the research and the implications are explained. This chapter also identifies the limitations of the study and some further research directions are suggested.
Chapter 2 Literature Review:

Social Media, Advertising Creatives and Role Identities

This chapter establishes the theoretical framework for this research by reviewing a range of literature about social media, advertising creatives and role identities. Specifically, the chapter addresses the areas of: (1) the rise of social media and its relationship to consumer culture for the advertising industry; (2) the work of creatives in advertising agencies; and (3) the role identities of advertising creatives. The theoretical framework discussed in this chapter facilitates the identification of research gaps and the design of the study described in Chapter 3.

2.1 Towards an understanding of social media

A phenomenal proliferation of social media platforms in recent years and the dramatic increases in consumers’ usage of these have had a significant impact on the media landscape (Mangold & Faulds, 2009; Choi, 2011; Hill & Moran, 2011). Before discussing how social media have reshaped the advertising landscape, it is important to establish what is meant by the term ‘social media’.

Social media, describe by the Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008, p. 5) as ‘the convergence of user commentary with video, photos, and music sharing, all present in a simple, user-friendly format’, have provided consumers with the vehicle for such mass dissemination of their content and viewpoints (Interactive Advertising Bureau 2008, p. 5). Kaplan and Haenlein (2010, p. 61) further defined social media as the platform that builds on user experiences and technology, enabled by a set of Internet-based applications and Web 2.0 for the creation and exchange of user-generated content. In other words, social media connect people on the Internet with the support of Web 2.0 and a range of applications that facilitate users’ interactions, participations and collaborations. According to Kaplan and Haelein (2010), the term Web 2.0 was first used in 2004 to describe the participative and collaborative use of
the World Wide Web in creating and publishing content by both software developers
and end-users. The rapid growth of social media has been expedited by both
hardware and software development. The popularity of broadband access and third-
generation mobile devices has facilitated faster and more convenient access to the
Internet (Berman et al., 2007a; Ferris 2007; Light & Lancefield 2007). Web 2.0
opened the gate for users to generate and share content on the Internet, and this
allows them to engage actively in discussions (Cooke, 2009).

Social media enable the rapid growth and distribution of user-generated content
(UGC) (Vanden Bergh et al., 2011). The Interactive Advertising Bureau (2008)
defined UGC as ‘any material created and uploaded to the Internet by non-media
professionals’ (p.1). The term UGC gained its popularity in 2005, and is usually used
to describe the diverse forms of media content that are generated by Internet users
and published through the social media. According to the Organisation for Economic
Cooperation and Development (OECD) in 2007, UGC consists of three basic
features: First, the content should be created by non-media professionals, such as end
users, ordinary people, hobbyists or other kinds of amateurs (OECD 2007, p. 8).
Second, UGC is created material that should involve the creative efforts of non-
media users’ to develop or modify existing content. Third, UGC is material that is
uploaded to the Internet and can be accessed by the public through online platforms.
These online platforms included social networking sites (SNSs) (e.g. Facebook,
MySpace & Friendster), audio and visual content-sharing sites (e.g. YouTube &
Flickr), collaborative websites (e.g. Wikipedia) and microblogging sites (e.g. Twitter
& Weibo). Among the various types of online platforms, SNSs have received the
most noteworthy attention from different sectors including research, education,
industrial practices and policy making (Boyd & Ellison 2007; Ellison et al., 2007;
The wall 2008; 2009; Valenzuela et al., 2009; Choi, 2011). This is because,
according to Boyd and Ellison (2007), one of the crucial components of SNSs is the
public display of connections. In other words, individuals share in each other’s lives
by sharing their profiles, or even friends’ profiles, through diverse SNSs. For
instance, Facebook is currently the most dominant social-networking site, having
reached a membership of more than 1.11 billion across the globe in April 2013 (Smith, 2013).

2.1.1 Social media consumption patterns

According to the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) in 2013, 39% world population were using the Internet; that is over 2.7 billion people. Europe is the region with the highest Internet penetration rate in the world, which accounting for 75% of its population, followed by the USA with 61%. The popularity of the Internet has also been enabled by the uptake of high-speed broadband (at least 10Mbit/s). This high-speed broadband is particularly well developed in some Asian countries such as Hong Kong and Japan. According to comScore’s (2013) report, Mobile Future in Focus, there has been a significant increase in the adoption of smartphones and tablets around the world. Mobile-broadband subscriptions had climbed from 268 million in 2007 to 2.1 billion in 2013. Users adopt mobile phones for online media viewing and other consumption activities. There is no doubt that consumers have become more reliant on digital mobile devices for everyday social activities and consumption. The proliferation of Internet penetration and broadband subscription, as well as the popularity of digital mobile devices, has made significant impact and changes to the media landscape. At the same time they have shifted consumers’ behaviour.

The high adoption rate of the Internet and the popularity of adopting mobile devices suggested that consumers are engaging actively with tasks on diverse digital platforms. According to the reports from World Newsmedia Network 2012, Internet users’ main activities include browsing on the Internet, searching for information such as checking on maps and news, listening to and downloading music and videos, watching sports events and news, playing games, sending emails and communicating through social networking. The Internet and the popularity of mobile devices are indeed driving the social engagement of users. It appears that, among all smartphone apps on iOS and Android platforms, the Facebook app (application, a piece of
software that tailors websites to mobile devices, for example) is the most popular app downloaded in 2012 (comScore, 2012). This implies that social engagement has become one of the major usages of mobile devices. Approximately two out of every three mobile users are accessing social networks or blogs actively, and these activities rank among the top mobile media uses (comScore, 2012). In addition, Ofcom’s 2010 report noted that 16-24 year-olds in the UK are generally the most active group on social networks, playing online games, sending text messages, and watching videos on the Internet. In other words, these young people spend a great deal of their time online communicating with people, particularly on social networks.

According to eMarketer (2012), while the number of worldwide social network users increased nearly 20% in 2012, the Asia-Pacific region recorded the second largest growth rate of 24.8%. This implies that the power of social engagement through social media is at least as influential in Asia as elsewhere. Mobile devices enable consumers to make their purchases online with ease, as an alternative to the traditional in-store shopping experience. Thus, to a certain extent, social media have become a more convenient and direct way for consumers to conduct information exchange on brands, comparing product features and prices (Chu & Kim, 2011). Apparently, e-commerce and mobile commerce have accelerated with the growing popularity and adoption of Internet-enabled mobile devices (Dholakia & Dholakia, 2004). Moreover, the new 4G-connectivity means that consumers will increasingly have access to faster and more robust mobile media, not least for the purposes of streaming video (e.g. Datta, Izdebski, Kumar & Suh, 2013). While there is still plenty of room for growth in the US and European markets, developing countries, including China, will be the focus of expansion for mobile markets, taking into account the population and the burgeoning middle class (Qiu, 2009).

Moreover, social media are not only a form of technological advancement; they also play a role in shaping consumer culture, and this can have an impact on the marketplace as well as on the advertising industry. Thus, the rise of social media has created challenges for the traditional advertising ecology (Sheehan & Morrison, 2009). It is essential, therefore, to explore the relationship between consumers’
activities and the rise of social media, and how this influences advertising. Therefore the following section discusses the emergence of social media and its relationship to consumers. Emphasis is placed on understanding consumers’ activities when using social media, their role in the social structure, changes in the consumer culture brought about by the growth of social media, and the challenges and opportunities for the advertising industry in relation to the changes in consumer culture.

2.1.2 Consumer culture

Consumer culture, then, is concerned with inter-relationships between consumers’ symbolic expressions through the market and their economic, political and social resources. In Arnould’s and Thompson’s (2005) highly influential paper, consumer culture is presented as a social arrangement in the marketplace, creating relationships between social resources and culture as it is lived, and between meaningful ways of life and material and symbolic resources available to people.

According to Kozinets (2001), consumer culture constitutes an interconnected system that uses commercial images, texts and objects to create a collective sense of consumers’ environments and their experiences through the construction of overlapping meanings. Consumers negotiate and interpret meanings, particularly in relation to their social roles, relationships and situations. Therefore, consumer culture shapes consumers’ feelings, actions and thoughts, and eventually their interpretations and patterns of behaviour in the marketplace (Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Holt, 1997; Askegaard & Kjeldgaard, 2002; Kozinets, 2002).

There are many perspectives on the tradition of Consumer Culture Theory (CCT) and many contributions to knowledge that have been made by interpretive consumer research. Some CCT researchers (e.g., Sherry & Kozinets, 2001; Holbrook &
O'Shaughnessy, 1988; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988) have drawn on theory from scientific and methodological perspectives, while others (e.g., Belk, 1987; Holbrook & Hirschman, 1982) have shown interest in understanding aspects of the field, such as the cultural dimensions of consumption, in particular contexts. In general, CCT research has focused on experiential and socio-cultural perspectives of consumption, which may not be accessible through experiments or surveys (Sherry, 1991). Researchers aim to study consumer experiences and meaning-making processes (Arnould & Thompson, 2005), extending the understanding of consumption culture within a social structure.

Some researchers (e.g., Arnould, 1989; Hirschman 1993; Wilk, 1995; Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Belk et al., 2003; Coulter et al., 2003) have worked within what is now referred to as the CCT tradition in examining consumer culture and the system of consumption in order to understand the system of meanings behind them. Some researchers (e.g., McCracken, 1986; Thompson & Haytko, 1997) have focused on cultural production systems such as marketing communication, while others (e.g., Sherry & McGrath, 1989; Sherry, 1990; 1998; Price, Arnould & Tiemey, 1995; Price & Arnould, 1999; McAlexander et al., 2002) study consumers’ experiences, reflecting on the social system. Other researchers (e.g., Hirschman, 1988; Hetrick & Lozada, 1994; Murray, Ozanne, & Shapiro, 1994; Murray & Ozanne 1991; Hirschman & Thompson, 1997) look at consumer culture in relation to advertising, with particular attention paid to commercial messages about consumption and consumers’ responses to commercial messages. Some consumer culture researchers (e.g., Mick & Buhl, 1992; Scott, 1994a; 1994b; Deighton & Grayson, 1995; Ritson & Elliott, 1999) decode and deconstruct cultural production systems and the consumer ideologies that have been shaped by advertisements and other marketing communications. It has long been argued that advertising plays a role in shaping consumers’ lifestyles and forming consumer culture, and that some consumers’ lifestyles and values exist in opposition to corporate power and the dominant culture (e.g., Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Dobscha & Ozanne, 2001; Kozinets, 2002).
Some researchers (e.g. McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988) have looked specifically at the co-constitutive and co-productive interactions between consumers and marketer-generated materials from cultural perspectives. For example Hannerz’s (1992) ‘distributed view of cultural meaning’ highlights the complexity, mutation and instability of consumers’ lives that are influenced by society, cultural myth and ideologies. Although it has been argued that the distributive view of cultural meaning does not actually come from consumer culture theory (e.g., Arnould & Thompson, 2005), this scope of study enriches our understanding of consumer culture and the constitutions of particular manifestations in society in general and markets in particular. In short, consumer culture theory indeed addresses the dynamic relationships between cultural meanings, consumer actions and the marketplace (Arnould & Thompson, 2005).

According to Arnould and Thompson (2005), there is a set of theoretical questions centred in CCT, namely the relationships between consumers’ personal and collective identities and the cultures embodied and created in the marketplace. This type of research has generally focused on consumer experiences and identities in everyday life have been shaped by cultural meanings, socio-historic factors and social dynamics (Wallendorf & Arnould, 1991; Thompson et al., 1990; Peiialozam 1994; Holt, 1997; 1998; Fournier, 1998:). To elaborate further, many researchers (e.g. Deighton & Grayson, 1995; Firat & Venkatesh, 1995; Schouten & McAlexander, 1995; Belk & Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2001; 2002; Holt, 2002; Joy & Sherry, 2003; Schau & Gilly, 2003; Holt & Thompson, 2004; Martin, 2004) have argued that consumers are living in multiple realities every day and using consumption to experience these realities. Thus, CCT researchers are interested in investigating how consumers consume (Holt, 1995). CCT illuminates the consumption cycle by furthering studies in contextual, symbolic and experiential arenas (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). This theory and research also helps to understand the entire consumption cycle, which includes acquisition, consumption, possession, and disposition processes, by studying these phenomena from various theoretical perspectives (Hirschman & Holbrook, 1982; McCracken, 1986; Belk, 1988). In addition, some CCT researchers have focused on commonalities in the
consumption interests of consumers (e.g. Belk and Costa, 1998; Kozinets, 2002), by exploring for example subcultures of consumption (e.g. Kates, 2002), the consumption world (e.g. Holt, 1995), consumption microcultures (e.g. Thompson & Troester, 2002) consumer tribes (Cova, Kozinets & Shankar, 2007) or brand communities (Muñiz & O’Guinn, 2001; Algesheimer, Dholakia & Herrmann, 2005).

All in all, CCT research seeks to address the experiential, symbolic and socio-cultural perspectives of consumption. Arnould and Thompson (2006) categorised four distinct research areas within the CCT tradition: (1) Consumer Identity Projects - researchers look at the co-constitutive and co-productive ways in which consumers and marketer-generated materials interact, as consumers. This helps them to understand how consumers are using the symbolic and material resources in the marketplace in order to meet their goals. These kinds of consumer identity projects are understood to be goal-driven (Mick & Buhl, 1992; Schau & Gilly, 2003); (2) Marketplace Culture – researchers look at popular culture in the consumer’s world by studying their feelings about social solidarity and how they make purchasing decisions within marketplace culture; (3) Socio-historic Patterning of Consumption – researchers look at the relationships between consumers’ experiences, their belief systems and practices within a social structure in order to explore the influences of consumption in institutional and social structures; and (4) Mass-mediated Marketplace Ideologies and Consumers’ Interpretive Strategies – researchers look at consumers’ meaning-making activities and how these activities embrace the lifestyle and identity ideals created by mass media from ideological perspectives.

It is essential to highlight the socio-historic patterning among these four research perspectives of consumer culture theory research. This is because consumers perform certain actions and improvisational moves influenced by their history of socialization as well as the norms and rules from socio-historical influences. Overall, with the emergence of social media, consumers have shifted from being relatively passive members of the consumer culture, to having a leading position in actively creating social (rather than simply personal) meanings and promoting these meanings to their communities through digital networks. In other words, for the purposes of this study,
the CCT literature highlights the need to address and explore the inter-relationships between consumers, advertising and broader market changes. Social media, used and shaped by consumers, form a multiplicity of cultural meanings and these meanings affect others within the market, including marketers and advertisers.

2.1.3 Consumer culture and the changing advertising landscape

Social media have been integrated into many aspects of people’s daily lives, from personal to social and business activities (Ellison et al., 2007; Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010; Muntinga, 2011). In particular, social media have transformed how people connect and communicate with each other (Choi, 2011). Today, many consumers around the world are connected with each other online whenever and wherever possible through social media. In 2013, 41% of the households in the world were connected to the Internet, with over 2.1 billion mobile-broadband subscriptions (Telecommunication Development Bureau, 2013). Western consumers, such as those in Europe and the USA, have been found to focus on personal competence and to prefer social media as a way of searching for information before consumption, whereas Asian consumers, particularly those who are Chinese, emphasize social relationships and prefer to use social media as a form of group communication and discussion (e.g. Bellman et al., 1999; Wharton Virtual Test Market 2001; Chau et al., 2002).

More and more consumers are engaged actively in online brand-related activities with a wide variety of social media platforms, such as blogs, social networking and video sharing sites (Smith, 2009; Mutinga et. al, 2011). Social media have indeed brought changes to the entire consumer culture, which has eventually changed the advertising landscape. This section discusses the relationship between consumer culture and the changing advertising landscape, with the discussion centred on meaning production and the mediation of meaning.
Before the rise of social media, McCracken (1986) mentioned how cultural meanings were mediated through consumer goods to individual consumers.

Cultural meaning in a consumer society moves ceaselessly from one location to another. In the usual trajectory, cultural meaning moves first from the culturally constituted world to consumer goods and then from these goods to the individual consumer. (McCracken, 1986 p. 1)

Several consumer culture theory researchers (e.g. Tse, Belk & Zhou, 1989; Witkowski, 1989; Thornton, 1996; Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Coulter et al., 2003) have identified the importance of cultural milieux and marketplace cultures in shaping consumer experiences and identities. Some researchers have studied the impact of economic and cultural globalization on consumers’ identities and their patterns of social interaction (Arnould, 1989; Belk et al., 2003; Bonsu & Belk, 2003; Coulter et al., 2003). Others have investigated and analysed particular marketing communications in the fashion industry (e.g., Thompson & Haytko, 1997). By and large, consumer culture is a system of meaning-making processes that channels and reproduces consumers’ thoughts and actions (Hirschman, 1993).

Mass media play an essential role in formulating or articulating dominant interests in society. Advertising is seen to play a crucial role in media industries, which in turn shape consumer cultures through commercial broadcasting and newspaper publishing (Kawashima, 2006). Percy et al. (2001) highlighted that advertising involves turning consumers towards a particular brand by cultivating long-term positive brand attitudes and promotion. In other words, advertising, to a certain extent, provides a kind of social education in meaning production while seeking to stimulate consumers’ brand-related desires and social aspirations (Williams, 1980; Baudrillard, 1988). Advertising also represents a cultural world, people and the complexity of experience (MacRury, 2009). Advertisements embody sign systems and display layered levels of meaning in relation to social beliefs and cultural contexts (Leiss et al., 2005).
In view of how advertising influences consumer culture, some researchers (e.g. Pollay, 1986; Williams, 2000; Aldridge, 2003) have claimed that it is one of the major mechanisms for creating needs in a consumer culture. Put simply, the power of advertising is that it appears everywhere in television, radio, newspapers, magazines and, nowadays, new social media. Advertising helps consumers to achieve their desires by creating symbolic meanings for consumption (e.g. Bauman, 1996; Featherstone, 1991). It also helps consumers to construct consumption reference groups, eventually leading to the creation of consumption norms. In other words, advertising creates more desire for consumption. This norm of consumption creates what Bauman (1996) described as ‘styles of consumption’. Marxists in fact have portrayed advertising as a ‘magic system’ (Williams, 1980). In any case, this norm of consumption has been flowing across the globe through the operation of advertising mediascapes (Appaduri, 1990), and it creates strong paternalistic influences on consumers and constructs their consumer culture. It has been suggested that consumers cannot fully avoid the influence of advertising; according to Williamson (1986), its influence is working at an unconscious level of meaning transfer. It is indeed an ideological hegemony (Goldman, 1992), which has a central role in capitalism (Leiss et al., 2005). Rather than simply influencing consumer behaviour and values, it seems that the advertising industry plays a pivotal role between consumers’ consumption patterns, the meaning making undertaken by marketers and advertising agencies and the meaning making undertaken by consumers as individuals and as members of particular groups.

Post-structuralists have suggested that the individual must take responsibility for consciously creating a self-identity in order to resist this market-driven influence (Bauman, 1988). By creating a self-identity, consumers can exercise the freedom to create new meanings for consumption (de Certeau, 1984). This freedom of choice can give rise to individual and perhaps collective resistance to the influences of advertising (e.g. Sartre, 1969; Hebdige, 1979; Condit, 1989; Fiske, 1987; 1989).

More specifically, Willis (1990) emphasized that individual choice and the creation of meaning and identity arise because individuals use advertising images as personal
and social resources. These practices particularly appear among young people (O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson & Elliott, 1995). For example, Ritson and Elliott (1999) argued that, while advertisements create a social resource to draw upon when making jokes and conversation, few of these interactions actually put pressure on consumers to buy the product. This is because consumers develop their own distinctive lifestyles shaped by many factors, and these lifestyles may be positioned against dominant consumerist norms (Murray & Ozanne, 1991; Kozinets, 2002). Some researchers, including Mick and Buhl (1992), Scott (1994), and Ritson and Elliott (1999), have even suggested that consumers critically reinterpret media and advertising ideals. This in turn suggests that more effort has to be invested in studying the organisation of production and the interaction between consumption activities and production, in order to understand this cultural economy (Pratt, 2004; Scott, 1999). In this area of study, consumer culture theory researchers (e.g. Hetrick & Lozada, 1994; Hirschman, 1988; Murray et al., 1994) have investigated how consumers make sense of these messages and formulate their critical responses in consumption.

The emergence of social media, particularly among the younger generation, creates a perfect platform for the construction and communication of self-identity and offers a new type of reference group against the dominant influences of advertising and marketers. As Loudon (1993) highlighted, social media can support the rights of consumers, and help them to become more powerful in relation to the marketplace. In order to cope with this complexity, there is a need to consider the context of consumer culture further (Arnould & Thompson, 2005). Research in marketing management has already provided some directions for studying advertising in the marketplace. For instance, some researchers (e.g. Leiss et al., 1997) have treated advertising as a form of communication that reflects social trend and values, while others (e.g. Sinclair, 1987; Williamson, 2002) engaged in the semiotic or textual analysis of advertisements. Still others have investigated the role of advertising in the development of a consumer culture (e.g. Davidson, 1992; MacRury, 1997, 2009). Other than this, there have been some researchers who studied the economic or organisational lives of the advertising industry (Alvesson, 1994, 1998; Hackley, 2002; Grabher, 2002; Cronin; 2004; McLeod et. al., 2009). Undoubtedly, the study
about consumer culture and its impacts is increasingly important in the transnational capital and global marketplace (Amis & Silk, 2010).

From the perspective of the socio-historic patterning of consumption, recent research has paid attention to consumers’ experiences of social media. The emergence of social media has affected consumption practices as well as consumers’ belief systems. Prior research on consumers’ experiences (e.g. Arnould & Price, 1993; Celsi, Rose & Leigh, 1993; Kozinets, 2001; Kates, 2002; Thompson & Troester 2002) supports the view that consumption activity fosters the collective identification of shared beliefs, meanings and social practices. Consumers form online networks on social media and have become more dominant in the marketplace, not only through their responses and reactions to what would previously have been seen as the dominant interest, but also by potentially playing a leading role in social and marketing activities through sharing, meaning-making and peer persuasion within social networks (Hill & Moran, 2011). Digital, online networks have become a meaningful and powerful medium of communication, and this social phenomenon affects communication in the market as well as the advertising industry (Choi, 2011; Hanna et al, 2011).

2.1.4 Consumer culture in the social media era

Consumers now have a very direct and intimate connection with the advertising industry, as well as with advertising creatives. They play a crucial role in influencing advertising strategies and creative ideas. Consumers have become increasingly involved in contributing ideas and opinions about brand building and promotional activities due to the impact of social media (Garfield 2005; Jaffe, 2005; Hill & Moran, 2011; Muntinga et al; 2011). In traditional marketing communication, messages were designed by marketers and advertising agencies, and transmitted to consumers through the mass media. However, it can be argued that marketers may not be able to claim that ‘we know what consumers want’ in the digital age (Azua, 2010). It is essential for further research on marketing and advertising to rethink the
relationship of consumers and marketers with the emergence of social media. Understanding consumers is a complex matter and should involve the consideration of consumption, consumerism and the consumer culture. As Aldridge (2003) highlighted, it is important to discuss and debate consumption and consumerism while studying consumers. In view of the focus of this research, the changes in consumers with the emergence of social media have had a significant impact on the advertising industry and advertising ecology in general, and on the role transition of advertising creatives in particular. It is therefore crucial to discuss the interwoven relationship between the concepts of consumption, consumerism and consumer culture in order to tease out the underlying factors of how consumers influence the advertising industry in the new era.

Researchers (e.g. Slater, 1997) have carried out studies of consumption from various disciplines and perspectives, including rational behaviour in economics and the study of cultural context in sociology, psychology, anthropology, cultural theory and media studies (Miller, 1995). Studies examining the relationship between consumption and self-concept have also been undertaken (Gidden 1991; Thompson & Hirschman, 1995; Elliott, 1997). All types of consumer research are essential to offer a holistic view of our modern life. This is because people’s lives are indeed operated in the sphere of consumption (Gidden, 1991; Firat & Venkatesh, 1994; Slater, 1997). Furthermore, according to Slater (1997), the relationship between our lived culture and social resources is mediated through the markets. The creation of the self-concept in contemporary society is presumably inseparable from consumption (Gabriel & Lang, 1995; Elliot 1997; White & Hellerich, 1998). Moreover, Elliot (1997) explored consumption in relation to the symbolic meaning of consumers’ resources. Nonetheless, the symbolic meanings associated with ways of life and the material resources are central in our everyday lives (Kleine et al., 1995; Elliot, 1997). Consumers consume products, activities or beliefs not only to satisfy their needs, but also because they want to tell themselves - and others - who they are and with whom they identify through what they buy (Elliot & Wattansuwan, 1998); as described by Gergen (1991), consumers feel ‘alive’. All in all, these studies have generated a greater understanding of consumption experiences that can provide relevant
managerial insights to marketers (e.g. Holt 1995; Thompson, 1997). Therefore, changes in consumers with respect to their beliefs and behaviours are crucial in affecting marketers’ planning and marketing activities and, hence, the role of advertising creatives in the advertising development process.

Consumerism is defined as a social movement of citizens and government protecting consumers’ rights and the power of buyers in relation to sellers (Loudon & Britta, 1993; Aldridge, 2003). Pressure groups have been formed to test goods and services on behalf of consumers. These groups also provide recommendations and campaign to promote consumer rights. Thus they are helping to empower consumers as citizens, advocating their rights and protecting them from being deceived or from being abused by the sellers’ power. This goal is achieved by providing objective information to help consumers to make rational choices. Consumerism has been defined as an ideology as well as a way of life, and this lifestyle is geared to possession and acquisition (Lyon, 1994). This ideology also raises the importance of individual values in the marketplace. The emphasis on individual values brings the development of consumerism and its potential stimulation to social and cultural restructures. It is easy to understand how consumerism changes our individual values, since some researchers (Miller, 1997; de Certeau, 1984; Douglas & Isherwood, 1996) have pointed out that it is one of the significant factors in constructing individuals’ meaningful life experiences within social structures. Consumerism also helps to establish and reproduce social stratification through consumption, leading to the commercialization of culture (Bourdieu, 1984). It is, therefore, clear that consumerism and consumer culture have been changing and shaping our culture and social structure by building every consumer’s’ individual values.

In relation to the formation of consumer groups, William (1976) pointed out almost forty years ago that consumers mutated into a bourgeois political economy. Consumer organisations acted both as pressure groups and as information sources for other people, sharing values and opinions (Kozinets & Handelman, 2004). Hence, with the emergence of social media, consumers form their communities through the
shared networks. The emergence of social media changed consumer culture by giving consumers greater autonomy in constructing their own lifestyles and values within their social networks. Although consumers have always had autonomy in making purchasing decisions, the emergence of social networks has allowed them to participate further in brand and product development, for instance through consumer-generated online discussion forums created by consumers for particular brands or products (Chatterjee, 2011; Chu and Kim, 2011).

Within the social networks online, consumers are no longer adopting a passive role in relation to dominant media; they have become a part of the media, constructing and promoting cultural meanings and values for consumption within their consumer culture (Lewis, 2010; Lessig, 2013). Such social change possibly creates resistance to the traditional dominant interests communicated through advertising and the mass media (Lessig, 2013). It differs from the traditional resistance from consumers towards advertising and the mass media, since consumers had never been able to group together on such a large scale or with such ease using previous communication platforms. Advertising creatives, then, need to understand the changes of consumer culture in order to react and survive in the marketplace (Sheehan and Morrison, 2009).

We are aware of the increasing use of digital technologies and its relation to consumers’ daily lives. Social media, incorporating social networking, peer media, social media, digital media, PR, and Web 2.0, allow people to connect, interact, produce and share content (Lewis, 2010). Thus, empowered with the connective and interactive features of social media, consumers no longer play as passive a role in receiving media messages as they did in the traditional media era. Therefore, social media have challenged the listening or passive consumer economy (Smith, 2009) where professionals controlled mass communications and consumer feedback in the form of comments from users was virtually impossible to project to the world (Smith, 2009).

Unlike traditional mass communication, in which messages are generated and
delivered from marketer or corporation; the rise of social media has enabled consumers to take an active role in publishing, commenting and reviewing content (Lessig 2008); and enabled audiences take over the say about what, how and when to watch programs and commercials (Kwak et al, 2009). Consumers are more connected, informed and empowered than ever in the social media age and they take an active role in generating and sharing content that they find meaningful to themselves (Choi, 2011). Such a shift about UGC has forced marketers to pay attention to what consumers say about their brands and to listen to what consumers want from the brand (Lee and Youn, 2009). In other words, consumers are taking an active role in participating in the production of commercial content. Consumers create and disseminate content that they find meaningful to themselves (Flight 2005). Muñiz & Schau (2007) suggested that consumers are capable and skillful enough to create brand-relevant content with a sense of advertising style and logic. Today’s consumers are no longer passive buyers, they are creators, distributors and end users of media content (Benkler 2006; Jenkins 2006; Lessig 2008). Because many consumers are exchanging information and interacting with each other through social media platforms, some use social media to exert their power and influence over other consumers or companies (Muntinga et al, 2011). Some researchers (e.g. De Bruyn & Lilien 2008; Lee & Youn, 2009; Chatterjee, 2011) studied how consumers influence others over the social media in terms of brand choices and decision making. Brand managers, in return, make use of consumers’ word-of-mouth (WOM) to build a critical mass to influence other consumers’ views on their brands (Chatterjee, 2011).

2.1.5 Social media challenges and opportunities for the advertising industry

Social media have brought a significant change to all kinds of businesses and industries. Much prior research (e.g. Deighton 1996; Benjamin & Wigand 1995; Cronin, 1994) indicates that the emergence of digital media has had a significant impact on business strategy and planning. The increasing numbers of users of social networking sites such as Facebook imply that social media will become the mainstream advertising medium (Nuttney, 2010). Communities, as a form of
consumer network, play a significant role in creating a win-win economic scenario for marketers and consumers (Sharma, Klein & Bhagat, 2008), but keeping pace with these ‘new forms of customer empowerment’ (Cova & Pace 2006) is now a significant task for marketers and advertisers.

Social media open up diverse opportunities for the advertising industry and marketers. They enable consumers to exchange information about products and brands. From the marketers’ perspective, they have a huge amount of natural information about consumers' consumption habits, tastes, opinions, lifestyles and attitudes available online and for free (Needham, 2009). Most importantly, they have social data: identity (who you are), contacts (who you know) and activities (what you do). Personal profiles on sites such as MySpace, Bebo and Facebook allow marketers access to preferences, allegiances, recommendations and conversations they could not have dreamt of, even five years ago. As there are communities for every niche, the same data richness can be found for every brand, sector or topic. It is always up to date, being added to spontaneously by consumers (Needham, 2009).

With the proliferation of social media users, marketers’ attention is drawn to this form of ‘earned media’ that helps them to gain favourable publicity and promote their marketing efforts (Lipsman et al., 2012). The power of social networks to influence other consumers seems key to organic growth in social media (Chatterjee, 2011). Many studies (e.g., Cha 2009; Hoy & Milne 2009; McMahan, Hovland & McMillan 2009; Sohn 2009; Zeng, Huang & Dou 2009; Kelly, Kerr & Drennan 2010) have shown that consumers have used social media to influence other users’ responses, such as shopping preferences, buying decisions and perceptions of marketing communication. Marketers seek to exploit these ‘new forms of customer empowerment’ (Cova & Pace 2006) by developing a greater understanding of their target customers and interacting with them more effectively (Okazaki 2006, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). Many have realised the importance of engaging their consumers in product development, customer relations and marketing communications (Smith, 2009). They hope to leverage social media to establish a critical mass of consumers who interact with their brands and become influencers of other consumers through
social networking sites (Chatterjee, 2011). In this sense, social media can be a suitable platform for viral advertising and marketing (e.g., Golan & Zaidner 2008; Utz, 2009) and electronic word of mouth (e.g., Libai et al. 2010). Social media open doors to marketers to contact consumers directly and engage them in a timely way with their brand-related activities beyond the function of traditional communication tools (Okazaki 2006, Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010).

Social media platforms are used increasingly to communicate directly with consumers and engage them in timely marketing activities (Kaplan & Haenlein, 2010). For example, marketers disseminate diverse marketing activities and product information through Facebook fan-pages and at the same time users can obtain updates on brand information, and are invited to join brand groups by clicking the ‘like’ button (Shapiro & Varian 1999; Nelson-Field et al, 2012). Marketers’ use of consumers’ ‘like’ responses on their brands’ Facebook pages has increased dramatically (Cashmore, 2010).

Social media also brings challenges for the advertising industry and marketers. Expecting digital media to be dominant in the coming decades (Coghlan, 2007), agencies report that building advertising and communication through social media are at the top of their business agendas, and believe that social media will help them to enhance their competitive advantage in the marketplace (Choi, 2011). However, advertisers and agencies are struggling to keep up with the fast pace of change in digital media and are failing to define social media strategies (Truong et al, 2010). Advertising industries see social media as a cultural fad and they are also concerned about the potential risks in terms of business models, revenue impact and lack of talent in agencies when the adopt social media for advertising (Blake, 2013).

Social media also bring financial challenges for advertising industry business models. There have been many debates concerning the most appropriate methods for measuring success, and there also seems to be some confusion over what the ROI of social media should be (Stelzner, 2013). Blake (2013) highlighted the challenges to the agency revenue model, that the one based on media spending and agency fees
may no longer be legitimate in the social media era. In terms of advertising practice, Blake (2013) surmised about issues of workflow and the lack of talent in the social media era. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) highlighted the need for training and development of creative talents. Growing and training talents also take time and effort. While agencies add talented people on board, they worry about the loss of talents at the same time.

The rise of social media is not only affecting the marketplace, but also has a direct impact on advertising agencies and their structures; it seems that agency structures that follow the ‘one size fits all’ model may not be well suited to the active engagement of consumers using the Internet and social media. More fluid and flexible organisational structures and flexible employment patterns are being adopted, due to the changing nature of work, particularly in terms of individualized and competitive work arrangements (Heckscher & Donnelon, 1994; Grey, 1998; Nicholson & West, 1988 Marchington et al., 2005). In the US, the structures of advertising agencies structure are very diverse. Advertising in New York is undertaken by organizations ranging from mega-agencies to very small-scale ones, and they provide services ranging from broad-based branding and consumer advertising to very specialised advertising such as that for medical supplies and services (Hackley & Kover, 2007).

Advertising creatives play a significant role in connecting consumers and marketers through creative ideas and advertising strategies. Creatives contribute a great deal of symbolic meaning of brands as well as having a broader influence on consumer culture (Kelly et al, 2005). Therefore, the rise of social media is likely to affect many aspects of creatives’ work and identity, as well as the challenges associated with the requirement for new knowledge and skill sets, that is closely linked with the role of creatives in the social media era. The following sections review previous research on advertising creatives’ work, roles and identities.
2.2 The work of advertising creatives and advertising agencies

A growing number of ethnographies have described and analysed advertising culture and the practices of advertising agencies (Moeran 1996; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2010; Miller, 1997; Kemper, 2001; Mazzarella, 2003, Malefyt & Moeran, 2003; Nixon, 2003; Nixon & Crewe, 2004; Kelly et al., 2005; Malefyt & Morais, 2012). For instance, Moeran (1996; 2005; 2006; 2009; 2010) examined the life of advertising practitioners in a Japanese advertising agency through ethnographic studies. These ethnographies have deepened our understanding about the advertising culture and the practices of advertising practitioners and advertising agencies, and this understanding provides us with better knowledge about agency management, agency practices and clients-agency relationships.

Nowadays, advertising agencies appear in different scales and specialisations. Global advertising agencies, sometimes referred to as multinational agencies, have led the advertising business for global brands and clients in the last decades (Faulconbridge et al, 2011). In facing the economy and the changes in the media landscape, the advertising industry underwent rapid consolidation through merging and acquisition by the holding companies (e.g. WPP, Publicis, Omnicom, Interpublic) in the 1980s (Ducoffe & Smith, 1994). Multinational advertising agencies owned by holding companies continued extending advertising to marketing communications in recent years and they provided full spectrum of services of brand management that including mass media advertising, public relations, and direct marketing. Parker (2005) provided a world overview of advertising agencies. In recent decades, there has been an increasing number of small and medium size national advertising agencies emerging; some are established as creative boutiques, which specialise in creative ideas development, while some put emphasis on digital specialisation. Horsky (2006) examined the different structures of advertising agencies and highlighted some criteria used by clients to choose agencies. Crain (2010) revealed some of the confusions faced by clients when choosing advertising agencies and service ranges.
Each advertising agency has its own unique structure and organisations. Kelley & Jugenheimer (2009) depicted two major organisations of advertising agencies: some are structured as departments with different specialisations while some are structured by accounts and are composed of multi-functional teams. Malefyt & Morais (2012) described the structure, function and work processes in advertising agencies. An advertising agency’s work is a complex network relationship that involves internal and external stakeholders’ cooperation (Grant et al, 2012). Nixon (2003) stated that environmental changes also mark changes in agency structure. Advertising agencies are service-oriented and organised according to departments with different functions. A typical full-service agency consists of an account department, an account planning department and a creative department (Nixon, 2003) and is bundled with a media firm that offers media planning and buying services (Horsky, 2011). In some agencies, the accounts department and account planning department are combined and known as an account management department (Vanden Bergh, 1986). An accounts department includes the functional roles of account managers and account planners. A creative department includes the functional roles of creative directors, art directors and copywriters and are referred to as ‘advertising creatives’ or ’creatives’ in general. The traffic department includes a traffic manager, who oversees the administrative work of advertising production (Nixon, 2005). In some agencies, the traffic managers align with the creative production unit within the creative department. Apart from full service agencies, there are creative boutiques, which specialise in creative ideas consultation or services requiring specialist skills, and sometimes serve as subcontractors of full-service agencies (Horsky, 2006).

In an advertising agency, creatives play a vital role in developing advertising ideas and production (Kelly et al, 2005; McLeod et al., 2011). Creatives work in two-person teams comprised of art directors and copywriters, under the supervision of creative directors. They are the originators of the advertising ideas, although many different stakeholders, such as clients and media specialists, affect the creative development (Stuhlfaut, 2011). There are some differences between the roles of art directors and copywriters during the creative process (Jackall & Hirota, 2000;
Gilmore, 2005; Hackley & Kover, 2007; McLeod et al, 2009; McLeod et al, 2011); although both are concerned with creative idea generation and advertisement development, the art director is responsible for the design of the advertising including the crafting of visual images and graphics layouts, while the copywriter works on verbal dimensions including headlines and copywriting of advertisements (Young, 2000).

Creatives are very devoted to the crafting of visuals and words for their creative ideas. They have strong pride and passion in relation to their work, and believe that their ideas reflect their individual identities (Hackley and Kover, 2007; Malefyt & Morais, 2012). Creatives feel a sense of ownership over their ideas (Hirschman, 1989; Kover &Goldberg, 1995; Young, 2000). Traditionally, advertising creatives were in command of producing the creative content of advertisements (Hackley & Kover, 2007), although their legitimacy has always been challenged within agencies (Hackley, 2003a). Creatives tended to be protective and defensive about safeguarding the originality and ownership of creative ideas and did not like to accept changes to their creative ideas, especially from non-creatives, and often considered such changes to be a violation of their artistic integrity (Kover, 1995; Kelly et al, 2005).

Several studies have noted that advertising creatives do not depend on a standard structural path within a single agency for career advancement; instead they mostly seek career advancement via 'job hopping' (Pratt, 2006) as they move to agencies with stronger creative reputations (McLeod et al, 2009; 2011; Nixon, 2003). Thus, creatives traditionally work in their own interests and for individual benefits such as building up their own reputations and creative identities. The creatives’ work and their individual portfolios are the main sources of their professional reputation, which is why industry awards are seen as important assets for future job opportunities and career enhancement (McLeod et al, 2009; 2011). Hence, creatives may become resentful if there are any changes to their ideas that will impinge upon their creative identity or integrity (Hackley & Kover, 2007).
Creative teams are under the supervision of creative directors or group creative directors. Creative teams work closely with wider account teams in advertising agencies (McLeod et al, 2009). Account teams include account managers, commonly referred to as 'the suits', and account planners who work on external relationship with clients (Grant et al, 2003). Account managers supervise the development of an advertising campaign and liaise between clients and the agency. Account planners are responsible for strategic planning that incorporates research insights into campaign planning (Crosier et al. 2003; McLeod et al, 2009). Creative work normally goes through an internal review process by the creative directors and account team before they are presented to clients. Creative directors are the gatekeepers of creative output and quality control and account managers and account planners judge the work according to how they anticipate it will appeal to their clients and consumers (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). Creatives depend upon account managers and planners to provide clear direction through advertising strategy and creative assignment briefing, while creatives express the strategy as advertising ideas for presentation to clients (McLeod et al, 2009; Malefyt & Morais, 2012). In an agency-client relationship, the clients usually interact with the agency through the account directors or managers in advertising planning to improve and encourage creativity of advertising (Grant & McLeod, 2007; Suh et al, 2011). In other words, the creatives seldom communicate with their clients directly, but rather through account managers within the agency in a dyadic client-agency relationship (Grant & McLeod, 2007).

Within the creative team, some researchers (e.g. Young, 2000; Moeran, 2006) have noted that art directors and copywriters may have different perceptions of creative development. Different roles performed within an agency, may lead to disagreements and tension, the result of divergent interests during the creative process (Hackley, 2003). For example, Malefyt and Morais (2012) argued that advertising creatives are imaginative and distant from the pragmatic orientation of account managers in advertising agencies. Similarly, Miller (1997) identified different perceptions, and even conflict, between creatives and account teams, suggesting that this might be because creatives are ‘artists’ and account managers work for ‘commercial concerns’
for their clients. Kelly et al. (2005) argued that creatives appreciate the need for their work to be commercially relevant as well as artistic. Thus, different roles and perspectives in advertising agencies can create fundamental conflicts in work environments. Hackely (2003) suggested that the dynamics and agency conflicts are in relation to the different epistemologies of consumer research held by planners, creatives and account managers within an agency. However, conflicts in an agency are not necessarily a problem and, instead, can drive agencies’ dynamics (Pelled et al., 1999). Some research has stressed creative conflict and tension, for example that ‘creative abrasion’ can facilitate innovation and learning in an organisation (Leonard-Barton, 1995). Verbeke et al (2008) suggested that ‘a willingness to openly discuss, debate and argue’ is constructive in knowledge-intensive and creative industries like advertising (p 123). A constructive networking and collaborative advertising planning environment can flourish creativity (Grant et al., 2012).

Account managers may have different goals from creatives. For instance, account managers usually prefer to sell safer and more direct approaches to clients because they are eager to please their clients and to reduce arguments and conflicts. However, creatives may often go for more risky and edgy ideas in order to challenge clients’ boundaries of risk taking and acceptance (Kover et al, 1997; Morais, 2007). Account managers believe that creatives push novel approaches and creative executions, even if these are not helpful to the brand. Put simply, creatives are more tolerant of uncertainty and risk (West, 2001). This strong sense of ownership may explain why creatives are distinctive from other advertising practitioners. This sense of ownership also suggests that the creative’s perspective on advertising success is different from that of other advertising practitioners or clients (Hirschman, 2003). To a certain extent, this may also shape the strategy and direction of an advertising agency, which might be different from the client’s expectation. As Malefyt and Morais (2012) explained, agencies and clients tend to have divergent goals; an agency may aim to build up its profile with a strong creative portfolio to maintain existing clients and attain new business. Clients, on the other hand, are likely to be concerned about brand and product sales and project development. Nonetheless, this sense of ownership of creative ideas is a key factor in constructing the creative’s identity.
Some researchers (e.g., Kover, 1995; Kover & Goldberg, 1995) examined the experiences of creatives, in particular of copywriters, in relation to the creation and production of advertising in agencies; and others (e.g., Hirschman, 1989; Young, 2000; Hackley, 2003) examined the roles of different advertising personnel who create and produce advertising. Other researchers are interested in the advertising production processes in relation to the class and backgrounds of creatives. For instance, Kelly et al. (2005) studied the work practices involved in the advertising production process of an Irish advertising agency. They suggested that advertising creatives draw on their cultural knowledge and experiences of the social world as raw material in constructing advertising meaning. Likewise, McLeod et al. (2009) examined the social class background of advertising creatives in UK agencies. These studies have suggested that class differences and the backgrounds of advertising creatives can impact upon their career choices, progression and work orientation. Stuhlfaut (2011) investigated the set of implicit theories held by creatives on creativity within an advertising agency in the US.

Moeran (1996, 2005, 2006, 2009, 2010) explored Japanese advertising agency practitioners and creatives. Most research on advertising creatives has been based on the study of Western countries, and there has been limited research on employee creativity in non-western settings (Madjar, Oldham, & Pratt, 2002). For instance, West (1993) studied creative personalities, processes and agency philosophies based on agencies in the UK, US and Canada. Hackley and Kover (2007) explored New York advertising creatives’ professional identities while Nixon and Crewe (2004) wrote of the heavily masculine environment of London-based advertising creatives. McLeod et al. (2009) examined the social class backgrounds of advertising creatives in Britain while Kelly et al. (2005) studied their working practices in Ireland. On a more macro level, Pratt (2005) explored agency restructuring and creative governance in the UK advertising industry. However, there is little understanding of Asian advertising agencies in general and of Chinese agencies in particular.
With the increase popularity of digital media, Kocheilas (2008) suggested that the rise of user-generated content on social media has extended the nature of creativity and will make the role of the advertising creatives more important than before. Various calls from agency practitioners about the re-structuring of advertising agencies have appeared and they are looking for directions to cope with the challenges and opportunities in response to the fast proliferation of digital media (O’Malley, 2009). There are changes in the agency structure, technology and working practices of the advertising industry and there are conflating experiences of creatives with other roles, including account planners and account management, in the agencies of today (Hackley & Tiwsakul, 2011). Indeed, advertising creatives’ roles have received relatively little focused attention in prior research.

Given the limited research that exists on advertising creatives’ roles, the following sections review literature primarily from organisational studies, for insights into roles, role identities and role transitions that may apply to advertising creatives. The final sections of the literature review then consider what is known about the Asian context for advertising and advertising creatives.

### 2.3 Roles, role identities and role transitions

Previous sections have indicated that the emergence of social media has created challenges and opportunities for consumer culture, the marketplace and the advertising industry. These changes seem likely to affect the traditional role of advertising creatives, in particular their role identity, role expectations and performances. Therefore, this section focuses on the role identity of advertising creatives. Emphasis is placed on the nature of role and its psychological motives; identity construction in organisations; the relationship between professional identity and organisational identity; the study of role expectation and performance in organisations; and the role of advertising creatives in an era characterised by the growing importance of social media.
2.3.1 The nature of roles

The term ‘role’ appeared a long time ago, in the social science literature of the 1920s and 1930s. In *Mind, Self and Society*, George Herbert Mead’s (1934) most influential work, he employed the concept of ‘role taking,’ along with related areas of role like the ‘generalized other’, ‘self’, ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘audience’ (Thomas & Biddle, 1979). Roles can be institutionalized or commonly expected and understood as designations in a given social structure. According to Linton (1936), these individual roles constitute a series of patterns. For instance, an individual may be positioned as an ‘accountant’ at work, a ‘mother’ in the family and a ‘church member’ in a religious institution.

Biddle (1979) suggested that ‘role theory’ is the major construct for integrating the studies of role and human behaviour in the social sciences. In the social sciences, there are two sociological perspectives on roles: the structural-functionalist and the symbolic interactionist (e.g. Blumer, 1969; Herman-Kinney, Reynolds, 2003). Structuralists define roles as ‘sets of behavioural expectations associated with given positions in the social structure’ (Ebaugh, 1988, p. 18), and view them as functional for the social system within which they are embedded (Parsons, 1951; Merton, 1957b). Symbolic interactionists view roles as emergent and negotiated between individuals (e.g., Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). In other words, any particular role is constituted and jointly defined by individuals’ subjective perceptions and preferences, and their coordination of behaviours. Structuralists tend to view roles as fixed and largely taken-for-granted positions, whereas symbolic interactionists tend to view them as fluid and always negotiable shared understandings.

Some role theorists (e.g., Allen & van de Vliert, 1984; Nicholson, 1984; Meyer, Allen & Topolnytsky, 1998; Nicholson & West, 1989) have used the term ‘role’ to mean shared expectations held by the role set; some to designate patterned predictable behaviors; and some to refer to social or occupational positions held. Nevertheless, researchers (e.g. Weick, 1995; Ibarra, 1999; Pratt et al. 2006) generally believe that employees’ perceived role identities will influence how they act and
interpret their work situations. In other words, roles are defined on the basis of expectations that include their own self-expectations and the normative expectations of co-workers. Ashforth, 2001) defined ‘role’ simply as a position in a social structure, and the study of ‘role identity’ as being about the behavioural expectations in a specific role. Thus, roles help individuals to formalize tasks and capture services by negotiating a personal space (Ashforth, 2001). Negotiation plays a very crucial part in role identification, particularly in the advertising industry, where employees (particularly creatives) are the core asset (Nixon & Crewe, 2004).

Roles link to interdependent or complementary roles in a social system (Biddle, 1979). In order to understand the individual’s role more clearly, Ashforth (2001) conceptualised it in terms of three major constructs: (1) role boundary (the environment); (2) role identity (the nature or content) and (3) role expectation (the social expectation for behaviour). This framework has been used to aid the understanding of work performance in organisations (van Knippenberg, 2000; Olkkonen & Lipponen, 2006; Walumbwa et al, 2008; Walumbwa, Cropanzano, & Hartnell, 2009).

A role boundary refers to whatever delimits the perimeter and, thereby, the scope of a role (Ashforth, Kreinet, & Fugate, 2000; Ashforth, 2001). Most employees have a clear distinction between their family and work roles, however, the owner of a small family business may have a comparatively little distinction between these two roles (Ashforth, 2001). It is important to note that the role boundaries are imposed and/or socially constructed (Ashforth, 2001). Epstein (1989) explained earlier that the individual will take the role boundary for granted once it has been constructed. In other words, individuals might not realize their role boundaries because they are seen as natural and perhaps immutable.

Role identity refers to the various meanings attached to an individual by the self in a social system. In other words, these meanings may be based on the social roles that people hold as well as the characteristics that they display and others attributed to them based on their conduct (Gecas, 1982; Ashforth & Mael, 1989). An individual’s
role identity shapes how he/she reacts to organisations and social structures (Ashforth, 2001). In fact, role identity has been used in many previous studies to predict a variety of behaviours (Callero, 1985; Riley & Burke, 1995; Ford, 1996; Grube & Piliavin, 2000; Drazin et al., 2000). The third element of Ashforth’s classification is role expectation. This places demands and constraints on specific individuals, while their behavior provides their social peers with information about the extent of compliance with expectations (Ashforth, 2001). Moreover, an individual not only shapes his/her normative behavioural expectations, but is also affected by other individuals occupying counter-positions and interdependent role in a social system (Katz & Kahn; 1978; Jackson, 1998). Thus, Biddle (1986) argued that ‘social systems are presumably better integrated and interactions within them proceed more smoothly, when normative consensus is obtained (p. 62)’.

Role expectations and performances of agency employees are linked closely to clients’ satisfaction in a client-agency relationship. In other words, an agency may fail to satisfy its clients because of unmet expectations and requirements. Ashforth (2001) suggested that an individual’s role identity is defined by the role set in general, which can be multifaceted under different situations within an organisation. Beard (1999) suggested that employee experience role ambiguity occurs if there is a lack of a clear role requirement and expectation associated with work leading to poor performance and hence to dissatisfaction in the client-agency relationship.

All in all, then, it seems that roles can be interdependent, complementary or even conflicting within social systems (Biddle, 1979; Ashforth, 2001). Lack of clarity or certainty about the requirements or expectations associated with the role cause ambiguity and can lead to conflicts associated with the role (Beard, 1996). A role identity provides the definition of the role and helps to develop a clear sense of who and what people are in a social system. Role identity is particularly crucial to a person’s role because it is associated with the goals, values, beliefs, and normative ways of thinking and acting in a social system (Ashforth, 2001). The nature of role identities is discussed further in the following section.
2.3.2 Identity and role identity

Knowing oneself starts with asking the questions ‘Who am I?’; ‘Where do I belong?’; ‘How should I act?’ These are the core areas of identity and human behaviour. Identity is linked closely with an individual’s feelings, thoughts and values with respect to a particular direction (Alvesson, 2000). Mostly, decisions that form identity are affected by the self-concept, which is an inherent logic reflecting one’s self-image (Mitchel et al., 1986). In this context, another essential question arises, namely ‘How is one’s identity constructed?’ This topic has been studied in previous research (e.g. Tajfel, 1981; 1985; Weick, 1995; Jenkins, 1996; Van Wijk & Leisink, 2004). For instance, Tajfel (1981; 1985) believed that identity itself appears just as it is. In other words, identity is static and should not be influenced by social negotiation.

However, other researchers (e.g. Weick, 1995; Jenkins, 1996) argued that it is constructed through social negotiations and sense-making processes. According to Alvesson (2000) and Van Wijk & Leisink (2004), identity is constructed dynamically through social interaction in the form of narrative as well as information sharing. This suggests that studying identity is a complicated issue involving self, social negotiations and interactions. However, how do social negotiations and interactions affect the construction of identity? And what is the process of constructing identity in a social context, particularly in the workplace? Different researchers have offered different perspectives on this process. For instance, McCall and Simmons (1978) saw it is self-judging; Riley and Burke (1995) as self-regulatory; some researchers (Burke & Tully, 1977; Riley & Burke, 1995) stressed that it is interpretative, and Farmer et al. (2003) argued that it is reflexive.

Riley and Burke (1995) suggest that the self-concept is about the set of meaning that a person holds of him/herself. It is based on both how we look at ourselves as well as how others act toward us. The self-concept includes both the idealised view of who we are and also the view based on other situational influences (Burke, 1980). Indeed, some researchers (e.g. Callero, et al., 1987; Ford, 1996) found that social expectation
has a strong impact on the development of an individual’s role identity. However, others (e.g. Barron & Harrington, 1981) have claimed that creative individuals usually possess a strong creative self-image, although this does not explain the relationship between creativity and self-concept (Dowd, 1989).

It is far more difficult to build a coherent self-identity in modern society due to the fragmented and rapidly changing environment, since identity is more open and connected to personal as well as social changes (Giddens, 1991; Willmott, 1994; Bauman, 1996; Sennett, 1998). The rise of social media has fundamentally changed the construction of social groups; for instance, people can have friends without geographical boundaries - individuals can make and maintain friendships in Asia, Europe or any corner of the world. This rapidly changing environment has an impact on the construction of self-identity. Therefore, studying personal and social influences is more complex and it is crucial for understanding identity construction.

Weic (1995) suggested we could understand the identity construction work from four levels: personal, interpersonal, organisation and symbolic (Weic, 1995). Although Van Wijk (2004) suggested that an ideal identity is constructed from the symbolic level, it could be argued that all levels contain certain symbolic influences and that identity is inherently an image of an individual. Nonetheless, there are also social influences that are shaped by a complex mixture of conscious and unconscious elements (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). According to Alvesson and Willmott (2002), when individuals engage in social interaction and mass media communication, conscious and unconscious elements can be produced and distributed in the form of messages, which contain language, symbols, sets of meanings and values. In other words, the study of their language and their meaning would be the important cues for understanding identity construction work.

At its simplest, role identity can be explained as a self-view (Burke & Tully, 1977), and it has been argued that individuals’ self-images are constructed mainly by their social roles (Piliavin and Callero 1991). Under the general rubric of identity (e.g. Turner, 1978; Schlenker, 1986; Brewer, 1991; Burke, 1991; Cheney, 1991; Thoits,
1991), there are two key role identity theories commonly supported by researchers: (1) Identity Theory (IT) (Hogg, Terr & White, 1995; Thoits & Virshup, 1997) and (2) Social Identity Theory (SIT).

Identity Theory (IT) emerges from the study of symbolic interactionism and was first developed by McCall and Simmons (1966), and later by Turner (1978) and Stryker (1980). As Mead (1934) explained some years earlier, the individual’s sense of self is based mainly on the perceptions of others. In other words, individuals construct the self from seeing themselves through the eyes of others in social interactions and the internalization of collective meanings, standards and values (Stryker, 1980; Burke, 1991). In other words, role identity is based on individuals as well as their relationship to society. Stryker (1980) further elaborated that role identity is structured and limited by the numbers of relationships in which one is involved; similarly, other researchers have described the attributes of role as ‘role sets’ (Ashforth, 2001). This term ‘role sets’ refers to various roles that are linked directly or indirectly to the focal role. For instance, a working member’ role set in an organisation would be his/her working peers, superiors, subordinates and other people associated with the person in the workplace. Looking at one’s role identity in relation to one’s family roles and work performance also help to reflect a person’s action and behaviour (Wiley, 1991). For instance, several researchers (White & Burke, 1987; Curry & Weaner, 1987; McAdam & Paulsen, 1993; Piliavin & Callero, 1999; Grube, 2000) studied role identity in order to understand people’s participation in civil rights activities (McAdam & Paulsen, 1993), commitment to sports (Curry & Weaner, 1987) and participation, retention and commitment to volunteer work in organisational contexts (Piliavin & Callero, 199; Grube, 2000). Öhlén (2002) also studied role identity in the nursing profession, specifically how it facilitates the development of role responsibilities.

Social Identity Theory (SIT) researchers (Tajfel & Turner, 1986; Robinson, 1996) and those who described the extended Self Categorization Theory (Turner, Hogg, Oakes, Reicher & Wetherell, 1987) explained that an individual’s sense of self is created by personal identity, in which a set of idiosyncratic attributes is embedded,
namely dispositions and abilities, and a social identity which consists of salient categories of people, such as nationality. Similarly, Levita (1994) pointed out that every individual is playing a unique role of personal identity and another role of social identity. In other words, every individual seeks to classify himself/herself within different social environments and to use this classification to distinguish between people and subgroups of people (Mael and Ashforth, 1995). Based on this assumption, Tajfel (1982) introduced two key elements for further analysis, suggesting that identification is based on (1) a cognitive component, which implies the perception of diverse social categories and how an individual locates himself/herself in one or more categories; and (2) an affective component, which is a signal function (Thoits, 1989; Harquail, 1998) that helps the individual to draw attention to his/her identity in relation to social value connotations. For instance, Ebaugh (1988) noted that a female, in different social categories, might have different roles in the same context, namely wife, lawyer and French. However, SIT researchers argued that each individual possesses a sense of his/her uniqueness, which can be treated as a personal identity. This personal identity encourages individuals to seek distinctiveness within collectivity (Brewer, 1991), a formulation well suited to the Asian context. Further, according to Ashforth (2001), once an individual has adopted a particular role identity (e.g. I am a teacher), he/she expects and creates a certain preliminary conception of self (e.g. concepts of being a teacher) that are comprised of beliefs, traits competences, values and expected ways of thinking and feeling.

Perry (1997) explained that role identity consists of core features that are important and necessary, and that help to construct the typical characteristics of a role (Ashforth & Kreiner, 1999). Ashforth (2001) suggested another dimension along with role in relation to a given situation (e.g. a specific context, setting or encounter). The individual keeps framing and reframing the meanings of given roles which are socially appropriate to a given situation so that he/she can feel positive about him/herself (Ashforth, 2001). In such a given situation, the individual seeks a definition of the situation in order to clarify his/her role(s) and relationships with others within that particular context; this can be described as ‘situational relevance’.
Some researchers (e.g. Swann, 1990; Stryker & Serpe, 1994) stated that individuals use the subjective importance of identities to define a given situation. This is central to the core sense of self and closer to his/her values and other core attributes (Miller, Urban & Vanman 1998). According to Ashforth (2001) individuals may group themselves depending on the context and their subjective importance and situational relevancy; both of these constructs help researchers to understand the role identity of an individual. In sum, although there are differences between SIT and IT, both theories are consistent in understanding role identity in relation to self and social situations.

Role identity is a function of commitment to a specific expectation (Farmer et al., 2003). A specific role identity generates some meaningful attributes about oneself and about others (Burke & Tully, 1977). Thus, the importance of an employee in an organisation can be reflected by his/her role identity and the set of expectations surrounding it. According to Farmer at el. (2003), role identity stems from two main sources: (1) associated self-views (Riley & Burke, 1995) and (2) feedback from social relations. Similarly, Callero et al. (1987) stated that people tend to behave in accordance with their roles; they attempt to seek support and verification of themselves (Riley & Burke, 1995; Petkus, 1996).

Apart from a self-viewed perspective, role identity is also derived from sets of expectations from others through social interaction. For instance, normative expectations are derived through reflexivity. People perceive themselves as a ‘social others’ through seeing how other people expect them to be (Yang, 1981; Callero et al., 1987; Markus & Kitayama, 1991; Farmer et al. 2003). In other words, role identity reflects an internalized set of role expectations and it affects what people do and how they react (Yang, 1981; Farmer et al., 2003).

Role identity becomes internalized because the social and personal costs entailed in no longer fulfilling a specific identity-based role increase as particular role behaviours continue over time (Stryker, 1980). According to McCall and Simmons
role identities motivate role performance and the relevant role is critical for self-validation (McCall & Simmons, 1978) and self-verification (Markus & Wurf, 1987). Role identity is tied closely to self-identity, and the more central an individual’s role identity is, the higher is the probability that the individual’s behaviour can be consistent with that identity (Stryker, 1980). Thus, the concept of role identity has been useful in predicting a variety of behaviours (Callero, 1985; Riley & Burke, 1995; Grube & Piliavin, 2000). In particular, although research is lacking in this area, it has been suggested that if an individual has a strong creative role identity, he or she is likely to be more creative at work (Petkus, 1996; Fisher, 1997).

However, role identity tends to result in role-consistent performances only when the demands of a situation are consistent with the enactment of that identity (McCall & Simmons, 1978). When situation-specific demands are inconsistent with a highly salient role identity and identity-consistent actions are not valued or confirmed, the identity will be threatened, and the identity holder will experience feelings of distress (Burke, 1991). The importance of these situational factors highlights the point made by Alvesson and Willmott (2002) that roles are not given by planned procedure or scripted rules. Rather, they are improvised while interacting with others, so that people engage continuously in forming, maintaining, strengthening, repairing, or revising the expectations that are coherent with self and perceived identity.

2.3.3 Identity construction in the (creative) workplace

In view of the organisational context of interest to this study, it is important to understand how an organisation’s members construct their identity in relation to their working environment. People working in an organisation engage in identity construction; they are trying to achieve a strong and coherent self-concept in relation to their work tasks and social relations (Alvesson, 2000). A strong employee role identity is central to the development of an individual’s sense of self, and creates a
strong commitment to protect his/her identity, and motivates role performance (Markus & Wurf, 1987; Burke, 1991).

Creativity is affected strongly by intrinsic motivation, and a strong creative role identity is an important driver for creative performance (Amabile, 1988). Research in organisational studies contributes to understanding of the relationships between organisational and self-identities, not least in creative industries. Several researchers (e.g. Stryker, 1980, 1987; Amabile, 1988; Burke, 1991; Woodman, Sawyer, & Griffin, 1993; Drazin & Schoonhoven; 1996; Petkus, 1996; Ford, 1996) found a strong relationship between role identity and organisational creativity in the workplace. Creative individuals usually have strong self-images linked to their creative work (Barron & Harrington, 1981). Furthermore, individuals with strong creative role identities are expected by their peers to be more creative at work (Yang 1981; Barron & Harrington, 1981; Pratt 1990; Petkus, 1996; Fisher, 1997), and employees are more likely to define themselves as ‘creative’ if their co-workers expect them to be so (Farmer, Tierney & Kung-Mcintyre, 2003).

Amabile (1988; 1996) suggested that the organizational environment should promote the value of creativity in work performance. In fact, more and more senior managers have realized the importance of encouraging their employees to be creative in tackling unpredictable technological changes in an increasingly competitive marketplace (Shalley & Gilson, 2004). Some studies (e.g. Amabile, Conti, Coon, Lazenby, & Herron, 1996; Madjar et al., 2002; Zhou & George, 2001) have shown that employees’ creativity within the workplace is developed through mutual support, open communication, encouragement and informational feedback. Openness and accessibility are intrinsic values of social media (Saunders, 2010), which suggests that its growing popularity has the potential to increase employee creativity.

Given the focus of this study on advertising creatives, who are acknowledged as crucial employees within their knowledge-intensive industry (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003), the following section reviews literature on professional identity.
2.3.4 Professional identity

Before discussing professional identity, it is crucial to define the terminologies of profession, professionalization and professionalism. According to Evetts (2005), a profession is a qualified occupation with distinct and generic categories of work, and it includes service-based and knowledge-based work. A profession offers legitimacy and status for the occupational group and constructs boundaries around it (Abbott, 1988; Larson, 1977). In other words, a profession is an occupational group that requires distinctive education, and uses this learned occupation to form a community of professionals and barriers to entry. Gustafson (1982) introduced three criteria to characterize professions: (1) a profession is able to learn and apply an extensive body of knowledge to approach real-world situations; (2) a professional has a standard and an identity in work which are aligned with the requirements of the professional community; and (3) a professional intends to address individual and community needs. It is important to identify an occupational group as a profession since this helps to enable the individual’s professional identity with the professional community (Netting, 1996). This professional, expert identity is a source of power in dealing with clients, although there has been much discussion of modern professionalism being in crisis (Pfadenhauer, 2006) as consumers/clients have greater access to information and can challenge a professional’s advice.

Professionalism is a term used in researching occupational change, particularly the process of development in professions (Evetts, 2005). Evetts (2005) defined it as ‘the process to pursue, develop and maintain the closure of the occupational group’. This seems to be an ultimate goal for forming an occupational group. It explains why it is essential to stay together within a professional community. Siegrist (1990) called it ‘the sum of all processes’ in the development of a profession, leading participants to a higher working status. Professional identity is one of the core areas for understanding changes in professionalism.
Professional identity is commonly described as the distinct role of a professional, and this identity affects a professional’s behaviours and self-concept (Empson, 2004). It can be developed from the possession of special knowledge and skills in a particular domain, and from the internalisation of a set of values (Alvesson, 1993). Regarding the aforesaid ‘closure of a professional group’, a professional’s behaviours and self-concept are influenced by other members of the professional group, and the common norms governing it. One of the key functions of professional identity is to help a particular group of professionals to distinguish themselves from other professions and from other occupations in general (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002; Empson, 2004).

Although the traditional concepts of professional identity have been discussed substantially within the area of sociology (e.g. Abbott, 1988), they have been challenged by social change. Cooper, Hinings, Greenwood, & Brown (1966) gave a clear explanation of this:

‘The attributes which sociologists of the professions used to identify as the hallmarks of a professional, such as education, vocation, esoteric knowledge, self-regulation, and civility, have been replaced, or at least augmented, by an interpretation that stresses punctuality, style, dynamism, financial success and entrepreneurialism’ (p.631).

It is important to note that an employee’s professional identity involves not only his/her professional image, but also how he/she relates to other members in the same occupational group by continuously sharing specific knowledge, common norms and professional ideology (de Bruin, 2000; 2004; Alvesson, 2004). This process is complicated because it involves interaction between professional and organisational identities. Indeed, previous research (e.g. Gioia, Schultz & Corley, 2000; Hogg & Terry, 2000; Fiol, 2002; Empson, 2004) has explored the changing processes and interactions between professional identity and organisational identity.

According to Albert and Whetten (1985), the fundamental questions of organisational identity asked by members of an organisation are concerned with
‘Who are we?’; ‘What business are we in?’ and ‘What do we what to be?’. For example, in a study of advertising agencies, Alvesson (1994) discovered that the organisational identity of advertising creatives, in relation to other professional members including account managers and strategic planners, was regarded as more honest, open and implicitly communicating professionalism. Furthermore, organisational identity is formed by continued interactions among members through a dynamic, dialectic process (Tajfel, 1978, 1982; Turner, 1975, 1982). In other words, each member within the organisation shapes and is shaped by other members in order to form a strong organisational identity. Although some researchers (e.g. Power, 1991; Pentland, 1993; Coffey, 1994; Grey, 1994, 1998; Hanlon, 1994; Covaleski et al., 1998; Anderson-Gough et al., 2000, 2001) believe that organisational identity works as subsidiary to professional identity, studying organisational identity is essential to understand one’s professional identity since the organisational context helps to shape a sense of professional identity.

One of the key functions of a well-defined organisational identity is to help members identify themselves within the organisation in order to remove insecurity regarding their employment situation (Empson, 2004). Albert and Whetten (1985) listed the characteristics of an organisational identity as central, distinctive and enduring. The concept of centrality concerns the creation of a consistent internal system to consolidate organizational values, norms and beliefs in order to achieve the organizational mission (Ashforth & Mael, 1996; Empson, 2004). The concept of distinction means that members should be able to differentiate themselves from other organisations in terms of role and identity (Ashforth & Mael, 1996). This characteristic is formed by continual comparison with other organisations, particularly competitors. However, Ashforth and Mael (1996) remind us that this concept could be affected by the changing structure of organisational membership as well as the accumulation of the members’ collective experiences. Some researchers (e.g. Gouldner, 1957; Wallace, 1995) have debated how and whether organisational membership serves to develop a professional’s self-concept.
Some researchers (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994; Pratt, 1998) have highlighted the importance of professional membership (i.e. a professional group) in developing identity of professionals. Some professional groups, such as scientists, have been found to identify more with their profession than their organisation (Cheney & Ashcraft, 2007) because their identities qua scientists supersede any felt responsibilities to managers and they are less likely than other professions to follow organisational policies. It is important to note that self-concept, self-esteem and self-image have a close relationship to the establishment of one’s professional identity (Öhlén & Segesten, 1998). In tackling these complicated relationships, Öhlén and Segesten (1998) advised researchers to look at professional identity from personal, interpersonal and socio-historical perspectives.

Schein (1978) also highlighted an assumption that professional identity can be developed through work experience and meaningful feedback in the workplace. Pratt (2006) explored how medical residents constructed their professional identity through ‘doing’ (i.e. what they do) and ‘being’ (i.e. who they are). Hackley and Kover (2005) explored advertising creatives in the UK as they negotiated and resolved their senses of professional identity. Regarding the construction of professional identity, Öhlén (2002) stated that socialisation is an interactive process of developing human relationships and the growth of professional characteristics. That is, the skills, norms, values and culture of a profession are developed and reflected through the process of socialization (Carlsen et al. 1984, Högström & Tolonen 1990). Therefore, some researchers (e.g. Schein, 1978; Ibarra, 1999) have argued that the professional and work identity are essential for professionals in their early career development. This can be supported by Pratt’s (1990; 2006) research on the identity construction of medical professionals. In these studies, medical professionals’ identities were developed through interaction with other professionals and through the internalization of knowledge in the workplace. Knowledge-intensive companies are organized and managed in the way which rely on employees’ self-determination (Hedberg, 1990; Kunda, 1992; Alvesson, 1995), but these companies also rely on interactions between their well-educated, expert employees (Starbuck, 1992; Alvesson, 1995; Morris & Empson, 1998).
Alvesson (2000) noted that advertising agencies use employees’ knowledge as a major resource, and he pointed out that the study of identity construction in knowledge-intensive organisations is complicated due to the presence of multiple and competing identities. This is because the knowledge-intensive organisation provides space for employees to develop multiple identities based on their own understanding and knowledge. However, Alvesson (2000) also stressed that the study of self-image and identity of advertising agency employees is particularly important because of the complex and organic nature of their work tasks and working behaviour. Therefore, understanding the construction processes of professional identities in knowledge-intensive companies is essential to understanding the working lives and management strategies related to these social groups (Alvesson, 2000). It should also be noted that several studies (e.g. Gouldner, 1958; Hall, 1968; Kerr, Von Glinow, & Schriesheim, 1977; Bartol, 1979) suggested that distinctive attitudinal attributes, such as job satisfaction, are crucial for employees to identify with their professional work roles.

2.3.5 Role changes and transitions

According to Schein (1978), work identity and professional identity are comparatively stable relative to other identities, because people can define their professional roles easily in terms of work attributes, values, motives and experiences. Nonetheless, the fast pace of change in contemporary society has created competitive pressure on industries and has made it a matter of urgency for organizations to develop new products and services. This means that organizations have to look continuously at their own roles as well as those of their employees. On the one hand, technological developments offer opportunities for the creation and reinvention of various industries and organisations. On the other hand, Ashforth (2001) argued that they create tremendous turbulence for organizations that have to consider new forms of business and new perspectives on company management. Facing a constantly changing environment, traditional assumptions about the stability of jobs and careers have become obsolete in many occupations (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996b; Cappelli et
al., 1997; Hall & Associates, 1996), with the advertising industry no exception. When change is the norm and stable equilibrium the exception (Nicholson, 1987), people are always in a state of ‘becoming’, as they move between and through different roles, identities and relationships (Ashforth, 2001). Ashforth (2001) suggested identity is not static, but constructed by individuals through a retrospective process that leverages internal and external influences and social expectation. Some researchers (e.g. Gioia et al, 2000) viewed identity as multiple and as fluid and unstable in organisations.

In other words, a work environment and the careers within it are always changing (e.g., Donohue, 2007; Hall & Mirvis, 1995), requiring individuals to adapt constantly to new roles and responsibilities (Ilgen, 1994). More generally, there has been a shift from industrial-based to knowledge-based work in contemporary society. Individuals are required to engage in continuous learning and the mastery of new and diverse experiences (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a). Moreover, work identification has come to be based more on individual rather than organizational role identity. Individuals are expected to be proactive in seeking opportunities for career development, moving across functional, organisational and even national boundaries (Ashforth, 2001). Individual initiative, networking and learning are therefore increasingly important for career development and work identification (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a), in the advertising industry as much as elsewhere (McLeod et al., 2011).

Moreover, Lifton (1993) argued that fragmented life in contemporary society has enabled individuals to become more versatile, leading to diverse roles, identities and behaviours. Besides, it is preferable for organisations to have employees who are more flexible rather than attached to rigid roles (Zaleznik, 1989); the ‘protean career’ (Zaleznik, 1989; Hall & Mirvis, 1996) is driven by the individual rather than by the organisation (Hall, 1976; Zaleznik, 1989; Hall & Mirvis, 1996). Hence, understanding role from an individual perspective is crucial in order to understand how organisations work. It seems that an individual’s role may no longer be defined primarily by organisational or social expectations; it is indeed a subjective standard (Ashforth, 2001). This echoes a symbolic interactionist stance whereby roles are
negotiated as part of understandings between individuals. However, according to Bridges (1995), the notion of role is unclear and it is difficult to identify discrete jobs in the contemporary workplace; Arthur (1994) used the term ‘boundaryless career’. This emphasises adaptability and individual-base continuous learning from their diverse experiences.

Bridges (1995) argued that the shifts taking place in organisations make the nature of work temporary and fragmented. New tasks emerge to address ever-changing needs. Improvisation and teamwork may be important skills as they allow flexibility and possibilities. In other words, the role boundaries that define the work tend to be unclear. In the advertising industry, for example, the rise of social media has presented advertising creatives with acute challenges to their work roles. As a result, an organization’s members must be proactive in creating and maintaining a sense of identity in the workplace in order to make sense of their work experiences (Ashforth, 2001).

An individual’s future role may also be influenced by role behaviour through the continuing interpretation of previous role activities (Grube & Piliavin, 2000). Expectations of an individual will also change over time as life conditions change (Jackson, 1998). Role behaviour will develop continuously in order to fulfil changes in role identity with a balance of social and personal costs (Stryker, 1980). In other words, an individual has to adapt his/her role behaviour continuously in order to satisfy social and personal expectations. This is particularly important in Chinese culture. Yang (1981) stressed that the expectations of ‘social others’ among Chinese professionals is quite high. In other words, Chinese professionals are well aware of the need to manage their identity within their social groups. This echoes Alvesson’s and Willmott’s (2002) argument that people’s roles are not planned but improvised through continual re-forming, maintaining, strengthening or revising roles within a social system.

The dynamic nature of working roles is evident in Pratt’s (1990) identification of three major categories in the organisation literature on identity construction: (1)
career and role transition, (2) socialization and (3) identity work. Regarding career and role transition, as stated above, identity is not static, but will change according to the progress occurring in the organisation and environment. According to Hall (1968; 1971; 1995), career and role transition give people ‘new roles’ over the course of their time in an organisational setting. This process of change, or ‘transition’, is concerned with how an individual aligns with and fits the role expectations from him/herself and others over time. Hall (1968; 1971; 1995) used a term ‘sub-identity’ to illustrate the importance of an individual’s career and role transitions as he or she moves on to new roles. He explained that this sub-identity involves ‘the aspects of identity which are relevant to particular social roles’ (1968, p.447). Although Hall (1968) did not explain clearly how identity changes during transition, he highlighted the importance of perceived competency in making the transition. Perceived competency is one of the key factors affecting an employee’s professional performance. Some researchers (e.g. Bern, 1972; Deci, 1975; Staw, 1976) have explained that attempts to enhance an employee’s feelings of personal competence or self-efficacy can increase his/her intrinsic motivation. Others (Nicholson, 1984; West, Nicholson & Arnold, 1987) have elaborated on the transition process of a work role. Figure 2 depicts the role transition based on the ‘modes of work adjustment’ (Nicholson, 1984, p.175) with reference to the personal change and role innovation. It can be categorised into four modes of work adjustment: change in the person (absorption), change in the role (determination), change in both the person and the role (exploration), and no change in either the person or the role (replication).
Modes of work adjustment

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Replication</th>
<th>Absorption</th>
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<tr>
<td>low role innovation</td>
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<td>and low personal change</td>
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<th>Determination</th>
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<td>high role innovation</td>
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<td>and low personal change</td>
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Figure 2: Modes of work adjustment (adapted from Nicholson, N. (1984). A Theory of Work Role Transitions. Administrative Science Quarterly, 29, p175)

Ashforth (2001) argued that changes in roles, or role transitions, involve psychological and physical movement between roles. This movement includes disengagement from one role (role exit) and engagement in another (role entry) in both society and organisational contexts (Burr, 1972; Richter, 1984). According to Louis (1980a), career transition means that an individual either moves from one role to another or changes his/her existing role. Some researchers (e.g. Louis, 1980a; Bruce & Scott, 1994) explained that the most common macro transitions in a career can be defined as intraorganisational transitions (e.g. promotion, demotion, and transfer), interorganisational transitions, interoccupation transitions and exit from an organisation (e.g. retirement and layoff). Under these macro role transitions, individuals usually become involved in permanent changes within organisations and social structures (Ashforth, 2001).

Role boundaries, role identities and role sets are the basic building blocks for understanding role transitions (Ashforth, 2001). According to Lewin’s (1951) theory, individuals’ social states are not permanent but ‘quasi-stationary equilibria’ (p. 199). These social states are created by a set of counterbalancing forces in any given domain. Lewin (1951) also indicated that a role transition implies a social state moving from one fixed state to another. Lewin coined the terms of ‘freezing’ and ‘unfreezing’ to describe this movement of social states. Field theory is indeed one of
the key notions explaining role transition, which is a movement across role boundaries (Ashforth, 2001). Based on the work of Lewin (1951) and Van Gennep (1960), Ashforth (2001) used the term ‘rites of passage’ to explain the process of role transitions: (1) rites of separation which facilitate role exit (Unfreezing); (2) rites of transition which facilitate the passage between roles (Movement); and (3) rites of incorporation which facilitate role entry (Refreezing). These rites of passage help to preserve the continuity of roles within organisations and social structures (Ashforth, 2001).

Of course, for different individuals in different situations, experiences of role transition might be different. Ashforth (2001) suggested four psychological motives cued by role transition: identity, meaning, belonging and control. These psychological motives are key components in the relationship between role and self. They work in shaping an individual’s identity as follows: (1) The motive for identity is about self definition (Who I am?) in the organisation; (2) the motive for meaning is about sense-making (What) and searching for purpose (Why); (3) the motive for control is a drive to master influence (How); and (4) the motive for belonging is a desire to attach to others (Who). Nonetheless, according to Ashforth (2001), role identification and the experience of success can reinforce individuals’ views about the subjective importance of their role identity and encourage them to satisfy these motives.

Overall, it seems that theories of role identity helps us to understand the intersection of roles, role transition and the self of individuals within organisations and social structures (Ashforth, 2001), and thus provide insights into how advertising creatives may experience their working lives and identities when faced with the growing importance of social media. As discussed above, relatively little research has explored such issues, particularly in the Asian context.
2.4 Summary of Chapter 2

This chapter has established a theoretical framework for studying the advertising creatives’ roles and identities in the social media era. The study of role identity provided me with a clear picture of the intersection of roles, role transition and the self of individuals within an organization, in particular to a knowledge-intensive industry like advertising. The discussions in this chapter also provide insights into how advertising creatives have possibly experienced their role and identity changes in response to the rise of social media. The understanding of social media, the advertising industry and role identity have facilitated the identification of research gaps and the design of the research methodology described in Chapter 3.

In summary, this chapter has explored the relationship between consumers’ activities and the rise of social media. As discussed, the emergence of social media has changed the consumption patterns as well as consumers’ activities. Obviously, consumers’ roles have been changed from traditionally passive members of the consumer culture to, nowadays, active members who create social meanings and disseminate these meanings within digital social communities. Meanwhile, these active consumers had been using and shaping social media constantly in order to form a multiplicity of cultural meanings in the digital networks as well as the marketplaces. For example, according to Muk (2013), consumers’ often expressed positive attitudes towards information on brands’ webpages. They also engaged actively with such webpages and social networking sites, sharing comments about brands and products with their peers, as well as with the marketers. Those active consumers formed fan groups and they participated actively in brand activities. Moreover, their comments and participation often generated useful insights for the brand’s marketers with respect to website design, promotion and strategic planning (Luo & Zhang, 2013). Consumers’ created meanings for marketing activities and they have impacted upon how marketers and advertisers are doing creative advertising strategies in the social media era. Specifically, social media have reshaped the entire advertising landscape by allowing consumers to share their comments and interests on brands, products and advertising campaigns through diverse SNSs. In other words, the tremendous development of social media platforms
as well as the increases in consumers’ usage has undoubtedly had a significant impact on the advertising industry, and even the media landscape recently.

Regarding the tremendous changes in consumption patterns and consumer culture in the social media era, SNSs have become more dominant in the marketplace. Based on this assumption, consumers are potentially playing a leading role in social and marketing activities, and marketers and advertisers are no longer dominating the advertising media and message distributions as in the past. This is because consumers influence others over the social media, discussing brand choices and making decisions. This is why some pioneer advertisers and brand managers have made use of this powerful WOM to promote their brands in social media.

The advertising creatives, the key concern in this research, are inevitably playing a crucial role in connecting marketers and consumers by making creative advertising strategies in the advertising landscape. Traditionally, creatives have had a broader influence on consumer culture through their creative ideas and successful advertising campaigns. This is also how they have constructed their roles and identities in the advertising industry in the past. However, as discussed in relation to the emergence of social media and the shift of consumer culture, this phenomenon has affected many aspects of creatives’ identities, for instance new knowledge and skill-sets are required in doing advertising on social media platforms. On a positive note, the popularity of social media and the rise of user-generated content within the networks makes the role of the advertising creatives more important than before due to the extended nature of creativity in this new media. Likewise, the nature of openness and accessibility in social media has provided creatives with the potential to enhance their creativity in making advertising strategies in a co-production process. This is an entirely different way of doing advertising. Nonetheless, the emergence of social media has created both challenges and opportunities for the advertising industry as well as the traditional role of advertising creatives, in particular with regard to their role identity, role expectations and performances.
The advertising industry is a knowledge-intensive industry. Therefore the construction of the creatives’ identity is crucial for them to perform their work roles effectively. As discussed in this chapter, role identity is essential to one’s role because it links to one’s goals, values, beliefs, and normative ways of thinking and acting in a social system. However, one’s role is not given by scripted rules but rather is improvised while interacting with other members in the social system. In other works, the advertising creatives’ perceived role and identity is one of continuous engagement in forming, maintaining, strengthening, repairing or revising the expectations in the social system. Unfortunately, previous research has said relatively little about creatives’ roles and identities or how they may be changing in the social media era, and much research on agency practice is based on Western markets. Thus, there has indeed been limited research studying the roles and identities of advertising creatives in the social media era, in particular in the Asian context. The Asian cultural context deserves more research attention, and a market like Hong Kong is particularly interesting given its high social media use, collectivist culture, and east-meets-west cultural fusion. It is for these reasons that this particular Asian context has been identified for this research, namely the Hong Kong advertising creatives and landscape.
Chapter 3 Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research methodology of this study. Emphasis is placed on describing the research aims and objectives as well as justifying the stance of the interpretive, qualitative approach adopted. The use of in-depth interviews and participant observation is explained and justified, as is the discourse analytical approach used in analysing the data generated from Hong Kong advertising creatives and advertising agencies. Ethical issues and the study’s limitation are also reviewed in this chapter.

3.1 Research aims and objectives

Based on the literature reviewed in Chapter Two, the emergence of digital technologies, particularly social media, seems to have many implications for advertising creatives and how they see their role. Given the lack of research on Asian advertising practices, this study aimed to explore Hong Kong advertising creatives’ working practices and experiences in the social media era and, more specifically, to what extent and how their roles are changing in response to the rise of social media.

To elaborate further, the aim of this research was to explore, from a micro level perspective, Hong Kong advertising creatives’ experiences of coping with the rise of social media. As discussed in Chapter Two, advertising creatives are regarded as the ‘life-blood’ of advertising agencies (Pratt, 2006), and so the emergence of social media is likely to affect advertising their roles, creative processes and collaboration with colleagues and clients. However, to date, there is still not enough known about how the changing media environment and associated consumer culture impacts on advertising creatives, and so further exploration is required (Muniz & Schau, 2007).

Previous literature examining the impact of social media on the advertising industry has been written mostly from a macro-level perspective. Prior literature has
suggested that advertising agencies have been attempting structural and strategic organisational changes in response to the changing environment with varying degrees of success (Benvenuto 2007; O’Leary 2008; Kocheilas 2008; Baxter 2009; Feldwick 2009; Baker & Handyside 2010; McEleny, 2011; Willott, 2011). Thus, multinational agency groups have expanded their services through the acquisitions of digital agencies in recent years. For instance, Publicis bought Digitas and Razorfish. WPP bought digital marketing businesses and merged its digital agencies Schematic, Bridge Worldwide, Blue and Quasar to create Possible Worldwide, a new interactive marketing agency with 18 offices. Havas has launched a group-wide social media division, Havas Media Social. However, agency managers admit that they are still exploring and are not very clear about the best model for agencies (McEleny, 2011; Willott, 2011). Despite many agencies engaging in some form of organisational restructuring, the impact on individuals who work in the agencies is also important, especially since the ways in which individuals interpret their participation in change programmes (Randall, 2004) will have implications for agency processes, including those related to change management.

Another focus of this study is the Asian market, primarily Hong Kong. While the rapid development of social media networks and infrastructure has occurred globally, Global Web Index (2012) highlights particularly significant growth in China and Hong Kong. However, most existing research about the effects of the social media on advertising has focused on the US and UK markets, and there is a lack of understanding about the Asian context, especially the Chinese market. Since Hong Kong is the hub of the advertising industry in the Asian Pacific region and one of the critical economic cities in China, most multinational advertising agencies in Hong Kong play a leading role in this region and Hong Kong has also influenced the development of the advertising industry in China in the past decade. By focusing on the roles of advertising creatives in Hong Kong in response to the rise of social media, this study sought to contribute to a deeper understanding of advertising theory in an Asian context.

Advertising creatives in Hong Kong seem likely to be experiencing changes in their work roles, from traditional professional practices to a new digital working mode, as
discussed earlier in this thesis. Therefore, empirical research is needed to deepen our understanding of advertising creatives’ role identity on one hand, and their experiences when working with social media on the other. However relatively little previous research on advertising creatives has been from the perspective of roles, particularly in relation to changes in the media landscape.

Having reviewed relevant literature and identified research gaps, three main objectives for the current study were formulated as follows:

- To describe the working practices and experiences of Hong Kong advertising creatives in a media environment increasingly influenced by social media.
- To explore the roles and role identities of advertising creatives in Hong Kong;
- To explore the influence of social media on the roles and role identities of advertising creatives

### 3.2 Research questions

The primary question of the study is: ‘**How and to what extent are the roles of advertising creatives changing in response to the rise of social media?**’ The study examines the influence of social media on creatives and their experiences as part of the broader advertising industry in Hong Kong. In addition, six subsidiary research questions were formulated:

- How do advertising creatives in Hong Kong understand their roles?
- How do they understand their role identities?
- What knowledge and understanding do they have of social media?
- How have they experienced the rise of social media in their working lives?
- What do they see as the opportunities and challenges for their work arising from the increasing importance of social media?
- What are the implications of their experiences in relation to social media for the management of advertising creatives?
3.3 An interpretive approach to qualitative research

Ontology questions whether social entities have an external reality or have been built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Bryman & Bell, 2007). In this research, a relativist ontological view of the world was adopted. This sees reality as socially constructed and multiple in nature (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Hudson & Ozanne, 1988). The relativist position is that ‘no interpretation of that world can be made independently of human sensations, perceptions, information processing, feelings and actions’ (Peter, 1992, p.74). Moreover, there is a social phenomenon that is accomplished continually by social actors who are in a constant state of revision (Guba & Lincoln, 1998; Schwandt, 2000; Czarniawska, 2003). While emphasis is placed on the active involvement of people in reality construction, it is believed that reality and knowledge are constructed individually and negotiated socially. Particularly when studying organisational management, emphasis is placed on the active involvement of organisational members in reality construction. Hence, in this study the inquiry was based on understanding and constructing Hong Kong advertising creatives’ working practices, roles and role identities by encouraging them to tell me about how they saw their world of work and their role in it.

Epistemologically, this research was concerned with understanding human behaviour and action rather than applying the methods of natural sciences to study social reality (Bryman & Bell, 2007). A qualitative research approach was adopted in this study in order to explore creatives’ perspectives, experiences and working practices. Qualitative research is a general term for any study in the social human context by the means of rich description, explanation and making sense of complex phenomena (e.g. Morgan & Smircich, 1980; Miles & Huberman, 1994). This is different from quantitative research, which focuses on applying unified theoretical and methodological concepts, and assumes that law-like generalities exist for human actions.

Qualitative research uses inductive approaches to generate and explore new theories in social enquiry (Bodgan & Biklen, 1992; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Jupp & Norris, 1993; Murphy et al., 1998; Heaton, 2004). The inductive approach, based on
inductive reasoning, is a bottom-up approach, with analyses moving from a specific observation to a broader generalisation and theory (Holland et al., 1989). This approach focuses on how people interpret and make sense of their experiences of their world (Willis, 2007). It seeks to contribute to an understanding of human behaviour and to offer rigorous explanations of why and how social phenomena occur (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003). The rationale for choosing a qualitative approach for this research is that the study focuses on advertising creatives’ personal perspectives and experiences in seeking to understand their social reality. Qualitative research is concerned with individuals’ accounts of their attitudes, motivations and behaviours, and it offers rich descriptions of their perceptions, meanings and interpretations (Ritchie & Lewis 2003; Denzin & Lincoln 2003; Silverman, 2010). It is an interpretative approach to social reality and generates descriptions of lived experience. For this reason, it is a vital methodology for this study since it enables advertising creatives’ perceptions, insights and experiences to be identified and explored. The strengths of qualitative, as opposed to quantitative, research are that it focuses on depth, insights, nuance and complexity to unravel how things work in particular contexts (Creswell, 1998).

A rich description of qualitative data involves describing, decoding, analysing and interpreting the data in order to construct ways of understanding the social world (Schwandt, 2001). The inductive approach is indeed exploratory (Blaikie, 2000) and useful for generating insights and theories without having predefined concepts. In this study, the inductive nature of qualitative research aids understanding and exploration of advertising creatives’ experiences and roles in relation to the rise of social media.

However, qualitative research is complicated and involves interwoven assumptions and concepts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), with diverse ways of analysing and interpreting data. Researchers adopt different labels for qualitative research such as naturalistic inquiry (Lincoln & Guba, 1985); field research (Delamont, 1992), interpretive research (Bryman, 2001), or ethnography (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Some qualitative researchers (e.g. Glaser & Strauss, 1967) are concerned with the generation of theory while others are not. Despite various labels for qualitative
research, all focus on lived experience, interaction, language and its meaning human beings.

Though in-depth data and rich insights can be generated by qualitative inquiry, and this might help to expand our understanding of the world, it is also necessary to be aware of its limitations. Some critics argue that it can be too subjective, that its theoretical significance is not clear (Bryman & Bell, 2007), and that participants’ values could influence the study. Inevitably, inductive argument is based on strong evidence (e.g. data extracted from interviews and observations), but not necessarily an absolute proof, of the truth (Copi, Cohen & Flage, 2007). In this study, the selected participants have diverse values, roles, life and beliefs, which might affect the data generation process. For instance, because traditional and digital creatives are coming from different educational and training backgrounds, they have diverse sets of value and interests on doing advertising in the social media era. Values and interests from the socially constructed world have to be understood as part of the research process (Smith, 1983). Therefore, the position of the researcher has to be examined in all settings and situations to ensure reflexivity on understanding interviewees’ value and interests during the research process. It was also important to ensure that the analysis was informed by emerging issues from the generated data and comparisons between accounts as well as consideration of the context.

Although qualitative research is not necessarily interpretive (Neuman, 1997), interpretive approaches and theories have long been used to describe, explain and make sense of qualitative data, particularly in the human sciences. An interpretive approach was adopted in this study, with interactions between the researcher and advertising creatives leading to the generation of concepts, which are regarded as the product of the ‘research act’ (Denzin, 1989).

Interpretive approaches to qualitative inquiry have grown since the 1960s, with approaches including symbolic interactionism, phenomenology, anthropology and ethnomethodology (Goulding, 1999). An interpretive approach is fundamentally opposed to positivism and structural theory, based on a belief that complete objectivity and neutrality are impossible to achieve when seeking to understand the
social world (Denzin, 1989). An interpretive approach sees human behaviour as a subjective interpretation of the social environment and seeks to understand the social world based upon participants’ subjective accounts (Burrell & Morgan, 1978). Interpretive researchers generally work with qualitative data, although quantitative data can also be used as part of an interpretive study to develop further insights or test research propositions (McAlexander et al., 2002).

Interpretivist research approaches are linked to Weberian sociology and Mead’s social psychology since both emphasise empathetic understanding and its context, and both aspire to reflective reconstructions and interpretations of social actions and social actors (Yanow & Schwartz-Shea, 2006). Interpretive researchers seek to access the experiences and perceptions of social actors by listening to them and observing them (Platt, 1985). An interpretive approach is appropriate for this study since it framed advertising creatives as social actors and focused on understanding their definitions of the situation from subjective and intersubjective perspectives (Schwandt, 2001; Rowlands, 2005). According to Schutz (1973), interpretive researchers are particularly concerned about understanding the interplay between subjective, objective and intersubjective knowledge. The idea of subjectivity focuses on a subject’s perspective, experiences, beliefs and feelings (e.g. Beiser, 2002), whereas the idea of objectivity focuses on reality and truth (e.g. Megill, 1994). The concept of intersubjectivity focuses on how people’s shared consensus and cognition shapes their relations and ideas buildings (e.g. Scheff, 2006). Further, intersubjectivity is a process of seeking to understand another individual’s mind, through social interaction, language and written texts.

Having provided the rationale for the qualitative, interpretive approach adopted in this study, the following sections explain how the interpretive approach was applied in this research.
3.3.1 Using an interpretive approach to study creatives’ experiences

Social members construct their own social realities (e.g. Berger & Luckman, 1967; Rowlands, 2005). Interpretive researchers aim to understand social context and/or phenomena through the study of social members’ subjective and intersubjective experiences (Walsham, 1995a). In this study, the research design followed the principles of interpretive qualitative research by exploring creatives’ experiences, feelings and perceptions in relation to their current working environments and how they made sense of the behavior and norms surrounding their work roles. The study employed the strategies of questioning, listening, observing and immersion in the working world of Hong Kong advertising creatives in order to generate descriptions of a culture (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995). Drawing on creatives’ own words and observing their actions and interaction in the working environment led to detailed accounts that served as the basis of meaning construction.

Since interpretive approaches are concerned with the actors’ definitions of a situation while they are acting and constructing meaning, it is important for researchers to be sensitive to context, setting and situation. All knowledge is somehow linked to perspective (Schwandt, 1994), because human behaviour arises from subjective interpretation of phenomena and environments (Orlikowski & Baroudi, 1991; Walsham, 1995a, 1995b; Klein & Myers, 1999; Cavana, Delahaye & Sekaran, 2001). In this study, taking into account the context of Hong Kong advertising creatives involved paying attention to locality, history, time, and events.

The extent to which understanding the construction of the social world is possible through an interpretive approach depends on the quality of interactions between the researcher and the participants (Hirschman, 1986; Minger, 2001). Anthropologists have distinguished between emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspectives in qualitative research (Harris, 1976). Researchers takes an emic perspective in exploring what people do and think, seeking an insider’s view of what is meaningful to them within their culture; they take an etic perspective when examining participants’ words or actions from an outsider, and more theoretical, standpoint. An emic perspective was essential in seeking intuitive and empathic understanding of the
advertising culture in response to the rise of social media. This study involved ‘inquiry from the inside’ (Evered & Louis, 1981), attempting to produce a rich account of the advertising creatives’ working lives with the researcher also being an active practitioner in the field. Having had ten years of practical experience in Hong Kong advertising agencies, I sought, as the researcher, to draw on my familiarity with the world of advertising creatives in exploring the experiences of my participants; and at the same time to be reflective and remind myself all the time not to take this world for granted by questioning my own assumptions. This dual insider-outsider perspective was aided in my case by the fact that, although I had extensive working experience in diverse advertising agencies in Hong Kong, the advertising industry I had known as a practising creative was not the same as the one I re-entered for this fieldwork. There was a very clear role for each creative in organisational structure as well as his/her duties and skill-set when I was an advertising creative in the past. The new generation of creatives has a comparatively vague role identity in the said domains. Thus, in this study, ethnographic fieldwork enabled me to immerse myself and become familiar with the informants’ situations, reading documents as well as observing interaction in agencies so as to draw out various values, ideologies and ways of thinking within this creative community. In informal conversations and formal interviews, I sought to enable the creatives to describe situations and experiences in their own words.

According to Guba and Lincoln (1994), the role of passionate participant, instead of dispassionate observer, is needed as a part of inductive research. For the participant observations, I was a ‘passionate participant’ (Guba & Lincoln, 1994) in the research domain, seeking to engage my experiences as a part of the data analysis. As a researcher who has worked as a creative, I was passionately involved in the inquiry, and my participation was central in understanding and analysing the creatives’ subjective experiences as I made use of my prior professional knowledge and experiences in various advertising agencies. This knowledge and experience helped me analyse and interpret the creatives’ meanings and appreciate the professional norms that helped shape these meanings.
This study adopted a social interactionist approach, whereby researchers believe individuals socially construct organisations and make sense of their social experience (Blumer, 1969). This stance requires further elaboration and justification and is discussed below.

### 3.3.2 Structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism

Structural functionalism and symbolic interactionism are two classical sociological perspectives adopted in role-theory research. From the structural functionalist’s perspective, a role is a set of behavioural expectations within a social structure and is functional for one’s social system (e.g. Parsons, 1951; Merton, 1975b; Ebaugh, 1988). In other words, structuralists believe that a role is a taken-for-granted position that is fixed according to the society in which one is embedded. In this case, one’s role should remain coherent and stable in order to ensure social function. On the contrary, symbolic interactionists believe that a role involves emergent and negotiated understandings among individuals within a society (e.g. Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969). In other words, a role refers to subjective perceptions and preferences that are not fixed or stable.

There has been some criticism of symbolic interactionism by orthodox sociologists (e.g. Parsons, 1951; 1961) on the grounds that its research methods are too impressionistic and not systemic for constructing theories. Symbolic interactionists, however, are not seeking an objective and macro-structural perspective on social systems for theory making; they are looking at subjective aspects of social life instead of seeking to develop a general theoretical framework.

In any case, symbolic interactionism is undoubtedly a key theoretical perspective in sociology for understanding roles. It has a long intellectual history, stemming from the German sociologist and economist Max Weber (1864-1920) and the American philosopher George H. Mead (1863-1931). Early work in this area emphasized the social processes, pragmatism and subjective meanings of human behaviour. The theory of symbolic interactionism was developed by Herbert Blumer who studied
with Mead at the University of Chicago, and coined the term ‘symbolic interactionism’ (Blumer, 1969; 1973).

Symbolic interactionist researchers study subjective aspects of social life instead of objective or macro-structural aspects of society. This is because interactionists are looking at the image of humans rather than the image of society to establish their theoretical frameworks (e.g. Farganis, 2008). This focus shapes the major difference between interactionists and structuralists. Interactionists assume the individual is a pragmatic actor, continually adjusting his/her behaviour in order to cope with the actions of other actors within a social system. In other words, the individual adjusts his/her behavioural actions only because these actions can be interpreted symbolically in society. Therefore, an individual performs actions as symbolic objects. Thus interactionists (e.g. Blumer, 1969; 1973) see individuals as active, creative participants who are able to construct their social systems.

Interactionists are also concerned with the social system, however. They believe that this is constituted from a set of organized and patterned interactions among individuals. Therefore, interactionists tend to observe face-to-face interactions among social members rather than undertaking research on macro-level structural relationships and various social interactions. Thus, interactionists emphasize the individual’s role in relation to symbols, the construction of society and negotiated reality. Indeed, Goffman (1958), a prominent traditional social theorist mentioned that the dramatic role the individual plays within a social system is like a role-making actor in the theatre. In this sense, role making is the key mechanism of interaction. Similarly, the negotiable nature of human roles allows shifts in social behaviour, improvisation and quality making of roles. Therefore the role making is another key mechanism of great interest to interactionists. All in all, from the interactionists’ perspective, roles involve struggle because the individual is required to create certain situations and roles before acting on these within a specific social context.

Interestingly, there is an offshoot of symbolic interactionism called ethnomethodology, which raises a critical question about how individuals might be
able to create an illusion of a shared society while interacting with each other, even if they do not fully understand other social members. In an early study, Garfinkel (1967) sent his students out to perform what he called ‘breaching experiments’ (experiments in trust) in order to tackle this problem. The aim of Garfinkel’s work was to analyse ordinary conversations with explanations. It is for this reason that, until recently, ethnomethodolgists undertook minutely detailed analyses of ordinary conversations in order to understand how roles are made by conversational manoeuvres.

In constructing meaning through each particular social member, an individual’s acts in communication have shaped his/her mental life within a social phenomenon (Mead, 1934). According to Mead, the concept of ‘self’ in social phenomena can be separated into ‘I’, ‘me’ and ‘generalized other’. Likewise, Vygotsky's (1978) concept of ‘higher mental functioning’ is very similar to the concept of ‘mind’. There are some key links between social actions and meanings (Mead, 1932; 1934; 1936). An individual's symbolic communicative act is constituted neither by the first person nor the second person, but relies on the objective constitution of the third person as an observer (Mead, 1934). The ‘meaning’ is constructed through a social relationship among people (Mead, 1934). Indeed, social interaction is crucial for an individual to develop his/her mind within a social process (Mead, 1934). Language is thus seen as a conversation of gestures, which contains a system of significant symbols (Mead, 1934; 1936), and studying these components can help researchers to have a better understanding of the conceptualization of the nature of meaning within a social context. From this perspective, ‘the mind’ itself is a result of social communication and interaction (Mead, 1936).

Despite the different beliefs about roles held by structuralists and symbolic interactionists, these two groups share the view that roles are reproduced within existing structures in society; in other words, a role is a character, which has been given (Giddens, 1984). However, one’s role has to be interpreted in a specific context (March & Olsen, 1995). Based on this assumption, every individual is constantly translating his/her role and a specific situation into appropriate actions. This could be applied to understanding the role of a creative in an advertising
agency; his/her role is ‘lived’ out and interpreted. Therefore, this research drew on a symbolic interactionist view in exploring advertising creatives’ roles and role identities.

In this research, the positions of advertising creatives were institutionalised, which may be seen as consistent with a structuralist perspective. However, the study focused on the meanings imputed to a given position by advertising creatives, since the roles that advertising creatives enact are negotiated within structural constraints. In other words, this study took as its starting point the construction of the negotiable reality of creatives’ roles in relation to the rise of social media.

3.4 Generating the Data

The data generated as part of this study came from two methods: interviews and participant observation. This section discusses how both methods were used to address the study’s research aims and objectives.

3.4.1 Interview

Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were used to explore advertising creatives’ experiences, perceptions and working practices in relation to the rise of social media. A pilot study involved interviews with four Hong Kong advertising creatives and transcripts from these interviews were reviewed to sharpen the focus of the main interviews. Interviews may vary according to the different theoretical and epistemological positions of researchers, so it is essential to discuss the approach taken in this study.

Human knowledge, perspectives, understandings, experiences and interactions are some of the meaningful properties of our social reality (Mason, 2000). Silverman (2006) suggested that emotions, subjective experiences and efforts to reproduce processes and interactions might be accessed through open-ended interviews. Rich data are generated through the interactive talks with people, and by asking them
questions and listening to their voices and emotions. This helps researchers to analyse and understand the discourses used and how they are constructed (Mason, 2000).

As Miller and Glassner (1997) suggested, participants’ deep and broad conceptualisations are often the most interesting parts of interviews. Qualitative researchers treat knowledge as situational, and interviewing as a way of exploring social experiences or processes (Mason, 2000). Indeed, the qualitative interview is powerful for understanding and constructing social explanations in depth and complexity rather than looking at a social pattern as a questionnaire might do (Mason, 2000). Furthermore, the qualitative interview provides the researcher with a chance to understand social processes, social change, social organisation and social meaning in depth to generate situated knowledge and to identify interpretive themes for further analysis and argument making (Mason, 2000). This process of generating the theoretical frameworks of a domain aligns with the key objectives of this research.

While researchers cannot observe a person’s mind directly (Patton, 1990), the use of qualitative interviews can allow them to explore and better understand meaning in depth. As Rubin and Rubin (1995) stated, qualitative interviewing is a method for exploring the meanings in a person’s life, routine, feeling and behaviour. A qualitative interview can also examine action, feeling and the context of thought which aids understanding of the relationship between different aspects of a social situation (Asksey & Knight, 1999). This makes interviewing a useful way of understanding peoples’ articulation of tacit perceptions and feelings by giving them opportunities to make explicit explanations.

Semi-structured interviewing was used for this research. Emphasis was placed on understanding the complexities and interactions of advertising creatives in relation to their reality (Mason, 2000). According to Robson (2002), this approach gives interviewers the flexibility to modify, change and omit planned questions, depending on the flow of conversation in each interview session.
This study aimed to explore creatives’ working lives from an emic perspective, and in the context of their particular work environments. All interviews therefore took place in creatives’ workplaces within a private meeting room. The creatives and I collaborated in the co-construction of knowledge through the interviewing process. As indicated by the interview guide (Appendix B), questions were designed to be open-ended in order to encourage elaboration and further conversation, and ‘floating prompts’ (McCracken, 1988) were used to probe responses to questions.

As the interviewer, I aimed to make good use of my advertising and cultural background to formulate appropriate questions and develop a warm, genuine and trusting relationship with the participants; this was intended to allow conversation to flow, offering insights into the creatives’ inner worlds and social realities, including meaning, ideas, feeling and intentions. I realised that my closeness to the creative world meant that I should also remain self-critical during the interviewing process (Mason, 2000). I also noted Denzin’s (1997) warning to researchers not to invade the privacy of participants while building collaborative, reciprocal and trusting relationships.

Most interviews were conducted in a mixture of Cantonese and English, a common practice in Hong Kong and one that I share. Each interview was audiotaped and transcribed. The transcripts and preliminary interpretations were shared with the participants and feedback was sought from them, in an attempt to reflect the their experiences and perspectives more closely (Covaleski et al., 1998). In order to pay careful attention to language, I transcribed all audio-recorded interviews and translated them into English. Moreover, after all the interviews had been transcribed and translated, they were crosschecked by a bilingual (English & Cantonese) translator in order to enhance accuracy and to reduce interviewer bias during the translating process. Additional ideas and interpretations of pronouns, slang and jargon in the transcripts were noted during the early stages of analysis. I also took notes and recorded aspects of the interviews that were not captured in the transcript, such as atmosphere, feelings, and participants’ gesture and facial expressions, in order to enhance richness of the data for further analysis. Besides the interviews, some documents, such as creative briefs, idea sketches, memoranda, minutes of
meetings and presentation documents were gathered to work as a supplement for the data generated through other methods (Yin, 1994).

The entire interview process was divided into seven stages: stage one – generation of data; stage two – transcription; stage three – coding; stage four – making sense of data by grouping themes; stage five – interpreting data; and the final stage six – addressing the research questions. Details of each stage are explained in Figure 3.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviews &amp; Data Analysis Process</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Stage One</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Data were generated by 32 interviews with advertising creatives in four different types of advertising agency: (1) Multinational full-service agency; (2) Independent full-service agency; (3) Multinational digital agency; and (4) Independent digital agency.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Stage Two** | **Transcription** |
| Full transcriptions were completed for all interviews (approximately 180,000 words). All transcriptions were crosschecked by a bilingual (English & Cantonese) translator. |

| **Stage Three** | **Coding** |
| All transcriptions were input into qualitative analysis software (Nvivo) for coding. This stage was divided into two main phases: initial open coding and merging similar and relevant codes in order to form categories (see Appendix C). |

| **Stage Four** | **Making Sense of Data by Grouping Themes** |
| Seven main themes were identified by reviewing the codes and relevant data: |

**Changing relationships between clients and creatives** with the rise of social media;  
**Changing relationships between creatives and account servicing** with the rise of social media;
Changes in the advertising industry and broader advertising ecology with the rise of social media;

Opportunities and challenges facing creatives with the rise of social media;

The impact of social media’s growing importance on creatives’ skill-sets and competencies

Creatives’ perceptions and understandings concerning the growing importance of social media;

Creatives’ role identities and role struggles in relation to the rise of social media.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stage Five</th>
<th>Interpreting Data</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>In this stage, data related to these seven themes were explored further using discourse analysis. This stage of analysis studies the experiences and meanings generated by the interviewees’ talk.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage Six</th>
<th>Addressing the Research Question</th>
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<tr>
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<td>The interpretations of themes were revisited and regrouped into findings related to the research questions.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Stage Seven</th>
<th>Organizing the Findings</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The final stage of the data analysis involved organizing the themes and presenting the findings across the two findings chapters.</td>
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</table>

*Figure 3: The in-depth interviews and data analysis process*

### 3.4.2 Participant observation

Following the interview phase of this study, participant observation was undertaken in two Hong Kong advertising agencies. This ‘micro-ethnography’ (Wolcott, 1995; Bryman & Bell, 2007) consisted of three weeks spent in the creative department of both a multinational full-service advertising agency and an independent digital agency respectively. Participant observation was useful in generating data that was
less likely to be accessible from interviews. For instance, some work process and the interaction among colleagues may not be clearly described by the creatives in the interviews. Therefore, this participant observation allowed me to observe and interact with advertising activities and creative processes in agency settings that differed in their organisational approach to digital and social media. The approach taken in this part of the study is explained and justified below.

Participant observation is a popular qualitative research method in the social sciences (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). Some researchers associate ‘observation’ with ‘ethnography’ in social anthropological research (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Ethnography and participant observation have a similar philosophy and research process (Bryman & Bell, 2007). These methods have been used in studies of advertising culture (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003; Kelly et al., 2005) and business settings (Rosen, 1991). Participant observation requires researchers’ extended involvement in the social life of a group of people that they want to study (Bryman, 1988). Researchers need to negotiate access to the group they wish to study and to spend a considerable amount of time with the group in order to understand its culture better. Researchers must not only observe and listen to what people say and do, but also engage in their daily activities, study their interactions with each other, and probe issues of interest. As Hirschman (1986) pointed out, an interpretive researcher should focus on the value generated from time spent in the field. Even during short periods in the field, time spent interacting with particular groups can offer insights into their everyday lives and behaviour from an ethnographic perspective (Arnould & Wallendorf, 1994; Kelly et al, 2005). This ethnographic approach is about the ‘sociology of urban life’ (Van Maanen, 1988; Silverman, 2001).

Gold (1958) classified four major roles in participant observation: Complete participant, participant-as-observer, observer-as-participant and complete observer. Based on Gold’s classification, I took the role of participant-as-observer. I was aware of my research role during the study and at the same time I participated in creative activities by contributing my ideas, preparing materials for presentations, interacting with creatives and engaging in their daily lives, as I had done professionally in the
past. In other words, I was semi-involved (Gans, 1968) and adopted an insider perspective (Kirk, 1984; Dwyer & Buckle, 2009), positioning myself as one of the creatives in the creative department of the two advertising agencies. As both creative and observer, I involved myself in creative activities and the creative processes of advertising projects. I joined creative brainstorming sessions, internal creative review meetings, creative group discussions, casual chit-chat gatherings, meetings with clients and presentations, external suppliers’ presentations, and creative ideas review meetings with creative heads and account managers.

The participant observations were undertaken in two contrasting types of advertising agency based in Hong Kong, each with a strong reputation within the industry. Agency-M is a multinational full-service advertising agency, and Agency-R is an independent digital agency.

Agency-M is one of the biggest multinational agencies worldwide. Its range of accounts includes both global and local clients. The current Chief Creative Officer (CCO) was the chairman of Hong Kong Association of Accredited Advertising Agencies (HK4As). Agency-M has obtained many creative awards in recent years, for both traditional and digital advertising strategies. For example, one of their recent campaigns has been awarded the most successful Hong Kong marketing campaign in 35 years (Kuo, 2013).

Agency-R is one of the leading independent digital agencies in Hong Kong. The founder of Agency-R, Tom, is one of the pioneers of interactive advertising in Hong Kong, with successful records for digital advertising. Both agencies have outstanding reputations in their own areas of operation, and comparing and contrasting data from these two distinctive advertising environments was expected to offer insights into a range of Hong Kong creatives’ experiences in relation to the rise of social media.

Gaining access is a crucial issue for participant observation studies. The negotiation of access involves seeking permission from the office of the advertising agencies. It can be very difficult for outsiders to gain access to advertising agencies because gatekeepers pay attention to the confidentiality of their work and working processes.
in order to protect the rights of the clients and maintain competitiveness within the advertising industry (Villas-Boas, 1994). Therefore, gaining trust from the gatekeepers is the most crucial part of negotiating access to the advertising agencies in this study. Van Maanen and Kolb (1985) stated that gaining access to organisations involves strategic planning, hard work and sometimes luck. In this study, I gained access based on my personal and professional network within the Hong Kong advertising industry. Friends recommended me to the gatekeepers of the advertising agencies. I was granted a door access card from the managing director of Agency-M and this gave me complete freedom in accessing the creatives’ working environment in the same way as a staff member in the agency. Further details of the process involved in gaining access will be provided in Chapter 5.

Key informants are an important source of insider information when doing participant observation (Bryman & Bell, 2007). They can also provide deeper insights and offer great practical help to the researcher (Collinson, 1992). My two key informants (Philip, Group Creative Director of Agency-M, and Tom, Creative Director and co-owner of Agency-R) helped me to get involved in many creative activities and interactions. These interactions with creatives in both agencies provided both solicited (e.g. interviews or casual questioning during conversations) and other sources (e.g. layouts, idea sketches and desktop environments) of information (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995), helping me to understand the creatives’ experiences in relation to the rise of social media. For instance, I took part in creative meetings, brainstorming sessions and presentations. These opportunities helped me to develop a close and mutually supportive relationship with the respondents. During the observation period, I was assigned with a working space that was located in the centre of each agency’s creative department. Figure 4 illustrated the floor plan and the distributions of the creatives’ working spaces in the creative department. I was assigned a working space, indicated with the red circle on the floor plan, which was located in the central part of the creative department. From there I could observe different creative teams’ activities and their interactions among each other. The small white circles on the floor plan (Figure 4) indicate the working spaces of other creatives in the agencies.
In fact I did not stay in my working space all the time during my fieldwork. I moved around the agency to different departments, such as account management, in order to observe other activities inside the agencies periodically. I also stayed with different
creative teams, joined their discussions and meetings, and worked with them on some presentations in their workstations.

All creatives in both agencies were aware of my presence, since the key informants introduced me as well as the objectives of this study on the first day of my fieldwork. I was proactive during my fieldwork and I took the initiative to introduce myself to each member of the creative teams and to chat with them. Many creatives seemed supportive and sincere and seemed to treat me as one of them. They seemed very open to sharing their experiences with me. Through the conversations within the interviews, I did sense that the creatives were being helpful in this research because of the support from the top management. Notwithstanding, in the interviews they were helpful, sharing their own notions about organizational and wider industry changes. They treated me as one of them by sharing some ideas in very casual ways, just as friends, perhaps because I could understand their working process and their expectations to a certain extent due to my previous professional experiences in the advertising field. However, I was also alert that this friendly relationship might have led me to making unduly assessments of their opinions during our conversations. The ethical issue of my role in the interviews and observations has been declared in Section 3.7.

Taking field notes is an intrinsic part of ethnographic inquiry (Emerson et al., 1995; Moeran, 2005a), and is ‘the traditional means in ethnography for recording observational data’ (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995, p.176). Participant observation is an iterative process and fieldnotes aid rich description (Geertz, 1973) by recording events observed and heard, as well as data and ideas arising from interactions and casual conversations with respondents (DeWalt & DeWalt, 2011).

The fieldnotes from both solicited and unsolicited sources provided rich materials and methodological triangulation for this study (Denzin, 2006). I made fieldnotes during participant observation in both agencies, recording what I saw in the advertising agencies, the topics and information that I heard about and discussed during informal conversations with creatives, and my personal observations, feelings, experiences and reflections during the participant observations. I kept two sets of
field notes, brief and expanded ones. The brief notes (Bernard, 2006; Emerson et al., 1995) were used to mark down key dimensions, words, phases, or events noted during the participant observation, and these served as the primary aid to memory. They helped me to capture multiple events and interactions with people in advertising agencies as quickly as possible after seeing or hearing something interesting. At the end of each day, a set of expanded notes with more details about the observations and experiences was written up (Appendix D: Sample of field notes). Expanded notes include detailed description of date and time, locations, the people involved in the events, what happened, people’s interactions, and my own feeling and reflections. It was important for me to create expanded fieldnotes because it developed ideas arising from the casual conversations and interactions during the day, either between the creatives and myself, or between the creatives themselves. I also used a voice recorder to record the interviews, and I transcribed these and wrote detailed notes afterwards. I took photographs as an additional source of data; they helped me to recall the situations and provide powerful illustrations of events that occurred during the participant observation. At the same time, I realized that expanded fieldnotes could consume a vast amount of researcher time, ending up with data overload and researcher exhaustion. In fact, it is impossible for researchers to record every encounter in the field. I therefore took the suggestion from Bryman and Bell (2007) that observations may be oriented towards the research questions, while keeping an open mind and being ready to record unexpected events or discussion.

The participant observation in Agency-M and Agency-R took the form of ‘micro-ethnography’ (Wolcott, 1995). It involved a total of 30 days with 240 hours (i.e. 15 working days, each eight hours long, in each agency). The participant observation took place in November 2011 in Agency-M and in July 2012 in Agency-R. The two participant observations were scheduled about six months after the completion of the 32 interviews. This was because the analysis of the data from interviews was essential to provide me with some focus for conducting the participant observation, in particular to explore how the creatives' interpreted roles and identities interacted with other practitioners and clients in the actual working environments. The suggested dates and lengths of observations, 3 weeks in each agency, were
negotiated with the creative directors in both agencies and they believed that the suggested schedule would facilitate me to be involved in their complete advertising project cycle so that I could be involved in different stages of the creative process for some of their ongoing projects. Figure 5 shows the schedule of participant observations in detail:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>The Agency</th>
<th>Participant Observations Date</th>
<th>Time &amp; Duration</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agency-M (Multinational full-service agency)</td>
<td><strong>Day 1</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 7th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 2</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 8th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 3</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 9th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 12:00 – 20:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 4</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 10th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 14:00 – 22:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 5</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 11th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 12:00 – 20:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 6</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 14th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 12:00 – 20:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 7</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 15th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 12:00 – 20:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 8</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 16th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 9</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 17th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 10</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 18th November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 11:00 – 19:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 11</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 21st November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 12</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 22nd November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 14:00 – 22:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Day 13</strong>&lt;br&gt;Date: 23rd November 2011</td>
<td>Time: 11:00 – 19:00&lt;br&gt;Duration: 8 hours</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Summary

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day 14</th>
<th>Date: 24th November 2011</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time: 10:00 – 18:00</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>Time: 11:00 – 19:00</td>
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<tr>
<td>Duration: 8 hours</td>
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<tr>
<th>Summary</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15 days</td>
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<td>120 hours</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency-R (Independent digital agency)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Day 1</strong> Date: 9th July 2012</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time: 9:00 – 17:00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Duration: 8 hours</td>
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| **Day 2** Date: 10th July 2012 |
| Time: 9:00 – 17:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 3** Date: 11th July 2012 |
| Time: 12:00 – 20:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 4** Date: 12th July 2012 |
| Time: 14:00 – 22:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 5** Date: 13th July 2012 |
| Time: 12:00 – 20:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 6** Date: 16th July 2012 |
| Time: 12:00 – 20:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 7** Date: 17th July 2012 |
| Time: 12:00 – 20:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 8** Date: 18th July 2012 |
| Time: 9:00 – 17:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 9** Date: 19th July 2012 |
| Time: 9:00 – 17:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 10** Date: 20th July 2012 |
| Time: 11:00 – 19:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 11** Date: 23rd July 2012 |
| Time: 9:00 – 17:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 12** Date: 24th July 2012 |
| Time: 14:00 – 22:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 13** Date: 25th July 2012 |
| Time: 11:00 – 19:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |

| **Day 14** Date: 26th July 2012 |
| Time: 10:00 – 18:00 |
| Duration: 8 hours |
There is a tradition in ethnographic research of writing in the first person to indicate the relationships formed between researchers and participants (Hirschman, 1986; Elliott, 2003; Malefyt & Moeran, 2003; Bettany, 2007) and to emphasise the importance of researchers’ experiential learning in the field. This style has been adopted for this chapter and for those reporting on the findings.

3.4.3 Qualitative interviewing versus participant observation

Interviews and participant observation are two of the most prominent methods in qualitative research and each has its unique strength (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Having adopted qualitative interviews and participant observation in this study, it is important to understand their merits as well as their limitations and also how they complement each other. As mentioned, the interviews were used to gather diverse creatives' thoughts and opinions on their roles and identities, whereas the participant observation was used to look at their roles and identities in actual working processes in different organisations. Both methods were important because, in the interviews, the creatives were expressing their feelings from personal perspectives, and I assumed there was a gap between their interpretations of their roles and their actual roles in interacting with other practitioners in their working environments. Thus, the participant observation is essential to enrich the understanding of the creatives’ roles in the social media era from different angles.

During the participant observation, I had many chances to work with the creatives, participating in their brainstorming sessions and creative meetings as well as joining creative presentations to clients. These activities allowed me to be present continuously in the creatives’ working environments and to observe their behaviors
and interactions, providing access to material beyond the verbal data generated from the interviews. In other words, participant observation allowed me to be immersed in the social setting of these Hong Kong advertising creatives, to interact and see as they saw, work as they worked. Although the interviews provided me with rich data, the participant observations gave me access to issues and moments such as internal arguments and resolutions, frustrations, resistance, problems and some personal discussions that went beyond their working lives. For instance, I could observe the creatives’ emotional responses to clients’ and account managers’ comments after presentations and how they reviewed those comments and justified their own approaches. Some senior creatives also shared with me what they thought of teenagers’ activities on social networking sites, and how they used material posted on these sites as a source of inspiration during the creative idea generation process. The qualitative interview was flexible and allowed the informants to reflect on their experiences and feelings while the participant observations facilitated me to observe the creatives’ daily routines and working processes. Participant observation also helped me to gather a wider range of creatives’ stories that would not necessarily be shared in interviews.

3.5 Sampling

One core set of data in this qualitative study was generated from 32 semi-structured in-depth interviews with advertising creatives in Hong Kong. Following a purposive sampling approach (Patton, 1987; Johnson, 1995), interviewees were selected from four categories of advertising agency, namely multinational full-service agencies, independent full-service agencies, multinational digital agencies and independent digital agencies (Figure 6). Individual creatives were selected based on their work experience, work role in advertising and level of seniority in advertising agencies. In other words, the sample covered different creative roles, different levels of experience in advertising, and different levels of seniority, within different types of agency.
| Multinational advertising agencies | Advertising creatives at different levels in various agencies:  
  e.g.  
  Ogilvy & Mather Advertising  
  Grey Worldwide  
  McCann WorldGroup | Advertising creatives at different levels in various agencies.  
  e.g.  
  OgilvyOne Worldwide  
  Grey Interactive |
|-----------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------|
| Independent advertising agencies | Advertising creatives at different levels in various agencies.  
  e.g.  
  CTWTM  
  Metta  
  TURN | Advertising creatives at different levels in various agencies.  
  e.g.  
  DesignerCity  
  Rice 5 |

*Figure 6: Sampling frame - selected advertising agencies in Hong Kong*

As shown in Figure 7, four levels of advertising creatives and their abbreviations were identified, namely (1) executive creative director/creative director; (2) senior art director/interactive art director/copywriter; (3) art director/copywriter; and (4) assistant art director/interactive designer.

These four levels of advertising creatives corresponded to (1) management level; (2) middle-management level; (3) senior-operational level; and (4) operational level. The interviewees’ names used in Figure 8 and in the findings chapters are pseudonyms.
### Levels of traditional advertising creatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECD/CD (Management Level)</th>
<th>ACD/SAD (Middle-management Level)</th>
<th>AD/IAD (Senior-operational Level)</th>
<th>AAD/ID designer (Operational Level)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FH/CD1 Joseph DH/CD1 Henry</td>
<td>FH/SAD1 Thomas DH/ACD1 Barry</td>
<td>FH/IAD1 Kit DH/AD1 Jeffrey</td>
<td>FH/AAD1 Jason DH/AAD1 Cherry</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FH/CD2 Keith DH/CD2 Nicholas</td>
<td>FH/SAD2 Gabriel DH/SAD1 Kym</td>
<td>FH/IAD2 Dave DH/AD2 Matthew</td>
<td>FH/AAD2 Alvin DH/AAD2 Mick</td>
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</table>

### Levels of digital creatives

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECD/CD (Management Level)</th>
<th>ACD/SAD (Middle-management Level)</th>
<th>AD/IAD (Senior-operational Level)</th>
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<td>FH/AAD1 Jason DH/AAD1 Cherry</td>
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<tr>
<td>FH/CD2 Keith DH/CD2 Nicholas</td>
<td>FH/SAD2 Gabriel DH/SAD1 Kym</td>
<td>FH/IAD2 Dave DH/AD2 Matthew</td>
<td>FH/AAD2 Alvin DH/AAD2 Mick</td>
</tr>
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</table>

**Figure 7:** Sampling frame – levels of advertising creatives

**Figure 8:** Sampling – list of interviewees
In this research, all interviewees are selected through discussion with the heads of the agencies according to the research aims and objectives. Different creatives, from junior and senior levels, were selected based on this purposeful sampling method. The interviews took place in the agency’s meeting room or conference room in order to protect the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Each meeting lasted for approximately 1.5 hours, with a mix of Chinese and English language in the dialogues. Transcription in English was done after the interviews, and each interviewee was given a chance to confirm the transcription one week after the interview.

3.6 Data analysis and interpretation

This study adopted the interpretive approach of using discourse analysis to analyse the generated data. The following sections explain the discourse analysis and locate the use of discourse analysis in identity work.

3.6.1 Discourse analysis

Discourse analysis has been discussed widely and has credible status in various disciplines including sociology, psychology, philosophy, linguistics, media communication and literary studies (Grumperz; 1982; Van Dijk; 1985; Schiffrin, 1987; Fairclough, 1995). Along the lines of other postmodern researchers (e.g., Derrida, 1976, 1978; Baudrillard, 1988, 1993), Potter and Wetherell (1987) introduced three different conceptual traditions used when applying discourse analysis in social psychology: speech act theory (Austin, 1982); ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 167); and semiology (Barthes, 1964). Across various traditions, discourse analysis emphasises how language as text constructs social reality, as well as the knowledge and meanings that are produced in a particular context (Talja, 1999). It provides a solid ground of research for understanding social reality. Recently, discourse analysis has received considerable attention as a way of investigating social phenomena and contexts in organisations (Keenoy et al., 1997; Oswick et al,
2000). As research on organisational strategy and identity has developed in the past decade (Clarke, Brown, & Hailey, 2009; Watson, 2009; Oswick et al., 2010), many of these studies drew on the discourse analytic approach.

In general, discourses are understood as a combination of spoken dialogue and written texts (Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984), allowing researchers to describe discourse as ‘all forms of spoken interaction, formal and informal, and written texts of all kinds’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987, p.7). Further on, definitions of text have broadened with the trend towards ‘social semiotics’ (Hodge & Kress, 1998) where discourses are seen to include cultural artifacts such as music, art and architecture.

Discourse analysis studies are part of the ‘linguistic turn in social science’, with texts studied as communicative units (Talji, 1999; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000). In the organisational literature, studies have approached discourse from different perspectives, including the study of metaphors (Grant & Oswick, 1996; Morgan, 1980; Oswick & Grant, 1996); language games (Mauws & Philips, 1995); narratives (Philips, 1995; Barry & Elms, 1997); texts (Czarniawska-Joerges, 1992; O’Connor, 1995); dialogue (Bakhtin, 1987; Gergen 1999); conversations (Ford & Ford, 1996; Woodilla, 1998) and sense-making (Feldman, 1989; Weick, 1995). Among the diverse views of researchers on discourse analysis, some theories and methodologies of constructing ‘reality’ have been extended by recent researchers (e.g. Oswick, 2000); for example, the study of discourse as a mean of analysing complex and dynamic organisational phenomenon is becoming more prevalent (Keenoy et al., 1997; Oswick et al., 1997; van Dijk, 1997; Grant et al., 1998; Alvesson & Karreman, 2000; O'Connor, 2000).

Among the diverse views in the literature on discourse analysis, Keenoy et al. (1997) identified two different analytical positions, namely monological and dialogue. When taking a monological viewpoint, the researcher reads ‘an organisation as one story’, usually viewed from the perspective of a dominant group (Boje, 1995:1029), whereas, taking a dialogue viewpoint, researchers recognise and legitimatise multiple independent voices and potentially autonomous discourses which contribute to the ‘plurivocal meaning and interpretation’ (Boje, 1995, p.1029) of any given
organisational reality. Furthermore, one’s identity can be considered on multiple, inter-related levels, namely organizational, professional, social and individual levels. Researchers view identity shifts from monolithic to multiple identities and from ‘fixed or essentialistic views’ to ‘discursive and constructed approaches’ to the subject matter (Sveningsson & Alvesson, 2003). In this research, the independent voices of different advertising creatives played an important role for understanding the creatives’ identities and how they seek to achieve meaning and purpose in their roles. Hence, taking the dialogical viewpoint of discourse analysis to understand the social phenomenon was deemed to be more appropriate to this study. This also echoes the view of Keenoy et. al. (1997), who pointed out that the individual continuously seeks roles in order to achieve meanings and purpose in the workplace, which is understood better as the state of becoming rather than being (Ashforth, 1998). This research attempted to explore the multiple voices from the empirical data of the advertising creatives at different levels and how they identify their ‘developing’ work roles and meanings as they attempt to fit and behave with the roles being projected discursively as appropriate and desirable ‘identities’ in the digital era. In addition, the meaning for informants in Hong Kong rests on culturally situated conditions of understanding (Hackley, 2003). This study benefitted from my position as an Asian with extensive professional knowledge and experience in advertising, mostly as a creative.

3.6.2 Understanding work identity through discourse analysis

Some researchers (e.g. Bartel & Dutton, in press; Creed & Scully, in press; Guild, 1999; Van Maanen, 1998) have defined work identity as the way in which employees define themselves at work. Hackman and Oldham (1980) suggested that the job crafting process is different, in principle, from the job design process. Job design is relatively simple, focusing only on employees’ experiences of jobs, whereas the job crafting process relates to employees’ perceptions of the meaning of work within a given social context (Wrzensiewski & Dutton, 2001). To elaborate further, it is a set of cognitions that employees use to describe their job attributes and their conceptions
of their duties. As Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) explained, every individual within any task or relational bounds of their work is acting as a job crafter, and this job crafter is continuously crafting the individuals’ cognitive impressions of whom they are and what they are actually working on. In other words, work identity and work meanings are changing, depending on how employees craft their jobs. As Griffìn (1987) noted, an individual’s work identity is shaped by a set of prescribed work activities through a period of time.

Work identity is shaped cognitively in the employees’ minds and in how they define their work (Pratt, 1998), however, as Ashforth and Mael (1989) said, work identity cannot be changed at an employee’s will when it is socially constructed. Moreover, Illgen and Hollenbeck (1992) pointed out those employees’ work identities and work meanings are crafted by their sets of task elements within a collaborative working environment. Nonetheless, according to Wrzeniewski and Dutton (2001), employees, as job crafters, will take action to shape, mould and redefine their jobs. Therefore, research on how employees define their jobs psychologically and socially is indeed essential for understanding the definition of a particular professional job like that of the advertising creative. Thus, it is important to note that if individuals alter their working activities, this somehow changes their task boundaries as well as their work identities (Wrzeniewski & Dutton, 2001). The work identity, therefore, is constantly changing due to the employee’s definition and re-definition (Ilgen & Hollenbeck, 1992). Likewise, Wrzesniewski and Dutton (2001) stated that work identity is essential since it is one of the core components in the creation of a job. When the meaning of the work changes, this implies a change in the employee’s work identity.

This research was concerned primarily with the role of advertising creatives in relation to the rise of social media. The concept of role corresponds to the concept of subject position with discourse theory (Poulsen, 2007). A subject position is ascribed meaning through continuing identification and it is constructed through discursive praxis. However, no matter how well the development and changes of roles fit with the definition of subject position, role and identity are interwoven closely within discourse theory, and these ongoing processes of identification create roles (Poulsen, 2007). In this sense, roles can be regarded as institutionalised understandings within
a society or within an organisation. Hence, identities are created through the identification with roles, and the individual’s narratives and self-perceptions about ‘who are you?’ are connected to his or her role in an organisational context. This relates to Watson’s (1997)’s idea of ‘identity work’ and the enactment of role corresponds to the individual’s self-perception within an organisation. Burr (1995, p.152-3) made the same point:

‘Not only do our subject positions constrain and shape what we are, they are taken on as part of our psychology, so that they provide us also with our sense of self, the ideas and metaphors with which we think, and the self-narratives we use to talk and think about ourselves. We thus have an emotional commitment to, and investment, in our subject positions, which goes beyond mere rule-following’. In line with these definitions, in this research the discourse of the advertising creatives’ work identity was pivotal, as identity and role complement each other.’

The construction of social reality is understood through the study of discourses as embedded in text as a communicative unit. Discourses are shaped by both the spoken or written text of social and cultural practices with the use of language; and are also shaped by the people who use the language (Paltridge, 2006). To a certain extent the purpose of the text influences the discourses, while discourses also influence the range of possible purposes of texts (Johnstone, 2002). Therefore, to understand the construction of social reality through discourse, it is essential to explore the text through understanding words in use, the language and the people, as well as the underlying purpose embedded in the text.

To understand identity work through discourse, the spoken and written text with which this research was concerned was not just about the language of presenting who the creatives were, but also how they wanted people to see them. Apart from the language they used, the way they dressed, their gestures and the way they acted and interacted with others also displayed their socially situated identities (Gee, 1996). That is, to understand more about the advertising creatives’ work identity through discourses in this research, this study needed to take into consideration the way the advertising creatives thought, the attitudes they displayed, and their values and
beliefs. Besides, as Gee (1996) stated, socially situated identities are enacted and recognised in different culturally specific activities and styles of language being used. Discourses involve particular ways of valuing, thinking, believing, knowing, speaking and listening, reading and writing (Gee, 2005). In this research, the discourse concerned the integrated and prefabricated language used (Gee, 2005) by the advertising creatives and the reasoning underlying the phenomena that they constructed. Prefabricated language is stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use (Wray & Perkins, 2000). For instance, in the interviews, creatives used the phrase ‘earth the idea’, referring to practical ideas for implementation. Again, my prior professional experiences in the advertising industry helped me to understand and interpret such integrated and prefabricated language in this research.

In contemporary organisational life, social contexts are often portrayed as unstable, a struggle and sometimes contradictory (Jackall, 1988; Watson, 1994; Gioia et al., 2000; Clarke et al. 2009). Hence, attention was also paid in this study to the changes, uncertainty, contradictions and reactions (such as anxiety) that the advertising creatives referred to in their discourses, which were also salient for their search for ways of dealing with their roles and identities when faced with the rise of social media.

### 3.6.3 Interviews as social texts

In this research, interviews were a major source of data. Interviews can be analysed as social text at a macro-sociological level in discourse analysis, where the speakers give meaning to the phenomenon (Hall, 1982; Parker, 1992). Wetherell and Potter (1988) suggested that the answers gathered from interviews are constructed as a bridge is put together using girders, concrete and cables. In other words, language is not only a tool that the speakers use to communicate (William, 1979), but also involves the speakers’ interpretations of the topic. Hence, interviews as social texts are an indispensable part of the speaker’s self-understanding and are context-dependent (Talja, 1999). That is, interview extracts show speakers’ interpretations and how they legitimise their views. In this study, the interviews, as social texts
produced by advertising creative, communicated what was on their minds and their understanding and the meaning of their roles in response to the rise of social media.

Discourses are also concerned about both the speakers’ subjects and objects. For instance, the interview extracts showed how the advertising creatives employed cultural interpretations of their work experience in a way that enabled them to present their views, argue for them, and defend them in an effective and convincing way. In this sense, the advertising creatives allowed themselves to embody different kinds of person, or rather, the subject positions offered by discourses provided them with varying identities. Texts from the interviews reflected the expressions of what was in the speakers’ minds and referred to both outside reality and internal mental events (Wetherell & Potter, 1987).

Wetherell and Potter (1987) noted that discourse analysis can be used to identify different contexts and situations, and is not static or linear. Speakers may move between difference discourses by using different linguistic resources naturally. In discourse analysis, researchers focus on analysing the meaning, values and ethical principles that individuals create together in communication and social action. An interpretative repertoire, the endpoint of discourse analysis, is the systematic linking of speakers’ descriptions, accounts, viewpoints and their arguments. Interpretative repertoires usually reflect the concepts that occur repeatedly in the speaker’s talk and the particular perspectives on a topic that the speaker reflects (Talja, 1999).

In the study of identity in organisations, researchers have often portrayed the instability, struggle and inconsistency of the social text (Watson, 1994; Jackall, 1988; Sennett, 1998; Gioia et al., 2000). A discourse analytical approach was thought to allow instability and change in advertising creatives’ work roles, related to the rise of social media, to be explored through their talk.
3.6.4 Identification of interpretative repertoires

In this research, I used the qualitative software Nvivo to identify interpretative repertoires in the transcripts of the interviews.

Interpretative repertoires are systematically related sets of terms that are often used with stylistic and grammatical coherence and often organized around one or more central metaphors. (Potter, 1996, p.164)

The interpretive repertoire is an essential framework for understanding discourse in social interaction (e.g. Potter & Mulkay, 1982; Yearley, 1985; Whethell, 1986; Potter & Mulkay, 1987; Potter & Reicher, 1987). It is the basic analytic unit of discourse analysis, and is also seen as the strategy that systematically examines function, construction and variability in talk and texts (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). In other words, it is a summary unit of speakers’ descriptions in talk and interpretations about a pattern in the gathered content. According to Wetherell and Potter (1988), an interpretive repertoire serves as a fundamental unit for constructing speakers’ various actions, cognitive processes and other phenomena. In different situations, variations and inconsistencies may be found in the interview talk (e.g. Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Mulkay, 1985; Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Machn & Carrithers, 1996).

Wetherell and Potter (1988) defined interpretative repertoires as a ‘bounded language unit’, which is comprised of a confined range of terms and derived from key metaphors. They identified repertoires from the presence of certain figures of speech or tropes. Foucault (1972) contended that the object of discourse as a practice is formed systematically with more than a single meaning or interpretation of which it speaks. Therefore, discourse analysis indeed works for knowledge formations.

However, Talja (1999) argued that interpretative repertoires are more than the ‘bounded language unit’ that Wetherell and Potter mentioned, where meanings are constituted differently in different discourses. Talja (1999) stated that language contains only a limited number of concepts and distinctions in different fields and contexts. The above notion was divided more explicitly into three phases in order to carry out the search for the pattern of repertoires in this research. The first phase
consisted of the analysis of inconsistencies and internal contradictions in the participants’ answers. The second phase consisted of identifying regular patterns in the variability of accounts: repeatedly occurring descriptions, explanations, and arguments, in different participants’ talk (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). The third phase consisted of identifying the basic assumptions and statements, which underlie a particular way of talking about a phenomenon (Talja 1999).

In some situations, the function of interpretative repertories can be identified easily by using some kind of specific language functions such as requests, excuses and accusations (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Furthermore, Wetherell and Potter (1988) explained that functions could be revealed by the study of variation. It is assumed that what an individual says and writes could be different according to what they are doing in the social world. Further, variation of discourse is a consequence of function (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Based on this assumption, some researchers (e.g. Mulkay & Gilbert 1982; Gilbert & Mulkay, 1984; Potter & Mulkay, 1985) have suggested that certain kinds of function lead to certain kinds of variation. In this case, I identified variations in discourse in order to understand the function.

Discourse analysis is indeed a study of variations for understanding function. Researchers look at the regularities in language in order to understand the complex inconsistencies in any discourse (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). Wetherell and Potter (1988) further elaborated that language is inherently constructed in order to achieve particular consequences and purposes. Potter, Stringer and Wetherell (1984) agreed that discourse is a kind of construction of one’s lived reality. Therefore, discourse analysis no doubt involves interpretation and hypotheses about the use of language (Wetherell & Potter, 1988). According to Wetherell and Potter (1988), function in discourse analysis refers to the findings instead of the raw data; they stated that talk is a simple way to describe a situation that can be analysed in terms of discursive functions and effects. The interpretive repertoires have to be understood as heuristic dimensions rather than descriptions of an independent reality.
3.7 Ethical concerns and limitations of the research

This research project has been designed in accordance with the University of Edinburgh’s code of ethics. I conducted this research as capably as my knowledge permitted, and protected the dignity and preserved the well being of the human research participants. Moreover, I protected the access, control and dissemination of personal information ensuring privacy, confidentiality and anonymity respected. All of the participants in this research were acquainted with the aims and objectives of the study before taking part in the research process. They were advised that the research was conducted on a voluntary basis and that they could withdraw from the study at any time they chose. As aforesaid, I needed to protect the privacy of all stakeholders in the advertising agencies and their intellectual properties at all times during the fieldwork and in writing up findings by not disclosing their full or real names.

There may also have been issues about the disclosure of sensitive material. During the interviews, some sensitive topics required a trusting relationship between the interviewer and respondent (Nichols, 1991), and some respondents may not have trusted me enough to share some sensitive topics like financial situations, staff contracts and budget allocations of some current working projects. For example Matthew, an art director from a digital agency, did not want to share information regarding his contract and salary.

DH/AD   I don’t want to compare my present contract to my
Matthew previous one as well as my salary, you know, it is quite
        sensitive and…it is private.

Furthermore, as Gummesson (1991) stated, researcher pre-understanding might hinder or neglect some particular findings, meaning that there may not be sufficient reflexivity to challenge pre-judgments and assumptions. In this case, although my professional experience in the advertising industry was crucial to analysing and interpreting the qualitative data, my interest and experience could possibly have been a source of bias, influencing the interviews and analysis, especially due to the
interpretive approach of the research. For example in the first interview, I followed my understanding about what a ‘creative meeting’ with client means and I assumed that creatives have to present creative ideas in front of the clients. However, I immediately noticed that the ways in which creatives communicate with their working peers have changed significantly. Creatives rely heavily on sending mobile text messages and emails, sharing files with each other through computer servers, and meeting with clients through conference calls or video conferencing. These changes reminded me that I had to pay attention to the creatives’ talk and be to be reflexive in interpreting the words used by the creatives and not my own assumptions. In addition, I took measures to avert this potential threat to the collection and interpretation of the qualitative data by sending the transcripts to all interviewees for confirmation.

Regarding the limitation of judging interpretive inquiry, according to Riessman (1993), the analysis of interpretive data is actually a co-created process involving interviewees and the interviewer. The interpretive approach aims to understand phenomena through the people-assigned meanings (Klein & Myers, 1999). Due to this complexity of data collection process and analysis, it is indeed difficult to provide readers with standard criteria for judging this type of investigation. As Smith (1984) pointed out earlier, it is impossible to develop and apply foundational criteria to judge interpretive data. However, according to Sandberg (2005, p.62):

‘truth is always something unfinished within the interpretive tradition, the criteria proposed do not enable researcher to generate absolute truth claims. Instead, they give researchers the opportunity to produce more informed and thorough knowledge claims in relation to their ontological and epistemological assumptions.’

Thus, the knowledge produced from this research by the interpretive approach can build trustworthiness in relation to the epistemological assumptions discussed in Section 3.3.
3.8 Summary of Chapter 3

The rise of social media raises questions about advertising creatives' work practices, roles and role identities, and this study aimed to explore how and to what extent the roles of Hong Kong advertising creatives were changing in the social media era. This chapter has presented the study's aims, objectives, and key research questions, and sought to explain and justify the qualitative, interpretive approach adopted in studying the changing role of Hong Kong advertising creatives from a micro-level perspective. It also sought to explain and justify the use of in-depth interviews and participant observation to explore advertising creatives’ experiences in the social media era.

As discussed above, this study adopted a symbolic interactionist stance, based on the belief that peoples’ behaviour is shaped from subjective interpretation of phenomena and environments. From this perspective, creatives’ roles involve negotiation with other individuals within a social system, and the role-making process occurs through social interaction. Understanding the creatives’ interactions and how they negotiate their roles in the social media era is a key to understanding how the rise of social media may be shaping their working practices, roles, and role identities.

This chapter has also provided a detailed account of the research design, involving 32 face-to-face in-depth interviews with advertising creatives at different levels of seniority across four different agency types, and participant observation in two distinctive type of agencies in Hong Kong. The chapter has explained the discourse analytical approach used in interpreting the data generated; and highlighted the ethical concerns and limitations of this research.
Chapter 4 Data Analysis and Discussion: In-depth Interviews

This chapter presents the discourse analysis of the qualitative interviews with 32 advertising creatives at different levels of seniority, across four categories of advertising agency in Hong Kong. The purpose of the analysis was to explore the experiences and meanings constructed by the informants through their talk, and how the informants in response to the rise of social media saw the advertising creative’s role. Key findings generated from the interviews are interpreted and discussed, focusing on three main themes: the creatives’ identification in response to the rise of social media; creatives’ experience of clients’ understanding and expectations of social media; and the creative’s emerging role of a facilitator.

4.1 Hong Kong advertising creatives’ identity

Watson (2003) defined identity work as:

‘[the] mutually constitutive processes whereby people strive to shape a relatively coherent and distinctive notion of personal self-identity and struggle to come to terms with and, within limits, to influence the various social-identities which pertain to them in the various milieus in which they live their lives.’ (Watson, 2008, p.129)

All the advertising creatives interviewed appeared to be undergoing a reconsideration of their role identification in the digital era, with the distinction between ‘digital’ and ‘traditional’ an important factor shaping their professional and social identities. Aspects of creative identity explored in the interviews helped to affirm the creatives’ self-identities as well as their social identities.
4.1.1 Divergent identification of ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives

With the rise of digital technology in general, and social media in particular, there is an increasing demand on digital advertising services. Organisational change in the advertising industry, not only in creative departments, is unavoidable in order to survive (Benvenuto, 2007). Because of these technological challenges, multinational full-service advertising agencies inevitably seek to expand their services by employing new staff specialising in digital platforms, or to expand their digital arms by merging with or acquiring technical and media companies. Many independent advertising agencies have been formed to specialise in digital services, and these recruit creatives who are specialists in digital platforms. In both areas of agency development, that is full-service and digital specialists, there is a growing need for creatives with digital expertise. The argument for recruiting creatives specialising in digital platforms has become more and more compelling in recent years. Some newly created positions, such as ‘interactive art director’ and ‘interactive creative director’, have evolved in creative departments. Trying to understand the popularity of these new posts, readers only need to Google the keywords ‘interactive art director’, to find a huge list of personal portfolios from individuals who claim to be in this role.

Against this background, two distinctive orientations in relation to the rise of social media were identified among the creatives interviewed in this study. In general, they saw the formal training and work experience of creatives specialising in digital platforms as different from those of the ‘traditional’ creative. For instance, the digital creatives mostly had multimedia or web-design study certificates, while the ‘traditional’ creatives had qualifications in art, visual communication or training in advertising design. In order to address such differences, new titles, such as interactive art/creative director, have been created and such titles or positions may be seen as a symbolic expression of creatives’ identity, both within their individual agency and in relation to their industry peers. Divergent identities as ‘traditional’ or ‘digital’ creatives were evident throughout this study’s interview data.
Several researchers (e.g. Burke 1973; Ashforth & Mael 1989, 2000; Ashforth, 2000; Prince & Arnould, 2011) have discussed whether individual identification exists either at a particular point of time or as a ‘state of becoming’. The findings of this research suggest that creative identification is an emergent process in the digital era. As discussed below, this is reflected in three contexts in relation to the rise of social media: organisational focus, immediate workgroup, and relational. The issue of identity struggles among tradition and digital creatives is also discussed below.

4.1.2 Advertising creatives’ evolving organisational identification

The rise of social media requires a new generation of creatives specialising in digital social communication platforms, and seems to have encouraged Hong Kong advertising agencies to position themselves as providing either full-service or specialist digital advertising services. This in turn appears to have required creatives to redefine their roles and identities. Some creatives seemed to be redefining themselves in relation to where their organisations sat in the shifting media landscape. For instance, the creatives working in digital agencies defined themselves as ‘digital creatives’ instead of using the title ‘advertising creatives’. This act implies that digital creatives, no matter whether they are young creatives with total educational backgrounds in digital media, or those shifting their focus from traditional advertising to the digital dimension, are trying to distinguish themselves from the advertising creatives with traditional skills. This construction of distinctive identity among digital creatives echoes some earlier researchers’ arguments (e.g. Kagan, 1958; Kelman, 1958) that the individual role identification process involves some attempts to be against other members as part of the group. Furthermore, organisational identification involves employees creating a sense of belonging and seeking conformity with their peers (Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton, Dukerich & Harquail, 1994). Thus, Henry, creative director of a multinational digital agency in Hong Kong, identified himself as a digital advertising creative within his organization, which he described as currently repositioning itself as a digitally focused agency. Having worked in the advertising field for more than 15 years, he
described himself as experiencing the transition from a ‘traditional’ to a ‘digital creative’ as this multinational digital advertising agency increased its focus on digital services. Henry also presented his role as a pioneer of this organisational identity transition. This allowed him to imply that he is forward-thinking and leading the way.

DH/CD  
Henry  
\[...\text{what I also found satisfying is that my situation is in a transition, and that the traditional advertising agencies are in a transition to digital agencies. ... I see this agency [OgilvyOne] is thinking more and more digitally. ... I think that's a great satisfaction there because I am like pioneering this change with my work.}\]

This excerpt offers an example of how creatives defined their identities with reference to the culture and direction of the organisation that they work for. In this case, Ogilvy is a ‘full-service agency’ that focuses on branding development while OgilvyOne is its ‘digital agency’, specialising in direct marketing. According to Ashforth, Harrison and Corley (2008), individuals identify themselves with the organisation’s values in order to shape their identification. Here, Henry makes a close connection between himself and the agency’s transition to become more digitally-focused, and he describes the ‘great satisfaction’ from seeing himself as part of the organisation leading the changes towards a greater digital orientation.

### 4.1.3 Advertising creatives’ evolving workgroup identification

According to Copper and Thatcher (2010), workgroup identification refers to individuals defining themselves in relation to their peers in their immediate working unit. As mentioned above, the creatives tended to identify with one of two groups, namely ‘traditional creatives’ or ‘digital creatives’. This distinction was not only made by individual creatives, but also some agencies seemed to be organising the creative function along these lines, forming creative teams so that some creatives specialised in handling interactive and social media advertising work while others worked on traditional media such as television and print. For instance, Nicholas,
creative director of a multinational digital agency, characterised himself and his ‘team’ as ‘digital creatives’ and other colleagues as ‘traditional creatives’, even while he identified commonalities across the two categories:

**DH/CD Nicholas**  
... *My work as an advertising creative is probably the same no matter whether I work in traditional or digital teams. We work in advertising and it is all about communication. Even though my team and I work more on digital platforms as digital creatives, the process that we go through or the thinking method of the traditional creatives in other teams is the same. The major difference is that we may use different channels or media to reach our target audience.*

This notion of ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ workgroup identification is also reflected by creatives who work in multinational full-service agencies; for instance, Jason, assistant art director of a full-service agency, compared his area of expertise and the media his team handles with creatives working in digital teams:

**FH/AAD Jason**  
*For a traditional creative team, we present our idea to clients and we will present the big idea first, and tell them how the big idea could work on TV, print, online etc. We will think of a big picture in the first place. We have to work with the digital team very often. I mean...digital creatives are more expert in interactive media, but maybe we are more expert in traditional media.*

This situation is demonstrated by informants’ self-categorisation as either traditional or digital creatives, and by their highlighting of differences between these two identities in terms of beliefs, knowledge, work content, work processes and skill-sets. For instance, Macro, associate creative director of an independent digital agency, commented that he had found significant differences in terms of the ‘ways of thinking’ and working processes between traditional and digital creatives:
Macro expressed a strong sense of bifurcation of beliefs about the application of online advertising platforms between traditional and digital creatives, illustrated by his comment about traditional creatives equating ‘posting a poster on a website’ with creative social media solutions. Macro used the word ‘traditional’ three times and constructed a superior identity as a ‘digital creative’ by associating himself with his workgroup, the digital team, and by emphasizing the ‘big gap’ between the ‘innocent’ beliefs of traditional creatives and the more sophisticated understanding of digital creatives regarding social media. Macro also described the traditional creatives with some disdain, illustrated by the expression ‘sorry’, stating that traditional creatives have ‘failed’ in handling social media.

As mentioned previously, some agencies have created new positions and titles (such as ‘interactive art director’) for creatives who specialise in digital platforms so as to marking a clear differentiation from the ‘traditional’ advertising creative’s work role. In other agencies there are clear distinctions between the two groups even if they do not have different positions or titles. For instance, in OgilvyOne, digital creatives are given the same title as art directors and copywriters in the creative department. Nonetheless, the distinction between two kinds of creatives was emphasised strongly in the account provided by Kym, a senior ‘art director’, of his colleagues:

Kym besides computer skills that I mentioned before, I think it is the ways of thinking, definitely! As I mentioned about the area driven by different computer knowledge that we require to work on the digital platform, it actually affects our ways of thinking and the working process. In fact, in our team, we have an off-line art director and online art director. The mode of thinking is different…
Despite having the same title as the art director in a digital agency and although these titles do not officially exist in the creative department, Barry made a distinction between ‘off-line art directors’ [i.e., ‘traditional’ creatives] and ‘online art directors’, [i.e., digital creatives], and he argued that the different skill-sets and modes of thinking required are driven by the different demands of working on different advertising communication platforms.

4.1.4 The use of ‘we’ and ‘they’ between traditional and digital creatives

In the interviews, the creatives’ identities were reinforced by distinctions in their talk between ‘we’ and ‘they’. This echoes the argument made by Brewer and Gardner (1996) that one of the major factors shaping definitions of work roles is collective self-representation. Thus, the concept of ‘we’ reflects the inclusive nature of self-representation as a frame of reference for evaluating self-worth. Others have suggested that identity emerges through processes of identification that can be expressed in symbolic terms, constructing and maintaining an association of persons and groups (Larson & Pepper 2003; Press & Arnould 2011). This section elaborates on how the advertising creatives used the terms ‘we’ and ‘they’, and what these collective identities appeared to mean for their work roles and the construction of their identities.

As mentioned above, the creatives in this study attempted not only to identify themselves as ‘traditional’ or ‘digital’, but also to differentiate between ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives. For instance, Jason, an assistant art director in a multinational full-service agency, referred to ‘traditional creatives’ as ‘we’ and ‘digital creatives’ as ‘they’. Jason expressed strong views about this distinction:
They [digital creatives] are also advertising creatives, but they have one more layer than us. They know how to do online media and they know how to do print media as well. I know what they are doing and they are more expert on digital media. For us, we present our idea to clients and we will present the big idea first, and tell them how the big idea works on TVC, print etc. We will think a big picture at the first place. I mean they are more expert in interactive media, but we are more expert in traditional media.

Jason showed how ‘we’ and ‘they’ represent different media specializations. In this excerpt, traditional media are understood as print and television commercials (TVCs), whereas digital media refer to online and interactive advertising. Jason believed that ‘we’ and ‘they’ are two different groups of creatives specializing in different media. The notion of creatives identifying themselves as ‘we’ and ‘they’ highlights the divergence of creatives’ identifications in response to the rise of social media. Here, we see Jason negotiating a sense of inferiority by clearly acknowledging that ‘they’ are more skilful (e.g. able to implement both digital and traditional advertising campaigns) than traditional creatives. In the last sentence of this extract, Jason added the qualifier ‘...but we are more expert in traditional advertising’, implying that, as a representative of traditional creatives, he felt defensive, or had a sense of a struggle for relevance among traditional creatives in the digital age.

Furthermore, Jason’s use of ‘we’ and ‘they’ is an example of creatives’ collective identifications as they constitute themselves as belonging to one of two distinctive groups with different skill-sets and mind-sets. This collective identification was noted consistently in the talk of both digital and full-service agency creatives. For instance, as discussed above, Barry, an associate creative director in a multinational digital agency, suggested that modes of thinking and skill-sets drove this divergence into traditional or digital creatives, even when they worked in the same creative department. This suggests that the creatives’ frequent reference to ‘we’ and ‘they’
allowed them to identify themselves not just as individuals but as a collective ‘in-group’ self with shared knowledge and characteristics, and in relation to an out-group (McFarland & Buehler, 1995; Simon, Pantaleo, & Mummendey, 1995; Brewer & Gardner, 1996). Such collective self-representations, reflecting social norms and shared beliefs, are evident among the creatives in this study, as highlighted by their use of ‘we’ and ‘they’.

DH/ACD  *We (digital creatives) have totally different mind-sets and skills against them (traditional creatives). This gap always happens in doing a co-operative project or a huge advertising campaign which involves different types of professional and creatives.*

Rather than seeing digital creatives as always superior to traditional creatives, however, Barry saw the two roles as complementary, acknowledging for example that digital creatives (working with an ‘online art director’) might not have good knowledge of how to handle branding and TV advertising.

DH/ACD  *I admit, they (traditional creatives) are good at branding and TVC in traditional ways.*

Henry, a digital creative director, also discussed divergent roles among creatives, explaining the differences he saw in the work and skill-sets associated with ‘us’ and ‘them’. He noted that traditional creatives may not be capable of handling advanced digital advertising due to a lack of computer knowledge, but he acknowledged that they also possessed some distinctive skills.

DH/CD  *… Physically they cannot do some advanced digital work, whereas we cannot do some advanced TV branding work. But I think more and more will cross over. We share knowledge and then, you know, it’s going to happen like that.*
The formulation of 'we' and 'they', referring to the differentiated collective identification of advertising creatives, was widely used by interviewees across the range of advertising agencies in this study. As indicated by Henry’s comment about skills increasingly ‘crossing over’, however, not all creatives agreed that the roles are distinctly or necessarily ‘digital’ versus ‘traditional’. In fact, some creatives resisted being identified as either ‘digital’ or ‘traditional’. For instance, Nicholas, creative director of a multinational digital agency, was not happy at being labelled as a ‘digital creative’, or as a creative director in digital platforms, by those from full-service agencies; he believed creatives should not be differentiated as either ‘digital’ or ‘full-service’ given the integrated nature of advertising.

DH/CD    I would not say I am a digital creative director in advertising, I see no differences when we are dealing with clients. We provide creative solutions to advertising strategies, no matter whether it is in digital or traditional execution…

Nicholas

4.1.5 Role struggles of traditional and digital creatives

As Hamilton (2002) noted, clearly defined tasks and requirements often help to reduce confusion and increase productivity. Clear definitions are not always offered to employees however. Judeh (2011) defined role struggle as a situation in which there is a lack of clarity or adequate information for an employee to perform his or her expected role in a job. According to Sawyer (1992, p.130):

‘To adequately perform his or her role, a person must know (a) what the expectations of the role set are (e.g., rights, duties, and responsibilities), (b) what activities will fulfill the role responsibilities (means-end knowledge), and (c) what the consequences of role performance are to self, others, and the organization.’
Furthermore, ‘Ambiguity may result when the three types of information do not exist or when they are inadequately communicated.’ Role ambiguity occurs, then, when an individual lacks salient, job-related information needed to enact his or her role’ (Sawyer, 1992, p. 130).

Breaugh and Colihan (1994) concluded that ‘ambiguity refers to employees' perceptions of uncertainty concerning various aspects of their jobs’ (p. 191). Indeed, many researchers (e.g. Beard, 1996; Macionis & Linda, 2010) have seen the role conflict occurring when individuals find themselves trying to respond to diverse working situations in consolidating a role. In this study, some creatives who moved between full-service and digital agencies found that they needed new skill-sets in their new roles, even though they had the same job titles and positions as before. For instance Kym, who moved from a multinational traditional agency, indicated that he has had to ‘catch up’, absorb new knowledge and develop new skills in digital advertising in order to cope with the changing nature of advertising.

DH/SAD  *I moved from a traditional advertising agency to this digital agency.*  
Kym  *I have had solid experience in doing advertising for years, however, although it’s the same post in this digital agency, it urges me to learn a new skill-set in digital executions…* *I have to catch up even though I did have certain digital knowledge before.*

Steven’s account of difficulty with his colleagues suggests that the rise of social media is creating an environment where role struggles are likely:
We have colleagues in our company who came from those traditional advertising agencies [full-service agency]. They [the new colleagues] are struggling with the working process in here - I am not sure why they need to struggle. What they needed to be concerned with in the past was only the front-end part and they did not need to take care of the rest.

Broadly speaking, the ‘front end’ part of a creative process refers to idea development and design, while the ‘back end’ refers to production and programming, or the execution of creative ideas. Steven expressed dissatisfaction with colleagues who had joined his digitally focused agency from full-service agencies. He seemed to be disappointed with them because they were not able to perform well on both ‘front end’ and ‘back end’ processes and he expressed a lack of understanding about ‘why they need to struggle’. In fact, Steven himself worked at a ‘traditional’ multinational agency before joining this digital agency, and so he was well aware of the different work content and processes between these two agency types. Indeed, he acknowledged that the ‘back-end’ of the process was new to them since most of the back-end work would have been outsourced in their previous agencies. Despite this, it seems that he expected new colleagues from ‘traditional’ agencies to be able to adapt to new aspects of their role without clear explanation or training to help them understand what they were expected to do in a digital agency.

More broadly, regardless of whether the creatives worked in digital or full-service advertising agencies, they did not have clear views about what it meant to be a ‘traditional’ or ‘digital’ creative. In part this general role struggle occurred because they were not sure whether their agencies should provide services differentiated by media if advertising was becoming more integrated across media. Faced with this uncertainty, it was difficult to establish who (traditional or digital creatives) should have expertise about what (media platform). More specifically, role struggle was also created by unclear job requirements and expectations when handling particular advertising campaigns; often no clear information was provided by either digital or
multinational agencies about the differentiation of the skill-sets and role expectations, and their organisational ‘labels’ or titles did not necessarily help them understand their work roles. Indeed, the label of ‘full-service’ or ‘digital’ creative created even more confusion if the creatives did not have sufficient information about these distinctive roles. Nicholas, for example, commented that he found it more of a struggle if he had to handle an integrated platform while being labelled a ‘digital’ specialist. Several creatives said they felt frustrated about their work roles as ‘full-service’ or ‘digital’ creatives since they felt unclear about their expected job requirements and whether they should move towards media ‘integration’ or retain a specialisation in providing creative services to clients who expect them to meet ever-changing market needs.

Both full-service and digital agencies have highlighted media integration services and media specialisation as ways of meeting the challenges associated with the rise of social media. Media integration services refer to agencies that provide marketing communications, planning and strategies and production services that integrate traditional advertising media with online media. Media specialisation services refer to agencies that provide marketing communication strategies and production services with specialisations in particular media, for instance, digital platforms. However, both full-service and digital agencies appear to be combining media integration and media specialization strategies. For example, a multinational full-service agency, McCann WorldGroup Hong Kong, expanded its creative department by recruiting creatives who specialised in digital media, blending them with their ‘traditional’ creative teams to work on integrated marketing campaigns.

Nonetheless, agencies’ movement towards media integration services and media specialisations is inevitably causing creatives to reconsider the nature of their jobs and skill-sets. For instance, Alvin, an assistant art director from a multinational full service advertising agency, had considered whether he should be upgrading his skills in digital platforms or continuing to do traditional advertising in his existing agency.
As the industry (advertising industry) is changing to a more digital focus, traditional creatives like me, I can only either stay in this agency (traditional agency) or learn new skills to move to a digital one...I don’t know, I am still thinking.

Based on this, during this grey period as the entire advertising industry is changing, creatives are forced to re-construct their identities in choosing to focus traditional advertising media, digital media or both. Overall, it seems that changes in creatives’ role identification, work processes and skill-sets in the social media era have created uncertainty leading to role struggles for creatives.

4.2 Changing creative-client relationships in the social media environment

As discussed in the literature review, both advertising creatives and clients are still trying to understand and explore the role and potential contribution of social media in communication campaigns. In this study, creatives generally described clients as ignorant about social media, and saw this as creating tension in their dealings with each other because clients have the wrong attitude toward the adoption of social media and they expect ‘free’ media and cheap production. Moreover, clients are miss-spending their budgets on social media advertising. These tensions appeared to affect not only the creatives’ job performance and satisfaction, but also their sensitivity towards client dissatisfaction.

4.2.1 Clients’ ignorance of social media

Mills and Morris (1986) highlighted that clients’ production knowledge and attitudes can affect production outcomes and are also crucial in establishing cooperative production processes. Similarly, Beard (1996) noted that the lack of professional training and experience of client representatives, particularly in the development of an advertising campaign, is one of the major problems in maintaining ‘a good client-
agency relationship’ (Scott, Sasser & Riordan, 2006). This study suggests that, at least from the advertising creatives’ perspective, clients’ production knowledge is weakened by their poor understanding of social media, and that this has implications for creative work as well as for the satisfaction of creatives and broader agency-client relationships.

In the interviews, there were no indications that any creatives viewed any of their clients as understanding how to use digital media. Rather, creatives from both full-service and digital agencies offered strong criticisms of clients for their ignorance of social media, making many disparaging remarks about their lack of knowledge. For example:

**FH/AD Dave**

They [clients] do not know much about this [social media advertising] in fact. They are not willing to know more if they do not know much. Therefore, it is rather difficult from our side.

**DI/ID Angel**

I don’t think clients understand us very much because they do not know about what we are doing. They know ‘zero’ about our work. So we have to tell them what this is about. Some of them they have never worked on an online platform before and they have only worked with printed media. So they judge it wrongly because they use the same mind-set as judging printed media.

Despite the differences in their agency backgrounds, Dave and Angel make similar claims based on their experiences with clients. They state that their clients ‘know zero’ or ‘do not know much’ about social media, and see such ignorance as leading to difficulty in their work, not least because they have to spend time explaining the basics to clients. Previous researchers have shown that the level of clients’ advertising knowledge and expertise is a crucial factor influencing the success of an advertising project (Korgaonkar, et al, 1985; Beard, 1996; Koslow, Sasser & Riordan, 2006). In the above excerpts, both Dave and Angel complain that their
clients cause them dissatisfaction in their work and Angel expresses concern that clients’ ignorance about social media leads them to make ‘wrong judgments’ about creative work. This suggests that if clients raise concerns, comments or disapproval in relation to creative work for social media, creatives are likely to attribute these to clients’ poor understanding of social media, leading to distrust and tension between client and creative.

The poor understanding of social media attributed to clients exists within a political decision-making context. For example, Jeffrey, an art director in a multinational digital agency, discussed how the client’s ‘respect’ could vary based on his or her level of knowledge about the digital advertising process:

DH/AD Jeffrey  ... Some will respect you more because they think you know more than them. However, some clients still want to take the lead and ask us to do something impossible or unreasonable because they do not understand it well… I think clients are not very familiar with the digital platform. I think we know more in this area than them...

In decision making about creative work, perceived knowledge of digital is a form of power exerted on either side. Jeffrey suggested that creatives would receive ‘respect’ if they were believed to be more knowledgeable than the clients. However, clients will ‘lead’ the creatives, pressuring them to do something they believe to be unreasonable, if the clients do not recognise themselves as having less understanding of digital media than the creatives.

Previous research has indicated that control over creative work is a major source of conflict in agency-client relationships (e.g. Kover, et al., 1995). In this research, advertising creatives wanted their clients to understand social media so that they would respect them and buy into their creative ideas, or they wanted clients to defer to their superior understanding. The creatives did not want to be forced or ‘led’ in terms of creative ownership, and they expressed a strong sense of dissatisfaction
about clients’ disrespect in putting them into an inferior position, especially since they believed that the clients had less knowledge about social media and advertising than themselves. Hence, advertising creatives seem to be criticizing clients as a defensive mechanism against the rejection of creative ideas for social media on one hand, and trying to build their own power and creative ownership on the other. Similar views about clients’ ignorance of social media were found from senior advertising creatives. Steven, an executive creative director of an independent digital agency, presented his view of clients as not being a personal, subjective criticism, since it was shared by his colleagues.

DI/ECD
Steven

I am sure that the colleagues and I have the same vision. I feel very happy to work with them [clients]. However, the major difficulty is that many clients still cannot catch up with what we think and we have to share much with them with extra effort!

In the above extract, Steven said he tries to deal with his clients by comparing what he knows with their understanding of digital platforms. Through this comparison, he puts the clients in an inferior position because they ‘cannot catch up’ with his knowledge. Moreover, he reflected that ‘extra effort’ has to be used when sharing ideas with his clients. This reinforced his stance of superiority in having more knowledge of social media than his clients do. Consistent with Hackley (2003), he pointed out that the judging of creative work relies on arguments between the agency and clients and the winning of arguments depends on skills of persuasion and plausible evidence presented. A clear example of this came from Fred, a senior interactive art director in an independent digital agency, who mentioned that clients were questioning proposed creative solutions based on lack of understanding about how those ideas were developed:
... I have to catch up the news and new technologies from the Internet browsing in order to prepare creative solutions to clients, however, they do not really appreciate this since they might think all of this information is easily downloaded from the web.

With the above discussion, it can be argued that the perceived level of knowledge about a particular issue can help one side win an argument, over and above the skill of persuasion based on plausible evidence.

4.2.2 Clients’ ‘wrong attitudes’ towards the adoption of social media

Social media are influencing every country and consumer segment, both regionally and globally (Nuytenmans, 2009), and this has a significant impact on the advertising industry. Creatives expressed the notion that social media advertising is ‘an imperative advertising medium nowadays’ frequently, across different agency types. The creatives also commented that their clients’ attitudes toward the adoption of social media had a profound impact on their daily working lives. For example, Teddy, creative director of an independent full-service advertising agency, stated that both the advertising agency and the client ‘do not have a choice’ about using social media in advertising campaigns nowadays, and he described social media as an essential element of any advertising campaign.

We don’t have a choice and clients do not have a choice either.

It is a must. Social media advertising is a ‘must’ item nowadays...

This implies an urgent need to consider social media seriously, paying particular attention to the active participation of consumers. It is therefore inevitable that even if marketers and advertising professionals do not necessarily embrace social media themselves, they will feel forced to incorporate this digital platform into their work.
practices. This view of social media as a ‘must’ or ‘package’ were shared across agency type, mentioned for example by Keith, creative director of a multinational full-service agency, as well as Alex, art director of an independent digital agency.

FH/CD ... You know all our clients are playing on Facebook as well, so they all think that this is the place that we need to explore. Sometimes the clients’ side requests it and they ask us to think of ideas about social media too. We try to integrated more media in our proposal, so social media are often incorporated.

DI/IAD Nearly all clients want to do advertising on social media now and it becomes a package in a campaign. In the past, a digital advertising campaign involved designing a website plus some online banner. Now, all clients require us to have ideas about social media....

Moreover, Keith’s and Alex’s use of words like ‘need to’, ‘requested’ and ‘require’ suggest that clients were often seen as demanding the adoption of social media, and agencies were having to respond by incorporating social media into campaigns. Most of the advertising creatives in this study seemed willing to incorporate social media into their creative planning and attempted to do so. However, given their beliefs about clients’ ignorance of social media, they were not always convinced that it was imperative to include social media in every campaign. For instance, Steven, an executive creative director of an independent digital agency, doubted his clients’ readiness to adopt social media with their brands.

DI/ECD I think social media are over-abused. Clients know social media is just like Facebook, but they do not have the concept of openness... Some clients even do not know why they want to do advertising on social media, they do it just because ‘others have, so I have to’.
Here, Steven expresses a belief that social media are ‘over abused’. Moreover, he also believed clients have not fully understood the rationale for adopting social media in advertising. Besides, he thought clients were just followers of other brands’ adoption of social media. This idea can be seen from his expression of ‘they do it just because others have, so I have to’. These sentiments reflect quite strong distrust of the client in relation to the adoption of social media.

Creatives’ beliefs about clients’ poor understanding of social media may influence their interaction and relationship building with clients. Even though the creatives did not generally object to adopting social media, they expressed concern and doubt about the underlying reason for their clients wanting to adopt social media in advertising or seeing it as imperative. As mentioned above, advertising creatives believe that many of their clients do not understand social media well and are not ready to open their brands to greater scrutiny on social media platforms. They suggested that their clients were just followers of other brands. They also argued that clients have misconceptions and treat social media platforms as just another medium without fully understanding their nature and particularly the requirement for openness. These concerns may be a source of distrust and conflict in agency-client relationships.

4.2.3 Fallacy of ‘free’ media and ‘cheap’ production

Social media are becoming more and more popular in terms of communication and promotional usages for marketers. A survey conducted by the Hong Kong Advertisers Association (2010) found that advertisers had strong views about adopting social media, with 84% of respondents stating that social networking platforms, including Facebook and Twitter, have potential for brand building. Apparently, social media offer more opportunities for advertisers as well as opening up advertising possibilities for advertising agencies to reach their target consumers. The opportunities for reaching target consumers through social media may be one of
the strong reasons for their popularity. The current research suggests further reasons for advertisers’ positive attitudes toward the adoption of social media. In this study, ‘free of charge’ and ‘cheap’ were common reasons provided by the advertising creatives for their clients’ desire to adopt social media advertising.

**DI/IAD**  
Alex  
 Clients like to advertise on social media a lot because it is free of media charge. Originally it was designed for communication and not for advertising. Now clients want to deliver messages to people through social media without any media cost...

**DH/SAD**  
Kym  
 The client thought social media could be done cheaply. In many cases, clients may require digital production in a campaign, such as Youtube, or so-called viral advertising: they expect a cheap price and effectiveness. Of course! Cheap and effective is always good for the customers.

Both advertising creatives, Alex and Kym, expressed the belief that one of the strong reasons why most clients like to use social media is that it is ‘free of charge’. Of course, while ‘free of charge’ would sound very positive to clients, the advertising creatives seemed to view this with reservation. This is because when social media are perceived as ‘free of charge’, clients believe that advertising this way can be done ‘cheaply’ by the advertising agencies, and therefore that clients might be able to reduce their advertising budgets. This perceived ‘cause and effect’ appeared to create some unspoken tensions in the relationships between clients and agencies. On one hand, advertising creatives believe that if social media can help clients to save some media costs, more budget should be made available for other aspects, such as advertising production. On the other hand, if clients believe that social media are an effective way to reach their consumers, they should pay more attention and invest more of their budgets in social media advertising. The client belief that social media are free and that advertising could therefore be done ‘cheaply’ created a problem for advertising creatives, and presumably for agency-client relationships more generally.
For instance, Steven, an executive creative director from an independent digital agency, described a client thinking that, because social media platforms are free, any established concept and material could simply put a copy online.

**DI/ECD** Steven: *Once, a client simply asked me to put the TVC on YouTube also, oh come on, they (clients) think it is a handy job to simply upload the file? We should think about some technical and branding issues before any advertising act.*

Not surprisingly, the advertising creatives in this study argued that this assumption is based on a fallacy. This has deepened the advertising creatives’ beliefs that their clients do not understand social media advertising, and it represents another source of conflict in the agency-client relationship.

### 4.2.4 Clients’ misspending of advertising budget on social media

If clients really believe that social media are ‘free of charge’ and that social media advertising can therefore be done ‘cheaply’, it may affect their beliefs about how much to spend on advertising and where to place their advertising budgets. Based on experiences shared by the creatives in the interviews, it seems that some clients actually decide to reduce their advertising budgets, based on this assumption. However, clients also expect that advertising can be done effectively with a low budget and can reach more of their customers effectively through these ‘free’ media. In contrast, the creatives argued that many successful and effective cases of social media advertising could not have been done ‘cheaply’. For example, the production cost of many creative ideas could not be achieved with a low budget, since many support teams are required to be involved in various aspects of production. Some creatives argued that the production cost of a viral video placed on a social media platform is no less than for a TV commercial. Although the advertising creatives did not share their clients’ beliefs about production budgets, the clients were found to be
demanding more advertising effort with lower budgets, thus affecting the creatives’ ability to generate ideas and their control over production.

**FI/CD**

*In fact clients invest only a small amount on creative and production when working with social media. ... Clients think that it is very cheap to work on creative and production on social media; but they were willing to pay a lot for other media in the past. ...but most of the time they leave just a small amount of budget for the creatives and production, and many of our ideas become ‘gun ashes’!*

**FI/AD**

*They think it could work with a very low budget. In fact, it is not that cheap – if you want to post a video on YouTube, you have to shoot it the same, as a TVC, and clients are not satisfied if it cannot be done on a very low budget. Clients just have a pre-conception that it is cheap to do advertising with social media, but in fact it is not.*

Teddy and Yarla reflected the difficulties and contradictions of being creatives while facing budget cuts in production costs. In fact, most of the creatives expressed the belief that social media can open up a lot of creative opportunities. At the same time, they want to propose more creative ideas to their clients. However, many creative ideas will be constrained by lower budget allocations. Gabriel, an art director at a full-service agency, complained that a low advertising budget prevents him from looking for good quality suppliers and affects the quality of the advertising outcomes. Teddy complained that his proposed ideas become ‘gun ashes’, not because of the quality of the ideas or the ineffectiveness of the message delivery, but because clients are not willing to spend money on them. Hence, there was a strong belief among the creatives that social media can lead to lower advertising budgets or even ‘no budget’, to use one creative’s words. This has direct and negative effects on creative possibilities, and is likely to lead to dissatisfaction on the part of the creatives, resulting in potential conflicts in the agency-client relationship.
Over the past decade, advertising agencies have had to adapt to market changes and satisfy the needs of clients, particularly larger clients, by providing an integration of services through merging and acquisitions (So, 2005; Beard, 1996). The expansion and popularity of the social media platform is driving agencies to change and to expand their range of services. Moreover, So (2005) argued that advertising agencies have to improve their services by understanding local cultural and social issues in order to sustain global business and clients. So (2005) explained that a good agency-client relationship is based on an agency’s understanding of clients’ expectations and must be built with trust, commitment and reciprocal communication. In this study, the creatives’ general perception that clients are generally ignorant about social media appears to undermine the potential for trust and mutual commitment, especially since it encourages them to expect that more can be done with lower budgets.

4.3 **Personal and social identity among Hong Kong advertising creatives**

One of the key objectives of this study was to explore the work roles and identities of advertising creatives in the digital age. Identities are affected by self-concept, which is an inherent logic reflecting one’s self-image (Mitchel et al., 1986). According to Van Wijk (2004), research on identity can generally be categorized into studying personal identity and social identity. Personal identity addresses the question of ‘who I am’, while social identity is based on social processes. It is about working out where we belong, and our uniqueness in the social group (Van Wijk, 2004). In this research, the advertising creatives were asked to talk about how they see themselves. They were also asked to share their reasons for joining the advertising industry. Both questions aimed to generate accounts of how Hong Kong advertising creatives constructed their work roles and identities and what they perceived as the social expectations surrounding their role.
Some tensions are evident in the identities of advertising creatives in previous research. Hackley and Kover (2007), for example, pointed out the ambivalent cultural status of advertising professionals in western culture by drawing some stereotypical representations from popular culture. That is to say the identity of creatives is positive and glamorous on one hand, such as in movies and dramas, which present advertising professionals are privileged and wealthy, with a high quality of living. They are portrayed as poised, brilliant, well-educated, middle-class mavericks (Hackley & Kover, 2007). Similarly, Nixon (2003) highlighted the alluring side of creatives being regarded as the elite in advertising agencies, and earlier research described them as ‘almost the top people in the agency...they’re bought and sold like footballers with salaries to match’ (Forrester, 1987: p.15). Likewise, as Peter Mead, Joint Chairman of AMV and BBDO said, ‘The creatives are the ones who lay the golden eggs’ (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p. 136). Obviously, creatives, in western cultural contexts, have played a privileged and crucial role in the advertising industry (Nixon & Crewe, 2004).

In the interviews conducted for this study, the creatives generally presented themselves, and characterized creative people in general and advertising creatives in particular, as ‘stylish and cool’:

FH/SAD Thomas ‘They [advertising creatives] pay attention to outlook, they are rather trendy, I would say...hahah...they are very close to the trend. They are willing to spend money on trendy stuff and they spend a lot. They are not good money keepers indeed.’

Some creatives in this study talked about how they had this image of creative people in their minds before entering the advertising industry themselves, and that ‘glorified’ representations of creatives as ‘cool’ and ‘stylish’ were one reason why they were attracted to the industry in the first place. As Alex, an art director from a digital agency, commented:
DI/IAD: ‘I joined the advertising field because I thought creative directors were so cool. People think we are somehow special and with good taste. They believe that creatives are smart people and full of innovative ideas.’

Alex: Another young creative talked about how he saw creatives as stylish and trendsetters, and generally perceived as living at the ‘front-end of the trend’. Several creatives spoke about how it is essential for a creative to dress trendily, and how they were willing to spend much of their incomes on fashion as well as buying expensive trendy magazines. Part of the reason for this seemed to be about impressing clients. One novice art director, for example, said that he believes clients will trust him more and believe he is creative if he wears trendy clothing at the presentation. In other words, clients’ judgment of creatives’ work can be affected by the presentation of creatives as creative through their personal styles.

Beyond this particular tactical use of style, it seemed that projecting a ‘stylish and cool’ image was essential to them in reinforcing their creative role and identity in the advertising industry. One comment was particularly striking in highlighting the importance of others’ perceived image of him: ‘I can lose with my creative work but I cannot lose with my image!’ This suggests that maintaining a successful personal brand, as a ‘creative’ over time, is more important to creatives than whether particular pieces of work are accepted or rejected. Similarly, describing British advertising creatives, Nixon and Crewe (2004, p. 136) highlighted ‘the commitment to fashion and individuality evident in their self-presentations’. Furthermore,

‘This was a differentiation partly rooted in ideas about the ‘creativity’ of our practitioners and was further evident in the way their self-presentation set them apart from their more business-orientated colleagues. Certainly within advertising, the strongest contrast was with account handlers, the practitioners involved with overseeing particular client accounts and liaising with clients’ (Nixon & Crewe, 2004, p.137).
This implies that creatives take particular care with their personal styles because they believe how they dress sets them apart from others in the agency, such as account executives.

The following interview excerpts depict the creatives’ self-images, especially from the operation level.

FH/SAD Thomas ‘Advertising creatives are more humorous, in general...not me...hehe
Rather open-minded and speak freely; rather optimistic with the personality; but... to a certain extent they are quite insistent on some things. They will believe in themselves, in what they think is right, and what they think is the best. They do not find it easy to accept others’ opinions...’

FH/AAD Jason ‘I think they are more fun and are more interesting people. They like to play tricks on you; they are very curious to different things, like kids.’

DI/IAD Sophia ‘They like to play. They seldom work in a serious atmosphere. They play whenever they come across anything they find interesting. I think the relaxing atmosphere is good way of working.’

Thomas and Jason, art director and assistant art director from the multinational full-service advertising agencies, both suggested that creatives are not just trendy, but also humorous, open-minded, interesting, curious and sometimes insistent on something they think is right. Sophia, who is an interactive art director from an independent digital agency, presented a similar image of herself as casual, free and playful. This echoes previous research that free and playful experiences are always crucial in doing creative work (Lieberman, 1977; Amabile, 1996).
These findings contribute to an understanding of how organisation members construct their identities in relation to their working environment, trying to achieve a strong sense and coherent self-concept across their work tasks and social relations (Alvesson, 2000). In this case, creatives’ identities are shaped in relation to other core parties in the working environment. The following section further explores creatives’ identities within their organizational context.

### 4.3.1 Advertising creatives’ concerns about freedom in their work

Most of the creatives in this study talked about how they enjoy the sense of freedom in their work, in terms of their flexible working hours as well as the informal work style and office environment. A key aspect of this freedom for them was that they do not need to follow a nine-to-five working pattern. The freedom of flexi-working hours was considered a privilege enjoyed by this group of people in the advertising agency, although the degree of flexibility depended on the norms of different agencies and was build up by trust in the creatives as being dedicated to their work. One art director explained that they may not go to the office after lunch but they may have to work very late if necessary, even on weekends. Thus, the freedom of flexi-working hours that they enjoyed involved various tradeoffs. The creatives explained that they are not flexible at all if work needs to be done at times when they want to enjoy social gatherings with friends or families. In the interviews, Dave, an art director from a multinational advertising agency, commented that ‘I have less and less friends now because whenever they ask me to have dinner, I will have to reject them because I have to work in the office at night’. Furthermore, this desire for ‘freedom’ sometimes has negative implications for creatives. For instance, within the advertising industry, creatives are often marginalized and are characterized as ‘trouble’ within the bureaucratic system (Hackley & Kover, 2007). The ‘freedom’ is valuable to creatives, but at the same time it appears to be challenged and contested by others in the industry. Indeed, the creatives commented that the freedom to be enjoyed in this career, such as having flexi-working time, had not turned out to be as
ideal as they had imagined before they joined the industry, and there were some comments about how misleading images of their role in the popular culture could be:

FH/SAD

Gabriel

*I may have been influenced by the style of the career that I fancied a long time ago, but of course it is totally different now...haha....before I was a creative I thought creatives were very smart and stylish! I fancied the working style and that they could dress so smartly. The working style is so free and they can go to work on a flexible schedule even though I knew they could be very busy. It may be true to a certain extent only. In fact, you will know what a creative’s work is like after you start your career as a creative, and I experienced the tough side of it! It is not as free as I thought. It is not stylish at all to be a creative. I have to follow many rules of the game in advertising. I have to accommodate our clients as well as our colleagues. It is not as free as I thought. What I thought I would enjoy most about this career seems to happen in my mind only...haha*

Gabriel, a senior art director in a multinational full-service agency, seems to have been attracted to the advertising industry by the alluring image he had of being a creative about five years ago. He thought the work style would be free and that creatives were stylish. However, his personal experience of ‘freedom’ at work was actually very different. What he perceived to be freedom in terms of working hours is set against working in non-office hours, such as late at night or at weekends. Nixon and Crewe (2004) mentioned the ‘social splitting’ that creatives do as they try to reconcile the contradiction between the ‘cool’ images from outsides and the ‘macho’, intensely competitive and workaholic environment (Hackley & Kover, 2007).

Moreover, the ‘rules of the game’ that advertising creatives encounter during their work may also be contrary to the image of freedom that they had in their minds when they first entered this field. Rules constrain freedom. Hence, the creatives believe
their freedom is limited in terms of working hours and needing to follow ‘the rules of the game’ set by clients.

Although creatives may be seen as cool and stylish, they can also be regarded negatively and considered superficial and impertinent people. In fact, not everyone finds the advertising industry attractive. Some Hollywood movies suggest that creatives are quirky and insecure (Hackley & Kover, 2007). Sometimes, they have been criticized as devious and corrupting consumers with transient values. Packard’s (1957; cited in Hackley, 2007) attack on advertising describes it as a deceitful industry where consumers are manipulated by a group of educated technocrats. For instance, Joyce, an interactive designer from an independent digital agency, mentioned that it is all about an illusion to consumers of being a cool career or even the advertising campaign they offer.

DI/ID  
Joyce  

*I did think being a creative is cool and free before I joined this industry. We seem to like creating ‘need’ and ‘desire’ for consumers to chase for a better life, but in fact, we don’t have a better life either...haha...*

In sum, the advertising creatives were aware of a very attractive side to their work roles at the same time as facing tensions and difficulties. This section has highlighted the characteristics of concern to the creatives and how they trade off freedom in their work experiences.

### 4.3.2 Relational identity among Hong Kong advertising creatives: client influences

Some researchers (e.g. Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002) have suggested that organisational studies of employees’ behaviours can be understood through the relations between the construction of organisation and self-identities. According to Alvesson (2000), identity is constructed through social interaction in a form of narrative as well as information sharing. As discussed above, Gabriel noted that his
freedom as a creative was constrained by having to play by the ‘rules of the game’ set by clients. The interview data below offer some further insights into how advertising creatives’ identities were constructed through social interaction with their clients. One of the advertising creatives described his role by using the metaphor of ‘their hands’.

FH/CD  ‘They treat us as their hands. They expect us to give them something they like. They have specified certain ways in their mindset. They do not like us to do something extra. What is in their minds is: ‘Just give me the ways that we want!’ So, they like you to follow the specified ways or formats. If you are trying to present some other creative ideas to them, they will find it not suitable to them and you do not understand what they need.’

Keith

In this context, ‘hands’ connote the idea of being part of a body, serving to perform and execute daily activity. In general, hands also connote the idea of a person who is doing hard physical work. Putting this into the context of the advertising industry, ‘hands’ is a metaphor that relates working class labour to performing the operational functions of advertising production. This metaphor contrasts with other ways in which the advertising creatives described about their expertise and their creative and imaginative values. Moreover, the reference to ‘their hands’ - clients’ hands - suggests creatives are working for other people who do not belong to them. Keith’s observation that his clients treat him as ‘their hand’, also inferred a sense of ‘lack of respect’ from clients, related to the image of the ‘hired hand’ in the Bible (See Bible text: John 10:12. ‘The hired hand is not the shepherd and does not own the sheep. So when he sees the wolf coming, he abandons the sheep and runs away’) and in popular culture (a famous film called The Hired Hand). Other creatives used terms such as ‘subordinate’ and ‘under the supervision of’ to describe similar

2 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hired_Hand
understandings of a hierarchical relationship between advertising creatives and their clients, putting the creatives in an inferior position as Dave and Nicholas reflected:

FH/AD ‘…In fact, I would say, clients do not see us as experts anymore. They treat us like a department under their supervision to help them to execute what they want to do.’

DH/CD ‘…there are clients who treat us as their subordinates and they do not respect us indeed. It happens too…. Clients may treat you like their subordinates and are not respectful to you in the first place.’

Alvesson and Willmott (2002) stated that people’s roles are not planned but improvised by continuously constructing their identity through re-forming, maintaining, strengthening or revising roles. These accounts reflect that the advertising creatives’ roles are constructed under a hierarchical and bureaucratic organizational system. Moreover, in Chinese culture, subordinates have to listen to and follow what their superior tells them to do (Lockett, 1988). In the above interview extracts the pejorative metaphorical imagery is strong and the obedience it implies contradicts the advertising creatives’ expected self-identity (creative, charismatic and confident) in the advertising agency. In previous research, Alvesson (1994) discussed the sense of ‘freedom’ of advertising people who want to break away from ‘large bureaucratically controlled agencies’. Ironically, although advertising agencies are trying hard to build up hierarchical-free environments to promote creative freedom, their bureaucratic system of judgment usually dis-empowers creatives (Hackley & Kover, 2007). The interview excerpts presented above suggest that these Hong Kong creatives also feel a degree of suppression by a bureaucratic system, which is strongly client-focused.
4.3.3 The shift from creative production to strategic facilitation

Anthropology and cultural research inform us that there is a distinct connection between consumer culture and advertising. Indeed, people may understand culture through advertising discourse (Dewaal, Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). Thompson and Haytko (1997) stated that advertising practitioners play the role of bridging the commercial and the culture worlds through their use of the symbolic capital of culture and society. In this sense, advertising practitioners, including creatives, who are believed to possess socio-cultural and education capital, are regarded as ‘cultural intermediaries’ (Bourdieu 1984; Featherstone 1991), responsible for constructing symbolic meaning and utility for commodities in a society. On one hand, creatives are regarded as ‘commercial urban ethnographers’ who are attentive to social activities, exploring peoples’ demeanors, interactions and modes of expression (Hirota, 1995: 340). Several researchers (e.g. Hirota 1995; Miller 1997; Soar 2000; Clarkin 2005; Kelly et al, 2005) found that creatives spontaneously incorporate their beliefs, observations and experiences gathered from the social world to develop advertising ideas. Others have echoed the significant role of creatives in society by portraying them as taking the ‘front row seats’ in advertising production and consumption (Soar, 2000, p.434).

These studies help to challenge views of creatives as egocentric or superficial, as they suggest that creatives have a reflexive awareness of other cultural forms and the situations they encounter within the course of their everyday lives (Hirota 1995; Miller 1997; Soar 2000; Clarkin 2005; Kelly et al, 2005).

Furthermore, creatives are regarded as ‘idea generators’ (McLeod et al, 2011), as well as being in charge of the advertising production. The production of advertising takes place under a ‘double client system’ (Moeran, 2009) since creatives typically cooperate with technical specialists, such as photographers, illustrators or commercial directors, to work out their ideas once the clients have accepted the idea (Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). In other words, clients employ advertising agencies for their expertise in branding and advertising campaigns and at the same time agencies
employ a second-level ‘motley crew’ (Moeran, 2009), which may, depending on production requirements, include photographers, commercial directors, makeup artists and so on, to support the production of an individual job. With the growing popularity of the Internet for advertising, creatives also involve digital experts such as web and interactive designers, animators and programmers to carry out advertising campaigns. In the interviews conducted for this research, the creatives noted that, particularly with the rise of social media, they have to cooperate with a wider spectrum of support crew, such as ‘tech teams’ including programmers and digital experts.

**FH/CD**

Joseph

*In previous times, I may say I spent 80% of my working time thinking of creative ideas, and left my teammates to handle the production. Now, I have less and less time working on ideas. For nearly half of my time I have to coordinate and share with other colleagues how the new technology can work; say, meeting with the tech team, suppliers and programmers; meeting with the media people; much of this running around, asking questions for one campaign rather than spending time on creative ideas of the campaign.*

From his position in a multinational full-service agency, Joseph observed that his role as a creative director had shifted from idea generation and production supervision to being a line manager of different team members. In the interview, Joseph admitted that he did not know much about the production details when he first encountered digital advertising, especially in terms of digital production. Hence, he has to spend more time on meetings and coordination with his internal colleagues, including the creative teams and account managers, as well as with clients, regarding ideas and production. He also has to meet with the ‘tech team’ and outsourced suppliers, including digital experts and programmers. As highlighted by Joseph, it seems that the role of a creative director has evolved and been extended from generating and supervising creative ideas to facilitating media and production details in order to accomplish successful integrated advertising campaigns. However, during
the creative process, successful idea generation and supervision requires knowledge of production and media. Even creative directors, who play a co-ordinating role, need to have solid knowledge of these areas in order to provide effective management.

Jeffrey, art director of a multinational digital agency, believes that the role of the creatives is not about design but involves providing solutions with strategic value for advertising. Similar ideas were expressed by other creatives, from junior to middle levels of seniority, and in multinational and independent agencies. They suggested that creatives could no longer focus solely on generating creative ideas, but had to offer ‘solutions’ which make use of different communication media to achieve advertising goals. Thus the process of judging the success of a ‘solution’ is more complicated than before. An advertising solution today may include marketing considerations, consumer perspectives, technical and media factors as well as creative ideas. Moreover, the creatives’ excellence may not be judged merely on the creative component; judgements also involve marketing tactics, consumers’ involvement and media competency. This suggests that the creatives’ role has shifted from ‘idea generator’ to ‘solution facilitator’ in response to the rise of digital and social media.

Assael (2011) reflected that, with the increasing popularity of new technologies and cross-media campaigns, the main objective of media planning has become maximizing return on investment (ROI). For Nicholas, creative director of a multinational digital agency, maximizing ROI was also his responsibility. He said that one important creative function that supports this was encouraging consumer
participation in the advertising campaign. In order words, one of the critical aspects of this facilitator role is to engage consumers - what Nicholas called ‘activation’. This requires creative ideas to be driven from a bottom-up perspective, informed by the consumers’ responses and interest.

DH/CD Nicholas ‘... it is very important, and it is a usual practice, to see the result of our creative ideas. The work that we have to do is to generate needs and responses, but not about building a brand or image only. That is the term called ‘activation’, it’s about how to activate activities and to drive the results. I have to help and think from the client’s perspective too, of how much ROI I can bring for the brand with these creative ideas. How much response from consumers can I draw from an advertising campaign... It is not only about creative ideas, but also the consumers’ responses and participation in the campaign that I have to take care of.

As creatives handle ideas across different media, including online and offline platforms, their role also incorporates more management duties, which may involve people, production and media. For instance, Tony, a creative director of an independent full-service agency, argued that the creative of today is like a manager responsible for creative ideas, clients and agencies’ business, the cooperation of creative workers, production, media and consumer response. In other words, the creatives’ role has extended from ideas generation to a management role facilitating the creative ideas across the whole advertising planning cycle, in collaboration with a range of creatives and other professionals.
Tony

As a creative today, half of my work is about management: managing creatives’ ideas, managing the agency’s business, managing our clients, managing the creative team cooperation, managing the production, managing the media and consumer response... it is not the same work as before and I have to take up several roles in my work at the same time; not only about doing hands-on work on creative ideas, but also stepping forward to work on management. My challenges that I have now are not only about producing creative ideas, but also how to manage all things in order to have good creative ideas across different media.

4.3.4 Divergence between senior and junior creative roles

In this research, nearly all the senior creatives, in both full-service and digital agencies, observed that their roles have extended in the ways discussed above. While junior-level creatives, such as assistant art directors and art directors, acknowledged the general shift away from idea generation towards the provision of integrated solutions, they talked about the lack of clear guidance within their agencies or among their peers about what changes they have to make and how their roles should develop. While most of the senior creatives believed that they should take a step back, oversee the strategies and facilitate the implementation of creative solutions across a range of media, many junior creatives talked about being treated as technicians who handle the back-end or production. Junior creatives are seldom involved in creative thinking processes. One novice art director, Matthew, from a digital agency observed that he does not feel that he is working in the creative department at all because he is seldom involved in the creative process in his agency. He added that he is treated as a technician and, most of the time, is only involved in back-end production.

Matthew

They (seniors) see me as a technician; I work very rarely in the creative process, but rather spend all my time doing digital production...
This suggests not only that the creatives’ role has indeed changed in response to the rise of social media, but also that the roles of senior and junior creatives may be diverging. Thus, the senior creatives have shifted towards a facilitator role, requiring them to take up more management duties across different stages of the advertising process. The junior creatives in digital agencies, however, complained that they have to take up back-end production parts of the advertising process and it is rare for them to be involved in the creative process of an advertising campaign.

This divergence in the creative roles of senior and junior staff seems likely to cause problems in the career paths of junior creatives. The career trajectory of creatives can be categorized into five broad stages, starting from ‘placement’, followed by ‘junior’, ‘middleweight’, ‘heavyweight’ roles and moving up to ‘management’ (McLeod, 2009). Usually, creative directors take up management positions and administer the work of other creative teams in an advertising agency, while some senior creatives opt to establish their agencies in partnership with others (Fletcher, 1999). Moreover, McLeod et al. (2011) argued that it is necessary for creatives to develop skill sets and craftsmanship in order to achieve advertising excellence. In the past they learned their skills by observing peers in their work practices as well as examining good examples of others’ advertising work. Collins (2004) described this process as ‘creatives learn[ing] by osmosis’ rather than by formal training. For instance, junior art directors will work with more experienced art directors or creative directors and follow their work processes, such as idea brainstorming, photography shoots and television commercial production. Hence, novice creatives learn from observing the work practices and learn through participation and interaction with their creative peers, clients and colleagues, and also from working with their superiors, as part of a ‘community of practice’ (McLeod et al, 2011). However, the same process of creatives learning from their superiors may not be so applicable with the rise of social media.

In this study, junior creatives described how their everyday work focused on ‘back-end’ production, limiting their learning and development to technical aspects of the work rather than the skills required to play a facilitating role. Moreover, the senior
creatives were not generally believed to have better knowledge about social media than they had themselves. This created some disappointment when learning from their superiors since the skill-sets required for using social media to achieve advertising excellence may not be gained through observing senior creatives’ practices.

Evidence for this was provided in interviews with both senior and junior level creatives. Some senior creatives frankly admitted that they were not familiar with the social media platform for advertising even though they may have worked on this platform on a daily basis. One senior art director in a full-service agency noted that he himself learned the advertising strategy and skills for social media platforms from scratch since there are not many guidelines for achieving a successful campaign. He also admitted that he could not give very clear directions to his junior team when handling advertising on social media platforms. He explained that he might have to learn with the team by reviewing other case studies as well as learning by trial and error. In other words, the creatives who have worked in multinational full-service advertising agencies expressed the belief that they might not be able to adapt and apply their accumulated knowledge when handling social media advertising.

FH/SAD Gabriel

I am always looking for some ‘hints’ or ‘guidelines’ for doing successful advertising campaign in social media so that I can pass this information to my juniors. But there is no ‘rule’ on that! Every case has its own characteristics. Therefore, in this case, I can only learn with my team together to try some possible examples from successful cases.

Most of the senior creatives interviewed in this research, regardless of whether they were from traditional or digital agencies, commented that ‘social media are something new for us’, so they cannot use the same way of thinking that they had developed in working on multinational advertising using TVC or print media. One
creative director expressed his anxiety about giving supervision to his team regarding social media:

FI/CD  
Teddy  
To a certain extent it is something unfamiliar to us, not to say that they have to give guidance to their junior team. What I tell my team is that we have to work and continue to learn new things together.

Likewise, one senior creative expressed that the accumulated knowledge and skills may not be enough or applicable to face the challenges of work on digital platforms.

DH/CD  
Nicholas  
The digital platform grows faster than we expect! Our previous knowledge is often not enough to catch up this tremendous development.

Junior creatives expressed disappointment and frustration when working with their superiors in advertising agencies on digital platforms. For instance, Cherry, an assistant art director in a multinational digital agency, described the difficulties and frustrations she experiences when working with her superior because her superior has insufficient knowledge to give her guidance.
Frankly speaking, I want to find a superior who is more knowledgeable so that I can learn more things from him; and I think it will be more effective at the same time. I think it can be possible to have both creative quality and technical knowledge at the same time. However, so far I have not met anyone who is capable to handle both. This is because there is only a very few people who are familiar with digital advertising. My creative director, I think, has some basic knowledge only. The problem is he cannot teach me anything whenever I face any difficulties. He can teach me about creative ideas but if I ask him about how I can execute it in some way, he does not know. You know I am still junior in this field and I expect my superior to help me to solve some problems that I cannot solve. However, I may have to learn it by myself.

In Cherry’s talk, she indicated that she is not satisfied with her superior because she expects him to help develop her creative quality and technical knowledge in advertising practices. She also made it clear that this is not only her expectation but also that of other junior creatives. Indeed, Grabhner (2002) noted that superiors’ guidance and supervision is vital for newcomers in careers that require skills rather than formal degree qualifications. However, this study found that not all senior creatives possess the social media knowledge that is sufficient to satisfy the needs of their junior staff. At the same time, senior creatives also believe that young creatives might have more up-to-date knowledge about the digital platform for advertising than they do. In the interviews, senior creative Nicolas from a digital agency presented seniors as not feeling threatened when asking juniors about their up-to-date knowledge of the digital world, justifying this with the idea that juniors are good at digital skills such as programming, new features of software and hardware.
DH/CD Nicholas  ‘I will ask my staff (junior creatives) about the new trend and development of digital world, you know, they have much more up-to-date information than I have...I have to plan the advertising campaign, how can I have much time to catch up those developments? I will leave it (the information of digital development) to them.’

Nonetheless, the rise of digital and social media has changed the ways in which knowledge and skills are shared and developed in advertising agencies. Senior creatives, such as creative directors, may be more dependent on the social media knowledge provided by the junior creatives, while the junior creatives, such as art directors, may expect their seniors to delegate more creative decision-making opportunities to them and become increasingly frustrated by being given only technical tasks. The mode of ‘senior supervising junior’ in the advertising industry, especially within the creative department, may be changing, with implications for the hierarchal system of the creative department and the distribution of decision-making power within creative departments.

4.3.5 The role struggles of junior creatives

From the interviews it can be seen that the junior creatives in both traditional and digital agencies, such as art directors, feel frustrated because they are overloaded with technical work that includes interface design and technical executions. For example, Cherry described the technical work she has to handle as ‘tedious’ because she expects that, as a creative, she should be involved in idea development and have opportunities for creative work rather than being required to focus on technical work:
DH/AIDS

Cherry

Though I can learn more, I have no time left to communicate with more people in here. Therefore I have to spend more time working on more tedious things rather than on design and creative areas. Another thing is I think my colleagues in here are not familiar with digital work as well. In fact, they have to handle some of the process but the problem is they are not very familiar either. I have to go to meetings with clients and programmers every time. They think that I will be the person who is the most familiar with the work, so it is better for me to answer what the clients ask... I think most of them are still familiar with print media. They are not ready to be familiarised with the digital platform.

Cherry expressed the feeling that she has suffered from unfair management and handling of duty allocations from her superiors because she is treated as a ‘technician’ rather than a ‘creative’ compared to her peers who may have less knowledge about digital platforms. She complained that handling the technical execution occupies most of her time, which makes her unable to become involved in idea development. In fact, Cherry said that one of the reasons that have led to her work overload is that even her peers do not understand digital work. In cases such as this, creatives with greater digital knowledge are being mislabelled as technical staff rather than treated as creative staff. This mislabelling of creative talents may be caused by the lack of knowledge among senior creatives and management about digital platforms, which means they give responsibility for handling technical work to junior creatives who are more familiar with digital platforms. Creatives may struggled on their creative role because they believed that for those who have superior technical knowledge should be expected to be involved more intensively on creative idea generation for digital platforms rather than working on technical development of digital platforms.

The focus on technical responsibilities has led to disappointment and frustration among junior creatives given their work expectations, to the extent that some said they were planning career changes.
The clearest example of this in the interviews was when Kitty, an interactive art director in a multinational full-service agency, mentioned that she had just resigned from her post as interactive art director because she was not satisfied with the duties assigned to her by the creative director. She said she did not feel comfortable working in the agency, and she described herself as a ‘nomad’ to express her sense of not belonging to the creative department. During her time in this particular agency, she was asked to work with different creative teams. At the same time, she was also assigned some jobs that focused on digital platforms. Kitty was frustrated by the overload created from having her own accounts to handle while also having to work with different teams for other accounts in the agency. She was also frustrated because her expectations were not met: she had joined this multinational full-service agency because she wanted to expand her work portfolio and be involved in more work on branding and integrated marketing campaigns. However, when she started at this agency, she found that only a few creatives were familiar with digital platforms and so she was always assigned all the work related to their use, such as social media and online advertising. Hence, she felt frustrated at being a ‘nomad’ because she felt that she was being treated as a supportive member for each team without having any sense of belonging.

FH/IAD
Kitty
I am about to quit my job (as an interactive art director) because I don’t like those jobs assigned by my creative managers. They (managers) treat me as a ‘nomad’; I don’t think I belong to this department, even to the agency.

FH/IAD
Kitty
I joined this agency (multinational) because I hoped I could learn more about how to do advertising, but not to work on digital programming or interface design...I am like a technician or supporting staff.
This study, then, has identified a problem about the management of creatives, in terms of allocating work and responsibilities. The original objective of blending digital expertise into the creative department appears to be the creation of synergy between ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ experts. However, due to the distinctive nature of work on digital and traditional media platforms, and the unique knowledge and skill sets required for different platforms, this is not easily achieved.

4.3.6 Social media’s creative opportunities

Traditionally, the major advertising media were considered to be TVC and print, and advertising messages and ideas were delivered through a linear, one-way mode of communication, from senders to receivers (Belch & Belch, 1995). Technological innovations, especially the emergence of the Internet and mobile technologies, have changed the very nature of media, as well as the mass communication process. With the interactive nature of communication, it is difficult to differentiate between the ‘sender’ and the ‘receiver’ due to the interactive components of many new communication technologies (Heath & Bryant, 2000). In other words, one-way, primarily mass communication has evolved slowly into a more interactive process. Both mass and interpersonal communication can be facilitated by new communication technologies. Accordingly, traditional views of media audiences need to be revisited with a fresh eye to address new and different processes of communication as they emerge (Marlow, 2009).

In this research, the creatives suggested that the rise of social media extends the possibilities for advertising ideas delivered through social networks and their linkage to applications on mobile phones and other devices. Most of the informants in this research, from both multinational and digital agencies, agreed that social media equip them with greater possibilities, including more job openings, new creative possibilities and opportunities for exploring different forms of creative production. For instance, Keith, creative director of a multinational full-service agency, talked
about the range of creative options and opportunities for consumer engagement associated with social media:

FH/CD
Keith
‘The opportunity is that we can try some new ideas in this social media; with unlimited space and imagination like inviting groups, designing games, different ways of drawing people to the group etc. It involves some big ideas and it is quite challenging indeed.’

Similarly, a creative director in an independent digital agency suggested that, apart from offering more creative possibilities, digital platforms, including social media, had brought more job opportunities for creatives like him:

DI/CD
Tom
For us working on digital platforms, and especially with the increased usage of the Internet and social networks, we have more and more job opportunities. The variety of jobs is increasing, not only limited to building websites, but also we can think of more creative ideas to interact with consumers through the digital platform. We will have more opportunities for creation. I think the digital advertising industry in Hong Kong is getting better and better.

Nearly all of the creatives taking part in this study, in both full-service and digital agencies, and at different levels of seniority, talked about social media as bringing more creative opportunities, and they were also enthusiastic about the opportunities in terms of their work roles.

Digital platforms also empower consumers to become more active and enable them to select the messages that they want to receive (Heath & Bryant, 2000). In other words, consumers nowadays are empowered by the nature of media to be active agents rather than passive receivers of information. Consumers are no longer considered as simply recipients of advertising messages; they are co-creators of knowledge and meaning-makers influencing a brand’s development (Rolland &
From a creative perspective, social media provides opportunities to meet their advertising goals through direct contact and interaction with consumers. For instance, Dave, an art director of a full-service agency, indicated that consumers’ active participation is becoming more and more important for advertising strategies and planning.

**FH/AD**  
I think the advantage of social media to us is that there are more channels to reach our consumers directly, say the teenagers. It provides one more platform to reach the consumers directly other than just print or TVC. I can reach them by designing games, posting topics on forums that they find interesting, or creating blogs to have conversations with them. I can get to know our consumers more directly with their participation and feedback.

The creatives believed that social media allow them to explore possibilities that have never been used in traditional media.

### 4.3.7 The recruitment of creatives

The recruitment of advertising professionals in the advertising industry has been changing in response to social, cultural and media changes. In the 1950s, elitism was evident in the way that large British advertising agencies recruited mainly Oxford and Cambridge graduates to their creative departments (Pearson & Turner, 1965; Nixon, 2003; Delaney, 2007). In recent decades, agencies have focused more on employing creative specialists or college graduates who have been trained with specialized knowledge and skill-sets, such as art and design, art direction and copywriting (Nixon, 2003; McLeod et al, 2009). Hence, courses and workshops about advertising creativity and media are offered to provide people with training opportunities to enter the industry (Beale, 2006). Similarly, in Hong Kong the HK4As Adschool has offered training courses including creative, interactive and media programmes for students and junior creatives to develop their advertising
knowledge and skills. At the same time, these courses aid the identification of new creative talent for the advertising industry. In the advertising industry, it is unusual to recruit professionals through open processes. Instead, advertising creatives usually learn about job opportunities through informal networks or referrals, or they are recruited under internships, work experience, or project-based agreements (Grabher, 2002; Hackley, 2009; Smith & McKinlay, 2009; McLeod et al, 2009). Hence, reputation and credibility are important for advertising creatives in establishing their professional identities. McLeod et al. (2009) highlighted the importance of creative portfolios in building advertising creatives’ credibility and reputation. However, before they can establish the credibility needed to get into the advertising industry, new entrants may choose to study advertising and undertake some training; many creatives have to undertake placements in order to build up their portfolios. Nixon (2003) noted that the placement system, initially launched in the British advertising industry in the 80s, and still evident in many advertising agencies nowadays, offered benefits for both sides. On one hand, it has provided opportunities for creatives to build up their work portfolios (their ‘books’), which can help them to enter the advertising industry, although placements often involve little or no paid work (McLeod et al, 2011). On the other hand, advertising agencies can observe and evaluate their performances before offering them permanent positions.

With the rise of online platforms and the popularity of social media in advertising, advertising agencies have found it more difficult to recruit creatives to fit the changing needs of agencies and clients. Some senior creatives taking part in this study observed that the challenges of recruiting suitable and capable creatives, at both senior and junior levels, are far greater now than before. One of the reasons they offered for this is the low level of compensation offered by their agencies. In most advertising agencies, creatives do not depend on an internal path for career advancement. They mostly seek career advancement or ‘job hopping’ (Pratt, 2006) by moving to a more attractive agency offering them better remuneration or a better creative reputation (Nixon, 2003; McLeod et al, 2009; 2011). For instance, Henry, creative director of a multinational digital agency, commented that ‘creatives come and go and it is not easy to find suitable replacements with a limited budget’, and he
blamed the lack of money on clients’ tight budgets. This echoes what has been discussed earlier about clients not being willing to spend large sums on social media advertising. This leaves agencies, on one hand, needing to expand their services by recruiting staff suitably qualified in the use of social media, but on the other hand, they are working within tight budget constraints, hence they may prefer to recruit creatives on a one-off job-basis or by outsourcing work. In other words, reduced advertising budgets make it difficult for agencies to afford making a long-term commitment to digitally competent creatives based on attractive salaries. For instance, Angel, an interactive designer from a digital agency, expressed a negative expectation of a salary increase although her workload had become heavier:

DI/ID
Angel

*I haven’t had much salary increase since I joined this digital agency, however, there are so many jobs I have to handle every day, my duties are getting heavier by searching, monitoring and even making responses to social media platforms. Unfortunately, these jobs do not count as creating an advertising campaign, therefore, I don’t see many opportunities to increase my salary or even for promotion.*

Senior creatives in this study also observed that it is far more difficult to recruit competent people with relevant digital knowledge and skill-sets than creatives who can handle traditional media. Previous research has suggested that there are strong bonds within the creative community, and that these facilitate informal information exchange across agencies (Pratt, 2006). Having inside information through the community network, such as knowing who has done what and who is working with whom within the creative community, is particularly important for creatives, both for their day-to-day work and their longer-term career development (Fletcher, 1999; Eikhof & Haunschild, 2006; Townley, Beech & McKinlay, 2009; McLeod et al., 2011). Typically it is critical for creative professionals to build up good creative portfolios in order to maintain a good reputation among peers, and this also provides opportunities for career advancement (Pratt, 2004, McLeod et al, 2009). In other
words, the recruitment of suitable creatives is based mostly on referrals coming from the creative community and reviews of previous work. However, some creative directors in this study suggested that the rise of social media has made it more difficult to recruit creatives from within the advertising industry. They claimed that recruiting creatives today is increasingly demanding and that the required skill-sets for a competent creative, especially for digital creatives, has expanded from art or copy to computer programming as well as digital video production.

DH/CD Nicholas ‘*At present, it is indeed quite difficult to recruit capable creatives. One has to be good at craftsmanship; at the same time one has to know programming skills. Moreover, one may also have to know how to do editing and video production too. It is quite difficult to recruit multimedia or digital creatives.*’

This suggests that creative managers cannot rely only on inside information within the creative community when they are recruiting; it may be necessary to look for creatives with knowledge and skills in different areas, such as the computer programming and video production knowledge mentioned by Nicholas above. McLeod et al. (2011) stated that some senior creatives prefer to employ young creatives from backgrounds that are totally different from advertising, for their fresh and surprising perspectives. In this study, Macro, an associate creative director of an independent digital agency, said that he had never worked in advertising before joining his present advertising agency; he had previously worked as a back-end programmer for investment banks. He found that his knowledge was transferable to advertising, and he argued that it was essential to have someone offering technical direction to advertising in response to the digital challenges. Similarly, Barry, an associate creative director of a multinational digital agency, had worked previously as a computer engineer in an information technology firm and had not been familiar with advertising before joining an agency. He was now working closely with art directors who were familiar with traditional media and he felt there was good synergy within those teams.
4.4 Creatives’ view of consumers

Most of the creatives interviewed acknowledged that consumers now play a much more important role in the creative process than ever before, and this has created a fundamental shift in the relationships between advertising creatives and consumers. Before the rise of social media, advertising messages were disseminated through mass media such as TV and print. Consumers were seen as passive receivers of advertising messages, which were created by advertising agencies and approved by clients. Today, digital technology and social media platforms have empowered consumers to play an active role in engaging in brand activities. Social media also facilitate marketers’ communicating with their consumers directly. According to Muk (2013), there has been an increase in social media advertising budgets. Marketers want to emphasize brand promotions on websites and social media because they believe that social media facilitate more direct communication with their consumers. Consumers’ comments that user-generated reviews and recommendations on blogs have become more important for marketers and consumers’ attitude and advocacy often create a significant impact on brand development (Luo & Zhang, 2013). During the advertising planning and production process, consumers were not likely to be involved until the creative ideas has been finalised, unless advertisers and agency planners drew on consumer research to gain insights and feedback in formulating the advertising strategy for their brands. Some researchers (e.g. Stewart & Hess, 2011) have even criticised the relevance of using consumer research in decision making about advertising plans. Nonetheless, there were comments about the limited opportunities for consumers to have direct interaction with advertisers or advertising agencies. Teddy, a creative director from a traditional advertising agency, explained that traditional advertising planning does not involve individual consumer’s opinions other than through consumer research reports. This implies that consumers have no involvement in the creative design process.
We (traditional advertising) didn’t really involve consumers’ opinions before, I mean, except the consumer reports for advertising planning…our old concept, we create what consumers need, right?

Previous research (e.g. Stewart & Hess, 2011) has noted that many advertising creatives do not like the idea of advertising research or revising their work based on consumers’ comments. Many creatives’ comments, in this research, indicated that consumers, who do not have proper training in advertising and who do not therefore fully understand advertising and marketing, are not really capable of evaluating advertising. Moreover, creative freedom and creative impact would be undermined if advertisers rely too much on consumer feedback. Therefore, in the past, creatives tended to see consumers as passive recipients of advertising who were not entitled to have much interaction with them or much influence on their work during the process of creative development and production (Pendleton, Lundstrom & Dixit, 2012). With the rise of social media, however, consumers are co-creating advertising and marketing activities (Benkler, 2006; Jenkins, 2006; Lessig, 2008) and social media can be a good platform for conducting consumer research (Hardey, 2009; Smith, 2009). Creatives see consumers’ activities on social networks as mirroring trends and fashion; for example, blogs could be described as ‘fashionable friends’ (Colliander & Dahlen, 2011).

The creatives interviewed in this study saw consumers as being well connected on diverse social media platforms, informing, exchanging and interacting with each other, and generally forming powerful social communities than was ever possible before. This meant that consumers were engaged actively in brand activities, and even in advertising planning and creative processes. From a creative perspective, the empowerment of consumers in relation to brands and marketing activities presented both opportunities and challenges, and required them to pay particular attention to consumers using online media. They saw social media and social networking sites as providing useful insights about consumer interactions (Shih, 2009) and as helping marketers to build brands by tapping into consumer-networked relations. For
example, Fred, a senior art director from a digital agency, highlighted the importance of reviewing consumers’ comments over the social networks in order to improve their creative processes and output.

**DI/SIAD** *I am regularly checking the consumers’ comments on social networks,*

**Fred** *Nowadays, they (consumers) are so active to criticise advertising campaigns...we must take these comments into account in order to improve our creative output.*

Previous research has suggested that creatives view their work as a vehicle for promoting their own talents and personal career objectives (Hirschman, 1989; McLeod et al, 2011). Given the changing role that consumers are playing in the development of brands and advertising, however, creative success was not always based only on their own creative ideas or creative executions. Teddy, a creative director from a multinational advertising agency, suggested that consumers nowadays are not only playing an active role in commenting on advertising campaigns, but are also a source of inspiration and advertising ideas.

**FI/CD** *Nowadays consumers give us (creatives) a lot of new ideas, they tell us what they want, what their interests are, over the social media. We (creatives) only need to be aware of these comments.*

Similarly, Tom, creative director of an independent digital agency, suggested that many activities and updates from friends on social media provided him with new ideas that would have been beyond his own reach:
Chapter 4 In-depth Interviews

When we browse on the Internet, or participate in Facebook, we know what people are discussing and concerned about. We know what people like and dislike, and at the same time, people from different backgrounds tell us something new that may be out of our scope; for example, the places they have travelled, the new gadgets they have found...we know more from them of what’s happening around the world.

This empowerment of consumers in relation to advertising strategy and creative ideas was also seen by the creatives in this study as an offer for opportunities in expanding their own creative autonomy and reputation. It is important to note that, in the creatives’ comments in this research, there is no sense of being undermined or feeling threatened by consumers’ co-creation acts online. Creatives care more about how to work with this situation but are rather worried about the consumers’ co-creation process. Anyway, in this new era, creative legitimacy can be earned not only from peers or creative awards, but also from consumer responses and recognition. For instance, Teddy, creative director of an independent full-service agency, emphasized that consumer responses as well as creative considerations played a more important role in advertising strategy, creative ideas and execution, and could also affect the success of an advertising idea.

As creatives, we should also understand the need of the market, how we could ‘move’ [mobilise] the market. In the past, I was barely concerned about business. I was just concerned about how creative my work was. But now if you ask me, I think ‘creativity’ and ‘execution’ are no longer that important to me; the most important thing to me is how we can ‘motivate’ our consumers.

Creatives also make use of consumer empowerment through social media to empower themselves by showing consumer support for their creative ideas and countering clients’ subjective judgments. For instance, Glaude, art director in an
independent full-service agency, commented that there were some clients who evaluated creative ideas and execution would base on their subjective views. With the rise of social media, consumers’ voices and preferences are more direct and instant; they can share what they like and dislike through social networking sites, initiate votes and invite comments on advertising and media content:

F/I_AD1  I think ‘creative work’ can be seen very differently now. Previously clients may have criticized our creative ideas or visuals based on their own judgments. Clients may have said whether they liked it or didn’t like it. Now it’s not only about whether they like it or not... now it is about using creative executions to help them reach the consumers and to engage consumers’ participation, how to make consumers like our ideas, I mean inviting consumers’ engagement is more important now. We have to think about the direct response from the consumers’ perspective, not for satisfying our clients only.

Glaude  Today, whether an idea is creative or effective may not be only the client’s decision. Now that every consumer online can be a commentator, reviewer and publisher, all organisations have to stop talking and start listening to how they are perceived (Smith, 2009). At the same time, creatives’ voices on strategy and creative execution can be strengthened when their views are in line with the consumers’. Consumers can be a strong backup force for creatives seeking acceptance of their ideas and proposals.

At the same time, some creatives worry about reviewing consumers’ diverse opinions and the workload pressures involved. For instance, Joseph, a creative director from a multinational advertising agency, talked about catching up on a huge amount of consumer comments before the deadline for an advertising campaign.
FH/CD  Joseph  It takes a lot of time to review consumers’ comments, and quite often those comments are different! It is hard to see the whole picture... you know, the deadline is coming; however, the opinions and comments are still being discussed a lot on the social networks.

4.5 The organisation structure of advertising agencies

During the interviews it emerged that there are some differences between advertising agencies in terms of creatives’ roles, team structures and levels of seniority. Every advertising agency has its own organisation chart due to its particular work patterns. In this research, I asked all senior creatives to draw organisation charts of their own agencies. I gathered these pictures and analysed them in an attempt to identify similarities and differences in organisation structure. Based on the analysis of the agencies participating in this study, four diagrams are presented to illustrate the generic organization structures of the four agency types involved.

Figure 9 shows the organization structure of a multinational full-service advertising agency in Hong Kong. The diagram indicates a split between two key groups of advertising practitioners, namely members of the account team and the creative team. The account team includes a CEO, marketing director, account planner, account director, manager and executives, while the creative team involves a group creative director, creative director, associate creative director and diverse art directors. There are 6 levels of positions in each team structure. Although formal organization structures do not necessarily reflect the experience or roles of individuals occupying particular positions, this structure implies that very clear individual roles, duties and skill-sets have been created in this multinational full-service advertising agency. In order words, creatives in this type of agency may be expected to have clearer roles, duties, assignments and even clients than independent agencies which have comparatively small numbers of creatives.
The organization structure of the independent full-service advertising agency shares the clear structure found in the multinational full-service advertising agency (See Figure 10). However, given the smaller size, there were only 4 levels of seniority in each team. Due to the smaller scale of the agency, creatives’ roles and duties sometimes cross over while working on a big advertising campaign or in the rush before a deadline. For example, the creative director is responsible for generating a creative solution and managing the entire creative and production process. However, due to the lack of human resources, they might also need to become involved in the actual production process. Creatives, in this type of agency, had a blurred role.
Figure 10: The organisation structure of an independent full-service advertising agency

Figure 11 shows the different arrangement in place for a multinational digital advertising agency; although the agency is divided into two general teams, the account team and creative team, they are both positioned under the CEO. The structure also shows that both teams are almost the same size: unlike the other organization charts, here the account team has similar numbers to the creative team. This type of agency shares the same situation with the multinational full-service advertising agency due to the large-scale organisation and number of creatives employed. It seems, therefore, in this type of agency, that creatives have a clear role, skill-set and duty in their positions.
Figure 11: the organisation structure of multinational digital advertising agency

Figure 12 shows the organization structure of an independent digital advertising agency. Here again, the agency is divided into account teams and creative teams, however, the creative team is bigger than the account team in terms of people and structure. It is also important to note that a post of ‘creative strategy manager’ has been created here. This post is interesting as it stands in between the account and creative teams. The creative strategy manager balances the creative solution and the clients’ expectation and, more importantly, the consumers’ feedback.

Figure 12: The organisation structure of independent digital advertising agency
This comparison of four different organization structures shows that the digital agencies, both independent and multinational, have created a new and cross-disciplinary structure in order to facilitate the management and production processes, whereas the traditional full-services agencies still keep a clear structure and indicate clear roles for each position. In other words, creatives in full-service agencies appear to have a clear role identity, at least in terms of their titles. Their skills and performance are signalled by these clear role identities, but these have become confused as job requirements have changed in the social media era. The digital agencies appear to be more flexible with job requirements and performances due to the cross-disciplinary structure, and also the smaller organizational size.

4.6 Summary of Chapter 4

This chapter has presented and discussed findings arising from interviews with 32 creatives across four categories of advertising agency in Hong Kong in order to explore how and to what extent their working practices, roles and identities are changing in response to the rise of social media. Several key experiences in relation to these issues were discussed above.

First, this study suggests that creative autonomy, personal style and flexibility in scheduling their work is important to the Hong Kong advertising creatives’ role identities. At the same time, in the interviews they showed that they were conscious of how their work role is changing in the social media era. More specifically, there appears to be some divergence between what the creatives interpreted as ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives, with each group comparing what ‘we’ and ‘they’ know and do. Both groups indicated that the role of advertising creatives has changed and continues to evolve in response to the rise of social media. Similarly, the workgroup identification of creatives is also being redefined. This situation appears to have created some tension and role struggles among traditional and digital creatives, in relation to the nature of their job, skill-sets, and, fundamentally, their work roles.
A second key experience emerging from this analysis is that, along with the changes in creatives’ roles and identifications, there has been a discernable change in the client-agency relationship, triggered by different understandings and conceptions of social media advertising held by clients and creatives. The creatives in this study complained that their clients were ignorant about social media, and misunderstood the implications of social media for advertising. Clients were thought to have the impression that using social media platforms is ‘free of charge’ or can involve ‘cheap’ production processes. These client views were thought to lead to inadequate advertising budgets, undermining advertising effectiveness and harming agencies.

Third, this chapter has explored creatives’ perspectives on their role changes in response to the rise of social media. They saw themselves as moving from playing a leading role in creative idea generation, to facilitating creative ideas and their implementation. Consumer empowerment and participation in marketing activities on social media platforms, and the growing range of technical expertise required in creating and implementing social media solutions has meant that creatives are often no longer taking care of the creative idea generation solely. This points to the need for creatives to negotiate their creative identities in the social media era, as well as the challenges to the traditional organisational structures of creative departments. One interesting phenomenon is that some newly recruited creatives, mostly digital creatives, do not have any advertising backgrounds and come from diverse fields beyond the advertising community, including computer science, customer relationship management, and digital media art. This situation is what Benvenuto (2007) has termed the ‘creative hydra’. Nonetheless, this suggests that the very nature of creative expertise is being redefined today, and that creatives’ identities are also changing in response to the rise of social media and the wider range of colleagues with whom they work as a result. Other professionals who do not have traditional advertising backgrounds, such as those with expertise in computing or customer relationships, introduce new elements to the advertising creative role. This situation creates both threats and opportunities for existing advertising creatives. On one hand, people with diverse expertise join the creative team and contribute to
creative solutions. On the other hand, creatives who have sophisticated training in branding and advertising are challenged by new modes of advertising strategy. Some traditional senior creatives in their interviews, reported feeling threatened by having to figure out how to do digital advertising in this social media era.

The interviews also explored how creatives see consumers in the social media era. From the creatives’ perspective, consumers are no longer playing a passive role but have become important in designing advertising strategy. Creatives and agencies have to listen to their voices and comments through social networks in order to integrate with consumers’ expectations.

All in all, it seems that, with the rise of social media, creative identities are changing. The distinction being made between traditional and digital creatives is not just based on whether they are working in full-service or digital agencies. There also seem to be challenges and frustrations in dealing with clients who lack the knowledge required to make good judgements about social media campaigns.

As creatives are increasingly expected to perform as facilitators of creative ideas, engaging consumers on social media platforms, they need technical and management/negotiating skills as well as the ability to develop advertising content. In turn, this could create tensions between junior and senior creatives, since the former tend to have greater digital or technical skills than the latter, and are allocated more technical work rather than being able to learn about and become involved in strategy and advertising development. In any case, there appears to have been little formal training provided in full service or digital agencies in the range of skills being expected of them. In terms of organisation structure, digital agencies seem to be more flexible in creating new positions and work teams, and in drawing in cross-disciplinary expertise to facilitate the fast-moving pace of advertising projects and production in the social media era.
These arguments have been developed from analysing the interview data generated in this study. The following chapter builds on this by reflecting on the participant observation phase of the study.
Chapter 5  Data Analysis and Discussion: Participant Observations

5.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses key themes developed from the analysis of qualitative data generated from field observations in two advertising agencies in Hong Kong, namely Agency-M Hong Kong, which is a multinational full-service agency, and Agency-R which is an independent digital agency. As discussed in Chapter 3, this study aimed to explore Hong Kong creatives’ experiences and perceptions of social media, particularly in relation to their working roles and identities. Participant observation was employed in these two advertising agencies with the aim of enriching the data presented in Chapter 4 through a process of methodological triangulation (Denzin, 2006). These two sites were selected in order to maximize the contrast between agencies in terms of scale (multinational versus independent), orientation (traditional or full-service versus digital), agency billing and staff numbers, client profiles and track records of creative and agency awards attained between 2009 and 2012 in the Asia Pacific Region. The two agencies represent the best in their categories as they have each been nominated and selected as Agency of the Year in recent years. Essentially, Agency-M serves as a leading agency in the large, multinational full-service category, while Agency-R is a leading agency in the smaller independent digital category.

Spending time in these two agencies and work together with the creatives enabled me to generate further data in addition to interviews by immersing myself in their workplaces. It also provided me with opportunities to experience and interact with the creatives, listen to what they talked about and to deepen my understanding by having informal conversations that touched on ideas emerging from my analysis of the interview data or arising from the observations. The success of an observational study depends on the quality of the relationships with people and the extent of the trust gained by the researcher from the group (Moeran, 2005a; Seale, 2004). Connection building and relationship networking is also important for conducting observations in the advertising industry (Moeran, 2005a). In this study, my own
creative background and skills helped me to gain an insider perspective through interacting with the advertising practitioners and participating in their everyday working lives and environment. At the same time, it was important for me to be reflexive during my observations and analysis, and some analytical interpretations were provided with the help of my academic background and the experience of undertaking the analysis of the interviews. This chapter begins by describing the process of gaining access to the two agencies and what was learnt from these experiences. It then introduces the two agency sites of the fieldwork, Agency-M and Agency-R. It follows by presenting the key themes arising from the participation observation stage of the study, namely: how creatives’ identities were bound up with the fusion of professional and personal interests; the multiple roles of creatives in the social media era; the creative possibilities of social media; and the development of creative skill sets by doing, reading and talking to experts within and outside individual creatives’ agencies. The chapter concludes with a summary of these key themes, before the final chapter reflects on the study’s key findings, contributions and implications.

5.2 Gaining access to the advertising agencies

I gained access to the selected agencies, Agency-M and Agency-R, through the connections and informal network that I had built over time as a creative professional myself and as an advertising academic working in Hong Kong. I initially made contact with a creative director from each agency, who knew me, and they referred me to the gatekeepers in their agencies. I believed approaching the senior creatives was a good starting point, because senior people usually have more power to make decisions about access or are likely to have close relationships with gatekeepers. However, I realised that they may have been very busy and not easily reached. Therefore, I decided to contact them by sending them a mobile text. I believed it would be a more polite and less intrusive way of reaching these busy people and letting them know my intention before trying to talk to them directly. After receiving positive replies from Philip (the group creative director of Agency-M) and Tom (the
creative director of Agency-R), I called them to explain the details of the study and request permission to conduct participant observations. Both directors were very helpful and positive upon receiving my request. I explained the details of my research intention and my expectations of engaging in their works. After these phone calls, I followed up with an email to them in order to seek formal consent. These processes helped me to contact and elicit the support of the senior ‘gatekeepers’ who could grant assess and approve my identity and the purpose of the study (Thornton, 2000; Crang & Cook, 2007).

The experiences of seeking access to the two agencies were very different and provided an early indication of the workplace culture in each agency. More formal procedures were needed to gain access to the multinational advertising agency than to the independent one. There were more people involved in Agency-M and the hierarchical structure was more complex there than in Agency-R, as discussed in the following sections.

5.2.1 Accessing Agency-M

Before I approached Philip with my request, I had met him once at an informal gathering of friends in September 2011. This informal meeting served as crucial groundwork in gaining access to Agency-M and I used it to raise the topic of participant observation with him. Philip responded positively and he explained that his duties were far more complex than creative idea generation only. He shared with me the difficulties he has faced as a creative director today. This informal talk made me feel positive about gaining access to Agency-M and it also helped to build a degree of trust between Philip and me. I explained to Philip the differences I felt there were between being a researcher and a practitioner, since I believe it is important to clarify a researcher’ role and establish a non-judgemental stance to convince the gatekeeper that the researcher is not threatening (Waddington, 1994).

The key gatekeeper in Agency-M was the Chief Creative Officer (CCO), who was someone I did not know personally. I found Philip very supportive and helpful to me.
in gaining access through the CCO. After I obtained the initial consent from Philip, he asked me to write a formal email to the CCO and to copy the request to his secretary, Emily. I wrote about my request in detail in the email to the CCO and, as Philip had suggested, I incorporated his name as the contact person and said that I would respect the confidentiality of any advertising work that I would access.

I learned that I had been given access by an email from Philip saying ‘Hey Vincie, my boss has approved and please contact Emily [the CCO’s secretary] and she will arrange the details with you’. The email also included the message that the CCO had sent to Philip previously, which said: ‘No problem! You owe me a meal! Ask her to call Em/ L.’ This friendly email from the CCO to Philip suggests that access was gained as a favour in exchange for the token of ‘a meal’, and this implies there was a close relationship between the CCO and Philip. This experience reinforced how helpful it was to have support from someone else in the organization in negotiating access with the gatekeeper.

Although Philip was very friendly and helpful during this process, I could see that he was also very conscious of the formality and bureaucracy of his company, advising me of what to say, what to do and who would be involved in making the decisions about access. The experience of seeking access was very helpful to me, knowing that bureaucracy could be a concern for a multinational full-service agency. Being sensitive and alert to hierarchy and confidentiality issues raised by Philip drew my particular attention to the constraints and pressures of creatives working in multinational agencies and reminded me that I would also have to be cautious about the impact of the study on their future work lives. This kind of sensitivity to constraints and potential respondents has been documented as important to observational studies of this nature (McCracken, 1988; Stewart & Shamdasani, 1990; Crang & Cook, 2007; McLeod et al. 2009).

I presented myself to Philip as a researcher as well as offering myself as a creative freelancer who was willing to offer support to any creative teams for idea development. In order to get to know different creative teams, I tried to take the initiatives to join their discussions and brainstorming sessions. The creatives
welcomed my participation and the ideas that I contributed; and they reflected that they found me helpful in giving them some useful insights. As the fieldwork progressed, they become more willing to share with me their documents and clients’ comments of their working projects. I was working with them on three different clients: a fast-food retail brand, a credit card and a contact lens. During the access negotiations, Philip gained agreement to involve me in clients’ meetings for his working accounts and other creative meetings in general. The account managers were very supportive in helping me to gain approval from their clients; they presented my role as a researcher as well as a creative freelancer and reassured them of the confidentially of material related to their accounts. I noticed that the clients approved my involvement in their accounts based on their trust in the agency and the creative team. During my fieldwork, I found that most of the creatives in Agency-M were very easy-going and open-minded in sharing their ideas and projects with me. In my experience, creatives enjoy collaborative work and we like to work with people who can share different perspectives and experiences. The creatives at Agency-M seemed eager to learn new things and they asked me questions about my academic research. In general they seemed open-minded and found it very easy to work with newcomers. I noticed that the creatives and account managers treated me fairly without making any special political concessions due to my presence, even though my access to Agency-M had been gained by referral from a senior person in the agency. I realised that the creatives were happy with me in the agency because, as well as being a researcher, I was a free-of-charge freelancer. Moreover, they noticed that my role in Agency-M was as a participant observer for my study. I reflected no intention that I would be in competition with them or cause any political threats to their positions. The creatives were willing to share with me and asked me to support their work without hesitation.

Permission to undertake participant observation in Agency-M was granted for three weeks, from November 7-25, 2011. The secretary of the creative department, Emily, confirmed the dates with me through a phone call. Emily received me on the first day of the visit, and gave me a door access card. Getting this access card was important because it implied a high level of trust, and it allowed me to have free access to
Agency-M at any time without the need to pass through the main reception area every time. In other words, this access card also opened the gate for me to many sources of data in the study.

5.2.2 Accessing Agency-R

It was much simpler to gain access to Agency-R than to Agency-M. This is because the company was smaller in scale, with around 20 staff, and hence the decision-making process could be easier and faster. The initial contact with Tom, the Creative Director as well as one of the founders of Agency-R, was through a mutual colleague, Nick, who is the creative director of one of the multinational agencies in Hong Kong to whom Agency-R has outsourced many advertising jobs since the company was formed in 2000. As mentioned above, the first contact was made with Tom by sending him a text message, which was followed by an informal meeting and chat about the research in mid-June 2012. We found that we had graduated from the same university, which allowed us to share many understandings about design and advertising. After this meeting, Tom introduced me to the other two partners in Agency-R, Kelvin and Chris, the joint business directors; Kelvin was in charge of the business in Hong Kong and Chris of the business in Mainland China. Tom was the creative director in both countries. Two days after our meeting, permission was granted to conduct the field study in Agency-R for three weeks, starting on July 9, 2012. The first meeting with Tom in Agency-R took place in a relaxing and friendly atmosphere. I presented myself to Tom that I would be joining the creative department as a researcher as well as creative freelancer so that I could engage in their work.

The following sections describe the data analysis and findings from these two field observations.
5.3 The two agency sites

This section describes the physical environments recorded during the fieldwork in Agency-M and Agency-R.

5.3.1 The setting for participant observation at Agency-M

Agency-M is one of the most reputable multinational full-service advertising agencies in Hong Kong and a renowned agency working with many famous international clients. The agency is located in Causeway Bay, which is the major business area in Hong Kong. Its offices are on the 23rd floor of a high-rise commercial building. This location reflects Agency-M’s status as a large-scale international organisation because it is based in a top-ranked commercial building in the business district. The reception area is modern and spacious and it displays a lot of creative awards and trophies. This environment reflects Agency-M’s status as a well-established advertising agency. In contrast to the reception area, the staff working area inside is plain and less decorative. Figure 13 shows the scenario of the reception area of Agency-M and Figure 14 shows the office setting inside Agency-M. The atmosphere of the creative department is lively and the overall surroundings looks a bit messy. For instance, there are many magazines and colourful layouts all around, and there are photos and posters posted randomly on a creative’s desk-panels (Figure 15).
Figure 13: The reception areas of Agency-M

Figure 14: The inside setting of Agency-M
There are over eighty staff members in Agency-M, with twenty of them in the creative department. Figure 16 below illustrates the structure of the creative department. It is divided into four core creative teams who are responsible for handling different accounts. The creative department is headed by Philip, the Group Creative Director (GCD) who is the gatekeeper of the creative department, and is also responsible for the quality of creative output and art direction of all teams.
Figure 16: The structure of the creative department in Agency-M

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Job Involves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MD</td>
<td>Managing Director</td>
<td>Managing the business and human resource of advertising agency. Identifying agency direction and decision making (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCO</td>
<td>Chief Creative Officer</td>
<td>The highest rank in creative department; responsible for the oversight for the whole development of the creative department project; generating new business (Mackay, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GCD</td>
<td>Group Creative Director</td>
<td>Responsible for leading the design, concept development and promotion strategies in business group; generating new business for the group (Mackay, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Creative Director</td>
<td>Leading design and concept forward in creative department; guide the creative team with the expertise’s skills and experiences (Mackay, 2004).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| ACD                 | Associate Creative Director| Developing concept and strategies, and working in conjunction with the creative director (Mackay, 2004).
Table 1: Definitions of roles in creative agency

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SAD</td>
<td>Senior Art Director: Leader or team leader in the art department, responsible in supervising and unifying the conceptual framework (Preston, 1994).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Art Director: Directing advertising department, and formulating advertisements and ad campaigns; also responsible in creating ads (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>Interactive Art Director: Directing and formulating in interactive digital design, web design, searching system, and ads campaign on the Internet (Mackay, 2004).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCW</td>
<td>Senior Copywriter: Leader or team leader of copywriter, responsible in supervising and unifying the copywriters’ project. (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW</td>
<td>Copywriters: Writing copy for internal and external publications; develop and writing copy for print advertising, broadcast commercials, and outdoor media; develop advertising concepts to sell products. Writing copy for advertisements, fact sheets, and promotional materials (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AAD</td>
<td>Assistant Art Director: Assisting art director in formulating advertisements and ad campaigns; creating ads; focusing on production work (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 17: Descriptions of job of different creative posts in Agency-M

The fieldwork in Agency-M began on November 7, 2011 and I arrived in the reception area at 9am even though I had agreed to meet Philip at 10:30am. The receptionist told me it was too early to arrive at 9am because no one in the creative department would be in at that time. She told me creatives usually came in after 10:00am. Janitors were cleaning the furniture in the reception area. I sat on the couch...
in the reception area while observing other members of staff who started coming in at around 9:30am, mostly wearing formal suits or dresses and high-heels, and who seemed generally to be an energetic group. The receptionist told me that the account managers normally showed up at this time. On the first day of my observations, I was wearing a white shirt and a pair of khaki pants, as I wanted to appear neither too formal nor too casual. While I was sitting on the couch waiting for Philip, the receptionist told me that the creatives in Agency-M normally did not enter the office through the reception area, but through the back door on the other side. It was interesting to hear that creatives did not like to follow normal office hours and that they did not follow the normal route to their workplace as the other staff did. This echoed what the creatives had mentioned in the interviews, that they see flexible working hours and free working style as important components for creatives. It seemed that the creatives had attempted to establish their identity collectively, making a strike for freedom away from the large-corporation bureaucracy by not following the norms of office working patterns. At the same time, I realised the receptionist seemed to accept the creatives’ flexible working style and indulge them as a special group of employees who enjoy privileges in the agency.

Philip welcomed me at the reception area at 10:30 am and he was punctual. He took me to his workstation, and at the same time introduced me to the other creatives in the department. Philip’s workstation is located in the corner of the creative department, beside the room of Louis, the Managing Director (MD) and the Chief Creative Officer (CCO). Apart from Louis’s room, all other workstations in the creative department are just divided by panel partitions and teammates sit close together. The creative director’s workstation is about three to four times bigger than those of the other creatives, who can see each other only when they stand up. This means that they have their workstations and privacy when they sit down to work. However, there are two open areas for small-group discussions in the creative department, as there are many discussions between creatives and account managers as well as brainstorming sessions. The atmosphere was very friendly and they were talking freely and loudly. I could hear their discussions and the sound of laughter from time to time in the creative department.
During the observation in Agency-M, I was assigned to sit at a round table located in one of the discussion areas in the central part of the creative department, where freelancers mostly sat. There were six chairs around the table, including the one I was sitting on. This table was usually assigned for freelancers and for creatives’ small-group discussions. Being located in an open area facilitated observations of the creatives’ interactions with other members of the company. Besides sitting there, I occasionally walked around to visit different creative teams. In the creative department, four creatives sat together as a unit divided by low-level partitions. In order words, they could keep their privacy when sitting at their work stations, but at the same time they could be approached easily when people stood up and walked by their workstations.

5.3.2 The setting for participant observation at Agency-R

Agency-R is one of the most reputable independent digital advertising agencies in Hong Kong, having been named one of the Agencies of the Year in 2009 and 2010. Agency-R has extended its business into Mainland China, setting up an office in Shanghai in 2010. The participant observation was conducted in the main office of Agency-R Hong Kong, which is located on the ninth floor of an industrial building where several small-to-medium independent creative enterprises are based. Compared to Agency-M, Agency-R is obviously a smaller-scale agency and it appears more down-to-earth. There is no luxurious lobby and the corridor leading to the office of Agency-R is greyish concrete and very plainly furnished with greyish concrete on the floor of the corridor. Even though there is no fancy, luxurious reception area in Agency-R, the office is clearly identifiable on the ninth floor and it created a strong modern atmosphere. Agency-R’s front door stands out on this floor because it is made from plain wood and stainless steel and brightened by strong lighting outside. This creates the impression that of a stylish designer-like studio setting.

The entire company is not as big as Agency-M, and it takes up an area around the size of a standard tennis court. The whole office can be seen at a glance. Situated at
the far end, there is a meeting room panelled with transparent glass that can accommodate eight people. In front of the meeting room are the staff workstations, which are set in an open-plan office design. In other words, there are no rooms and no panels dividing the workstations and all the staff in Agency-R share the same size and same style of work desk. This reflects a strong open-door policy and it shows that Agency-R is trying to flatten the hierarchy system through the design of the office environment. All staff share the working space regardless of their positions and the open plan design allows everyone to see each other’s work. On one hand, this gave me the impression of a warm and friendly atmosphere for the staff to share their working experiences. However, I found that there was very little privacy for staff while they are working in the office. While I was there, I could see everyone’s activities displayed on their computer screens. Everyone could hear each other’s conversations when they were talking on the phone. Whenever one staff member turned the radio on, it could be heard everywhere. During the daytime, creative members mostly worked independently and they concentrated on working at their personal computer workstation and seldom talked to each other. Figure 18 illustrates the creative department of Agency-R.

![Figure 18: The creative department of Agency-R](image)

Chapter 5 Participant Observations
There was a total of twenty staff in the agency, of whom thirteen were in the creative department. Obviously, the size of the agency is comparatively small and it is simpler in terms of hierarchy and structure than Agency-M. Figure 19 below illustrates the company size and organisational structure of Agency-R, Hong Kong.

![Diagram of Agency-R's organisational structure]

*Figure 19: The structure of the creative department in Agency-R*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Letter abbreviation</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Job Involves</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BD</td>
<td>Business Director</td>
<td>Developing, directing, and implementing marketing efforts for specific interactive design; identifying key markets and potential customers; developing pricing and distribution strategies (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A/C D</td>
<td>Account Director</td>
<td>Maintaining a good relationship between the agency and the client; overseeing an entire client account; planning advertising and/or public relation campaigns (Field, 2006).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------</td>
<td>-------------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PM</td>
<td>Project Manager&lt;br&gt;Manipulating the department resources, such as designer and programmer, to complete the client’s project; planning the production schedule (Field, 2006).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Creative Director&lt;br&gt;Leading design and concept forward of interactive design; guide the creative team with the expertise’s skills and experiences on the digital platform; focusing on interactive advertising and ads campaign (Mackay, 2004).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IAD</td>
<td>Interactive Art Director&lt;br&gt;Directing and formulating in interactive digital design, web design, searching system, and ads campaign on the Internet (Mackay, 2004).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CW</td>
<td>Copywriter&lt;br&gt;Writing copy for publications on the interactive platform, such as social media, corporate website and digital ads campaign; developing advertising concepts to sell products on digital platform (Field, 2006).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ID</td>
<td>Interface Designer&lt;br&gt;Assisting and formulating and presenting the layout of the designed interactive interface, usually by computer illustration (Saffer, 2010).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BkP</td>
<td>Back-end Programmer&lt;br&gt;Using computer coding to realise the created concept and interface done by designer (Saffer, 2010).</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Figure 20: Descriptions of job of different creative posts in Agency-R*

According to Tom, the creative department under his supervision consisted of six Interactive Art Directors, also called front-end creatives, who had studied or worked in the multimedia design area; and four programmers, also called back-end creatives, one Copywriter and two Interface Designers. The creatives in Agency-R did not
work in a fixed team structure. In other words, they did not work with the same partners and did not follow the same client accounts all the time. Creatives teamed up with different company members on an individual job basis and Tom assigned the teams according to the nature of the job and the creatives’ workloads. This arrangement suggests that there was more flexibility in terms of structure and working practices in this smaller agency. The creatives in Agency-R told me that they preferred this flexible arrangement because, on one hand they had equal opportunities to handle different accounts, which helped them to gain a wider range of work experience while, on the other hand, they could share their workloads with other creative members if they were too busy. A constructive supporting atmosphere was found among the creative staff.

5.4 Connections between creatives’ identities, their leisure and personal interests

The creatives’ identities were linked closely with their leisure and personal interests. In Agency-M and Agency-R, the creatives liked to showcase their personal belongings in their workstations, such as figurines, postcards, gadgets and doodles or sketches (Figure 21). Some creatives displayed photos of their pets. Moreover, many creatives enjoyed sharing information about their personal interests and leisure pursuits in casual chats, as well as news and interesting ideas that they had gathered from friends and social media such as Facebook. Previous researchers (du Gay 1997; Hackley 2003; Miller 1997; Soar 2000; Kelly et al., 2005) noted that advertising creatives drew extensively upon their personal interests and personal experiences for advertising production. Socialising among the creative community could also maintain a relaxing working mood, through exchanging humour, provoking challenging thoughts and pushing traditional boundaries with humour as a way to promote creative work. Kenny and Euchler (2012) revealed how creatives in a UK agency used social media and jokes in their work life as an important part of their creative identity work, individually and as an agency. In general, sharing personal interests and new information seems to be an important part of creatives’
work lives in advertising agencies and of their identity construction. They use these objects as a way to construct their creative identities in relation to their personalities and personal enthusiasms. In both agencies, Agency-M and Agency-R, the creatives enjoyed socialising with each other during the working day. Bonding was built up among the creative community by discussing and sharing leisure activities and personal interests.

*Figure 21: Workstations of the creatives in Agency-M*
As Figure 18 shows, there were many comic figurines displayed on Philip’s and Tak’s workstations and bookshelves. Many creatives in Agency-M liked to gather together to share their latest collections of figurines and toys with each other, and some took photographs of each other’s collections to share on Facebook. Other creatives talked about their experiences of playing video games. Often these discussions started with pairs and attracted other creatives to join and for a larger socialising group which shared jokes and laughed loudly in the office during working hours. These activities were unique to the creative department and it seemed that creatives were privileged with this free working style. Observing the other departments, such as account management and production, staff acted in a more formal way and they were less likely to chat loudly about personal interests in their workplace. Apart from group chats in the office, I frequently saw the creatives browsing on the Internet, and sharing content on Facebook during office hours. They frequently stayed connected and chatted online while handling their creative work. Quite often, it was difficult for me to know whether the creatives were working or handling personal issues in the office. They also reported to each other on what they learned from social networks and forums.

A similar scenario was found in Agency-R. Creatives liked to bring their personal things, such as toys and figurines, to their office and displayed them on their bookshelves (see Figure 19). As mentioned before, creatives concentrated when working with their computers individually and they seldom talked to each other during the daytime. However, they gathered together and started socialising, sharing their hobbies, interests and fun experiences with each other as soon as they finished their work. Gathering time mostly happened late afternoon at around 5 or 6 pm.
Figure 22: Workstations of the creatives in Agency-R
Despite this, the creatives in Agency-R did not follow a routine working-pattern either; like the Agency-M creatives, they worked flexible hours. For instance, those in Agency-R started work at different times and they had flexible lunch hours. Some went to lunch at 2pm and some at 4pm. Some came to the office to start work at 11:30am after they had brunch. Each of the Agency-R creatives seemed to be working independently, on their own schedules, and their working hours were very flexible.

The above observations enriched our understanding and reinforced the evidence from the interviews in Chapter 4 about the lives and freedom seeking of advertising creatives in Hong Kong. They appear to have interwoven leisure and personal life with their work and enjoyed the privilege of freedom in constructing the pattern of their own working lives. In other words, creatives shaped their identities by exhibiting a culture in which they talk freely and expressively, fusing their work with their personal interests and hobbies. Playfulness, along with humour and jokes (Kenny and Euchler, 2012), seemed inseparable from the Hong Kong creatives’ work lives. These elements were particularly crucial as part of creativity construction and creative identity work (Andriopoulos and Gotsi, 2001; Montuori, 2003). The creatives suggested that such a free working style and flexible working hours gave them a sense of privilege in their agencies. The privilege of freedom in organising their working lives seemed to be one of the significant characteristics of Hong Kong advertising creatives’ identity.

5.5 The multiple roles of creatives in the social media era

On the first day of my participant observation in Agency-M, Philip caught up with me and shared his present works. He also mentioned his changing work role and the challenges he was facing in relation to digital platforms. In our conversation, Philip commented that the challenges creatives face today are due to the fact that many advertising agencies and their clients have greater demands and expectations of creatives on traditional and digital platforms, and that these demands are more
evident because of the keen competition between advertising agencies, both traditional and digital.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Philip Vincie</th>
<th>Day1</th>
<th>11:30</th>
<th>Philip’s workstation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philip:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>You know, nowadays, advertising agencies want to cut their budgets for creative staffing but they expect us to do more and more work. Clients want to cut our creative and production budgets but they want more and more from us.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>What do you mean by ‘more’?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Philip:</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>We provide clients with ideas in terms of helping them with strategy, production, media ideas, consumer insights, creative ideas, trends, technology updates…. everything goes together and they expect us to know everything.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Contemporary creatives are expected to take up responsibilities more than generating creative content and production of advertisements (Hackley and Kover, 2005). In both Agency-M and Agency-R, some clients expected creatives to perform different tasks and provide them with integrated solutions that went beyond creative content production and cut across traditional and digital platforms. For instance, Philip mentioned that his work involved development on strategy, creative ideas, consumer insights, media and technology. The scope of work was diverse and involved strategic thinking as well as new media explorations. One client of Agency-M, a fast food retail brand, requested the account managers and creatives to suggest new ideas on promotional activities to them for the coming season. In responding to this request, I saw both creatives and account managers agree, and interpreted this as a good sign that they would like to open up more advertising opportunities. One day I came across Tak, creative director in Agency-M, who asked me if I could help him edit some slides of a power-point presentation. Tak briefed me about the aim and content flow of the presentation and he expected me to strengthen the presentation by adding more convincing data about social media responses to some previous advertising campaigns. I started to search on the Internet and some databases. While I was working on the presentation slides, Tak was impressed by my work in adding
some results and sources and he told me that creatives today should be more strategic and rational, not saying ‘I think that’ and ‘I feel that’ but replacing these phrases with ‘the result shows that’ and ‘this campaign prove to be successful in terms of…’. Tak’s request for help also indicated that the rise of social media meant that creatives needed to demonstrate strategic thinking when presenting ideas to their clients, and that he saw one way of doing this to be incorporating more facts and examples. To a certain extent, this builds on the discussion in Chapter 4 of creatives’ beliefs about their clients’ ignorance about social media; believing this, the creatives indicated that they were willing to do more and prepare a lot of case study material and facts in order to share their knowledge and convince their clients about the value of the social media approaches they were suggesting. A similar scenario was also evident in Agency-R. Tom, the Creative Director, incorporated advertising strategy and creative ideas as well as creative media production into the campaign proposal that he presented to their clients. Tom believed that it would be more persuasive to present a strategic point of view together with creative ideas and media production. The above observations suggest that the creatives’ roles had become more diverse, moving beyond the traditional requirements of creative idea development toward a role incorporating creative strategy and innovative media production technology. These observations and my experience in the agencies also suggest that the boundaries between creative roles and those of account planners, account managers and media planners were becoming increasingly blurred.

These blurring boundaries required the creatives to have more diverse knowledge and skill-sets. They were expected to commence work on a project based just on the preliminary thoughts provided by the clients, and the creative directors complained about the lack of insightful advertising strategy or brief provided by account management. The creatives complained about their peers, that they often gave them a ‘so-called advertising strategy with some cliché words written on it’. To creatives, ‘cliché words’ on the advertising strategy meant that they found the strategy failed to provide them with creative insights. Though account management should be in charge of advertising strategy development (Malefty & Morais, 2012); creatives seemed to be disappointed when they found themselves of working on advertising
strategy and they believed that these duties went beyond their scope of work. In fact, there were contrasting views from creatives regarding the lack of clear advertising strategy and clear advertising briefs. Some of them complained that it was beyond their role because it was about developing marketing ideas, but others preferred to come up with their own advertising strategy rather than receiving it from clients or account managers, since creatives thought that developing the strategy gave them greater creative freedom.

In general, both clients and advertising agencies appeared to have developed a broader set of requirements for advertising creatives, requiring them to participate more in marketing ideas as well as creative advertising production. This echoes the interview comments that creatives have to play multiple roles: sometimes they are marketing strategists, sometimes they are advertising content creatives, and sometimes they are media technologists.

At the same time, agency management (creative directors and account directors) and clients expected creatives to expand their range of work and requested them to present integrated solutions that involved strategy, creative media, consumer insights and innovative technological development. For instance, creatives in Agency-M often worked on large-scale advertising campaigns for worldwide clients. During the fieldwork, I joined a creative brainstorming meeting that involved creatives, account management, media planners and clients for a fast-food retailing chain store. Brainstorming meetings were usually initiated by account management or clients at the early stages of a project. There were 11 people in this meeting including me. Philip brought Joseph, Leonard and me to this brainstorming meeting; he presented Joseph as a senior creative, Leonard as a young creatives as well as a social media lover, and me as a new junior member joining this meeting, because he expected the clients would have less expectation of me. As well as the creatives, there were three other account managers and one media planner. There were three marketing mangers from the client side. I realised that clients appreciated and enjoyed brainstorming with the creatives a lot because the creatives were usually the most talkative group and they brought many fun ideas, including marketing and promotional ideas, to discuss in the meeting. At the same time, I saw that Philip and Joseph were also
enthusiastic about joining these brainstorming meetings, because they felt that they could contribute creative ideas at an early stage of the advertising planning process that would expand creative possibilities. In Agency-M, the creatives at senior levels, like Philip, were expected to join these brainstorming meetings with clients. Senior creatives also brought with junior creatives, like Leonard, who may be more familiar and active with social media activities, to the meeting. Usually the junior creatives were less talkative in the meetings and they learnt by observing the interactions of their seniors with the others. However, I found that senior creatives, clients and other members also welcomed junior creatives’ participation without showing hierarchy. Senior creatives appreciated Leonard’s and my comments during the meeting without resistance or embarrassment. This scenario seemed to echo the findings in the interview that senior creatives reflected that they might have to be more open-minded and learn new knowledge from junior creatives, particularly about new media. In fact, the creatives learnt from each other within the creative department and the hierarchy was disregarded. This particular brainstorming meeting was conducted in a friendly and constructive atmosphere. I found that the roles of creatives, account management, media planners and clients were blended together at that point and everyone was encouraged to think strategically and creatively without regard to the boundaries of their particular positions.

In Agency-R, the creatives were also expected to meet with their clients and discuss marketing activities such as road show and exhibition concepts, and how to incorporate these activities through social media and mobile devices. It was often Tom or the account directors of Agency-R who suggested these meeting to their clients. For instance, on Day 10, Tom and Ben, account director of Agency-R, prepared a presentation of some recent technological developments, such as the mixture of virtual and real reality for advertising. I presented myself as a creative freelancer to support the presentations. The clients expressed amazement and appreciated their presentations and their sharing, and said they would consider them seriously in their advertising planning. After the meeting, Tom told me that sharing case studies with clients facilitated better communication and could encourage clients to try out new things, possibly generating more advertising opportunities.
eventually. In the presentation, I saw that Tom played a role as a creative director as well as a technology expert. He explained to the clients how the use of these new technologies offers promotional opportunities for their brands and products. It was interesting to see such examples of creatives’ roles going beyond the functions of ideas development for traditional or digital media in advertising, as they performed multiple functions in terms of thinking and presenting strategy, ideas and technology development in the social media era.

The creatives in Agency-R also experienced challenges in learning a new way of working with their clients as well as with full-service agencies. For independent digital agencies in Hong Kong, like Agency-R, the business mainly came directly from clients, but they were also asked to help digital-focused tasks on integrated campaigns outsourced by multinational full-service agencies. Tom, the creative director of Agency-R, expressed his difficulties and disappointment in working with multinational full-service agencies. He reflected that the creatives were given no creative freedom while working with full-service agencies: those in full-serviced agencies always treated them as ‘technicians’ instead of digital creatives. For instance, on Day 4, an account director, May, met Tom and briefed him on a new job regarding a website design for Brand H. In the given project brief, all the content and layout designs, including colour, composition, fonts and graphics, were already set. Tom was very unhappy about receiving this project.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tom</th>
<th>May</th>
<th>Day 4</th>
<th>3:30 pm</th>
<th>Tom’s workstation</th>
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</table>

**Tom:** What do they (multinational full-service agency’s creative) expect us to do?

**May:** I know. I am really sorry…but you have to understand it is out of our control. Agency (multinational full-service agency’s creatives) said the clients (Brand H) need to see the full-set of layouts before they can get their client’s approval on the campaign; and they (multinational full-service agency’s creatives) said it is their responsibility to help their client to maintain a consistency of brand image in all deliverables.
Tom: So are you telling me...’just follow the layout and do it, Tom!’
Do you remember what we have agreed regarding the development of
our company? (unhappy facial expression) You seem to have
forgotten…

Tom was not happy to take up this project because he thought that it allowed him no
creative autonomy and all he had to do was just to work out the execution according
to the layout provided. During a tea break following this incident, Tom shared with
me his disappointment about co-operating with full-serviced multinational agencies.
He told me that, on one hand, he knew that it was good for Agency-R to expand its
portfolio and business by having these big brands when they worked with
multinational agencies. On the other hand, the creatives in Agency-R, including him,
were not happy being treated as ‘technicians’, which implied they were given no
creative freedom on ideas as well as allowing no room for interface design in their
work, and they were expected to play a supportive role in production only in an
integrated advertising campaign. In this case, the digital creatives were not satisfied
with playing the role of being ‘narrowly focused on digital’ without the broader
creative input, including the development of an integrated planning proposal and
advertising strategy. Therefore, the creatives in Agency-R had been learning how to
expand digital solutions into broader marketing and communications strategies. In
fact, Tom had reminded all staff at the beginning of 2013 about the strategic
direction of Agency-R, which was to increase work coming directly from clients and
reduce or even cut all jobs from multinational agencies. This was because he and his
partners believed that this direction could drive the company to develop more
business and operate on a bigger scale as well as gaining more creative control.

Another direction given to staff in Agency-R was asking them, in particular the
front-end creatives and account directors, to expand their knowledge and mind-sets
from a business and strategic perspective in order to provide clients with integrated
advertising planning, including strategy and creative ideas as well as production,
while at the same time emphasising their digital expertise. It is important to note that
this company direction, set by Tom and his partners in order to fight for greater
creative autonomy, led them to urge creatives to expand their marketing knowledge and integrated idea development beyond the digital-media production that they were used to handling, shifting to more diverse and multiple roles. Learning new knowledge and skills seemed to be linked closely with the construction of creative identity in the social media era, involving how they saw themselves, how they thought a creative should be and how other stakeholders in the industry see them as creatives. In Agency-R, I found that some creatives, particularly the interactive art directors (front-end creatives), were willing to learn more; they showed enthusiasm and support to Tom for moving the company toward a strategic advertising direction. They helped to prepare case studies for their clients and they had put together online sources that included strategic content for integrated campaigns. In contrast, the programmers and interface developers spent more time learning about new technology, including computer coding and programming. The creatives were expanding their knowledge and skills in a broader spectrum. As Agency-R is one of the leading digital agencies in Hong Kong, it can be projected that digital agencies in Hong Kong, including Agency-R, have been facing similar challenges. Developing their expertise in a broader range of areas in order to cope with the rise of social media seemed to be a direction for them to grow into. Thus the creatives in Agency-R took up diverse roles in their work, expanding their knowledge and skill sets in different directions while coping with the challenges faced in their work lives.

5.6 The creative possibilities of social media

The creatives in Agency-M were enthusiastic about incorporating social media into advertising campaigns. On the fourth day of the fieldwork in Agency-M, I was invited to join a conference call meeting with one of the creative teams responsible for a credit card Brand M, together with the account servicing team of Brand M. The conference call was held in one of the Agency-M meeting rooms, and at the other end of the line was the media agency, namely MU. This meeting took place in a small room with a round table in the centre. There were three members of the account servicing team at this meeting, and three creatives apart from myself. The
MU representative had sent the media plan to the account managers by email beforehand. During the meeting, the MU representative started explaining the proposed media plan for Brand M and said it should cover the use of diverse media including magazine print ads, outdoor billboards and wall stickers in shopping arcades. The MU representative also explained the media allocation and campaign duration in detail. Occasionally the account manager, Avila, raised some questions to MU to clarify some details of the media plan. The creatives mostly kept silent during the conference call, just listening and jotting down notes. The conference call lasted for about half an hour. After the call, the account managers reminded the creative team to come up with creative ideas according to the media plan discussed in the call. The creative team agreed on a date with the account manager, two days later, to conduct an internal review and also arrange a date for presenting the client with the media plan and creative solution.

After the conference call finished, the creative team (including Philip, James and Leonard) returned to the creative department and sat down at a round table to review the media plan for Brand M suggested by MU. During the meeting, Philip and James started generating creative ideas based on the suggested media plan; some creative ideas had been discussed in the brainstorming meeting, including sponsorship of a travel guidebook, a billboard at the airport, and large wall-size posters in shopping arcades. During the discussion, James expanded on some thoughts about the target audience and suggested that the media plan should also address students who plan to study overseas, because he believed these students would be another core set of target customers for Brand M in addition to other travellers. Both Leonard and Philip agreed with James’ suggestion and they also agreed that creative teams should take the initiative to propose more ideas to their clients, going beyond what they had been told to do. After a short discussion, the creative team of Brand M suggested placing a booth in the Education Expo and putting up banners in the venue in order to reach the students planning to study overseas. Advertorials in some booklets as well as guidebooks for further studies were also suggested. Moreover, James also suggested other online and social media advertising ideas such as posting blog messages on travel or ticketing discussion forums. Philip also suggested opening a discussion
forum and inviting people to share their stories about money lost during their travels, incorporating Brand M as an incentive to reward their participation by reimbursing them the amount of money they lost. The creatives seemed very excited as they discussed these social media advertising ideas. Indeed, during my time in Agency-M, many of the creatives seemed very positive about adopting and proposing social media ideas in their proposals for their clients, irrespective of whether it was part of the creative brief or not.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>James</th>
<th>Day5</th>
<th>2:50 pm</th>
<th>Open-discussion area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Philip</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leonard</td>
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**Philip:** How about opening a discussion forum and inviting people to share their ‘dramatic stories’ of their trips? We could start posting some first.

**James:** Yup. We could make some noise on social media…and make it ‘naturally’ and ‘effectively’. Also I think it is good but see how we could link to Brand M within each story, but the problem is we should not be making it too ‘hard-sell’.

**Philip:** We do not link Brand M as it might be too ‘hard-sell’. How about if we invite people to share their ‘dramatic stories’ such as losing money and their terrible experience. Then Brand M will reimburse them with the ‘lost’ amount. It would be a nice soft-selling promotional gimmick!

**Leonard:** Yup! That sounds interesting to me too. I want to share one of my worst experiences when I was in Sydney! I want to be the first one to get my money back! Hahahaaaaa

**James:** That sounds good…but how can we judge it is real, and not a fake or made-up stories?

**Philip:** I think it doesn’t matter as long as the target audience participates. Or we could ask them to provide an insurance claim form as a rule of the game.
The creative team discussed their social media ideas continuously for nearly one-and-a-half hours and hardly touched on the brief suggested by MU such as the travel guidebook, billboard at the airport, and posters in shopping arcades. They seemed much more excited about their own social media ideas and the creative opportunities social media gave them to explore. Hence, Philip explained some possible further details for making use of the discussion forum, such as that they could work out some creative discussions and topics on ‘U-wants forum’ and other social networks to engage the consumers in sharing their bad travel experiences. James built onto Philip’s ideas further by suggesting that people could for vote for the ‘worst’ travel experience through Facebook. The creative team seemed very excited, talking about social media and building onto each other’s ideas. They all liked these ideas for using the social media platform. Philip kept jotting down notes and drafting initial sketches on his notepad; he seemed very attentive to their ideas and attempted to push them further. Similarly James was typing concept copy on his laptop computer to prepare for the presentation. Whether or not social media provided a powerful medium to reach the potential consumers for Brand M, the creatives expressed a very positive attitude to exploring ideas on social media platforms and they agreed that social media are an indispensable part of their lives. Overall, the creative team’s discussion lasted nearly two-and-a-half hours and the atmosphere was constructive and happy.

5.7 Developing creatives’ skill-sets

In both agencies, Agency-M and Agency-R, the creatives appeared to be taking responsibility for developing new knowledge and skill-sets that included marketing and consumer strategy, media production, and technological developments. Their autonomy and creative identity seemed closely linked with the range of work they were doing and expectations of them held by other stakeholders. For instance, the creatives at Agency-M tried to expand their range of work to incorporate strategic planning and to learn more about marketing as well as new media technology, because they wanted more creative autonomy from clients and account management.
and believed this would come from getting more involved in earlier stages of the advertising planning process. Those at Agency-R also wanted to expand their marketing knowledge, because they did not want to be idea executors and also wanted more creative autonomy from multinational full-service agency and clients.

The led to further questions about creatives learning in terms of new knowledge and skill sets: what, how and where do they learn? They appeared to be interested in learning different knowledge and skills according to the agency that they belonged to. For instance, the creatives in Agency-M repeatedly described social media advertising using phrases such as ‘try to do something new’, ‘That’s very popular…’, ‘I think it’s trendy!’ However, they admitted that they knew little about technology, especially the production of creative ideas on diverse digital media platforms. They were enthusiastic about talking to technical experts about innovative technology for advertising. In contrast, the creatives in Agency-R were interested in learning more about marketing and integrated strategy. They want to grow their business and gain more creative autonomy over an advertising campaign. For instance, Tom, creative director of Agency-R, asked me to help them search for examples of advertising campaign strategies and consumers’ responses to prepare some overseas case studies for their client.

In both agencies, Agency-M and Agency-R, the creatives developed their knowledge and skill sets through conversations and sharing with peers in the advertising community. Through participation in a community, individuals come to understand its perspectives, values and boundaries, and they share communal resources, language routines and stories (Lave & Wenger, 1991). In this study, it can be seen that creatives took responsibility for their own learning, teaching themselves through reading books and online resources, and talking to others in the advertising community. For instance, creatives talked with account managers about marketing ideas, and they talked with programmers and suppliers in production houses about content production and interactive technology development.
5.7.1 Learning from doing, reading and talking

As discussed above, many of the creatives were active on social media sites such as Facebook during the working day, both for work and personal reasons. Such everyday use of social networks helped them to understand digital and social media, and it was a source of ideas for integrating these platforms into creatives’ work (Kenny & Euchler, 2012). They also took responsibility for keeping themselves up to date by reading books, analysing and discussing social media news, case studies and other materials they found through browsing on the Internet.

For instance, in Agency-M, on some creatives’ bookshelves there were books related to advertising awards and case studies as well as social media marketing, such as and Social Media Marketing: The Next Generation of Business Engagement, and Web 2.0: A Strategy Guide. There were also reference books on writing mobile apps. The creatives made photocopies from those reference books and posted them on walls to share with others (Figure 23). I also saw creatives making reference to those books in their work, and testing out dummy layouts from them. They also developed their knowledge by doing things (Figure 24), and by discussion with peers.
Figure 23: photocopy about apps design posted by creatives on wall in Agency-M

Figure 24: creatives in Agency-M are testing out QR code on dummy layout
Chapter 5 Participant Observations

According to Fuller and Unwin (1998), individuals can learn by participating in the shared practices of a community. During the observations, I occasionally saw creatives in both agencies questioning and challenging each other during ideas discussions. They appeared eager to explore whether the ideas they suggested could be produced or not. They exchanged information about what they learned, sharing creative ideas from other brands, like viral videos and online games. They also shared new technology, music, gadgets or video games among each other and sometimes posted interesting ideas on Facebook. They seemed to enjoy sharing examples of social media campaigns with each other and discussing tactics for engaging consumers in their advertising campaigns, as indicated by the frequent laughter during these discussions. For instance, the creatives in Agency-M occasionally gathered together for small group discussions and shared creative campaigns they had seen; these often involved social media advertising on Facebook or YouTube (Fig 25). Sometimes, they discussed particular projects and how social media might be used in them. At other times, the creatives had more formal internal reviews with their peers and account managers in the open area, and in these meetings they often expressed eagerness to incorporate social media into their creative proposals and discussed tactics for engaging consumers.
The following excerpts illustrated how the creatives learned by discussing ideas and talking with each other. On day five of the observation in Agency-M I joined the discussion with Curtis, the ACD, and his team, which was working on creative concepts for Brand K, a fast-food retailing brand in Hong Kong. The project was about generating a new print-ad campaign for a new burger. However, they started discussing the use of viral video posting on YouTube. Curtis encouraged his team members to come up with possible ideas because he thought they could open up more creative opportunities with the use of the social media platform.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curtis</th>
<th>Day12</th>
<th>4:37 pm</th>
<th>open-discussion area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Eddie</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Leonard</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**Curtis:** I think that would be fun to do something on social media on top of print ad, say viral video on YouTube. Hey, do you remember the case of that beauty company of ‘getting grade C’? They have posted a video on YouTube as if it looks like a teaser to induce the word-of-mouth. We can do something like this, but the thing is we must make it as amateur as it is. I don’t want to make it too professional and obvious.

**Eddie:** I think it would be a good idea to propose a series of open-ending stories about lovers’ arguments… the client will like it if it doesn’t involve too much cost more than a print ad. We could then also invite audiences to join and comment the story ending on their own.

**Leonard:** Yup. That’s sounds great! We could ask An Man and Ann.(from account services) to become the actor and actress in order to save cost…

**Curtis:** Ah? An Man? No way… I think she will scare the audience and no one will respond…haha…but we can ask Ann to spread it out, as if her own story with other friends… you know how nosy of Ann and her friends…hahaaa

**Leonard:** ahahahh, that’s a good idea….
Curtis and the other creatives in his team felt more and more excited as they came up with ideas for producing viral video on social media. They built on each other and learned something new through talking to each other. In fact the original brief from the client required them to create a print ad campaign and point-of-purchase materials. Posting a viral video on social media was not actually specified, but the creatives were taking the initiative to come up with viral video concepts for the client because they themselves wanted to learn more about social media advertising at the same time. The practice of suggesting social media to clients was not limited to Curtis’s team, but was also observed among other teams in Agency-M. The creatives learned new knowledge and skills by doing, reading and sharing with other creatives. This learning process has been referred to as being in social relations to others (Lave 1993) and they learn through the participation of the shared practices in a community or ‘lived in world’ (Fuller, 1997). I also realised, in another group discussion with Philip and James, that they encouraged us to take the initiative in integrating social media into their campaigns, even though the client did not ask for it. Philip showed us three case studies involving social media advertising on the Internet and encouraged us to adopt social media in addition to the print campaign for the credit card brand. The creatives learned to know about social media advertising by doing. The account managers seemed to be happy with the creatives’ suggestions because they agreed that adding social media advertising could create a better promotional synergy for a brand.

5.7.2 Learning from new creative positions

The creatives were often observed trying to develop new knowledge and skill sets through their practices and interactions with industry peers. Sheehan and Morrison (2009) emphasised this need for new creative talents in various positions in advertising agencies in order to respond to the challenges and opportunities of digital media. With increasing demands for advertising on digital platforms, some agencies have started organisational restructuring and recruited creatives with expertise in digital media gained from prior experience in digital agencies (Horsky, 2006;
Willott, 2011). These new appointments were intended to expand and strengthen the services offered by agencies and also to help existing staff develop their skills further. New positions had also been created in Agency-M and Agency-R. Agency-M had created the new position of Interactive Art Director in the creative department, with responsibility for providing creative consultancy on digital media platforms. Kitty had been recruited to this post in early 2011. According to the organisational structure of Agency-M suggested by Philip, Kitty was under the supervision of Curtis, the Associate Creative Director of Agency-M. Kitty sat with three other creatives, and her workstation was the same as the other art directors or copywriters. Typically, a creative team is comprised of an art director and a copywriter (Stuhlfaut, 2011; Grant et al, 2012). In Agency-M, Kitty was not paired with a copywriter, but was assigned to team up with different creatives, depending on jobs assigned by Curtis. For instance, Kitty had worked with Tak, Mark and Joseph, who belonged to different teams and handled different accounts. From my observation of Kitty’s work, it seemed that she was playing a dual role: performing idea development as well as providing advice and support on digital technology production. However, she was seldom involved in branding or strategy discussions with other creative members during creative idea development. While Kitty was working with other creatives, she was expected to contribute ideas for incorporating Internet and mobile devices into advertising campaigns and suggestions for solving technical problems. Sometimes, Kitty joined other creative teams in the middle of a discussion if they encountered technical questions. She was also expected to work with different teams to prepare presentation material for clients, particularly on digital advertising content.

In fact, Kitty told me that she was not very satisfied with her role in Agency-M. Before joining Agency-M, she worked in a multinational digital agency in Hong Kong. She made this job switch because she wanted to work on integrated advertising campaigns and to learn more about marketing and advertising strategy. However, she felt that other creatives in Agency-M treated her as a technical consultant and she seldom had a chance to get involved in strategic planning. Kitty’s experience was very similar to Joyce, a junior creative in multinational digital agency
who took part in the interview phase of this study. As discussed in Chapter 4, Joyce expressed frustration that she was not getting the chance to broaden her expertise because she was kept working on technical execution.

Fuller and Unwin (2004) stated that learning is a two-way system; practitioners also learn from newcomers through idea sharing and knowledge exchange. With Kitty joining the creative department, the other creatives were keen to ask her questions and learn from her. For instance, on my third day in Agency-M, Curtis and Kitty were chatting in the open area, discussing some possible ideas for making viral videos for a project. During their discussion, Kitty mentioned the details of posting a video on YouTube for a client. She was explaining the details to other creatives, Curtis and Andy. Curtis was very interested in learning from Kitty not only about her previous job experiences but also her knowledge of digital platforms. In particular, Curtis and Andy were very keen to know more about social media advertising. They both admitted that they knew little about digital platforms and they were eager to know more. The excerpt below illustrates the eagerness of creatives to learn from their digital colleagues.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Curtis</th>
<th>Day13</th>
<th>16:43</th>
<th>open-discussion area</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kitty</td>
<td></td>
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**Curtis:** Why did you leave the digital agency and come here (Agency-M)? I thought it should be more fun and challenging over there than here. I think you have started to regret it, haven’t you?

**Kitty:** It was not that bad except it was too busy there (digital agency); but most of the work is on the digital platform; website, social media... and I want to try out more, know a broader scope of brands; that’s why I came here (Agency-M).

**Curtis:** Who was your previous boss? Did she/he familiarise you about digital technology and programming?
Kitty: He…I rather not say much about him because I had had a bad experience with him. Hahaaa….but I can tell you there are many digital expertises, many campaigns that we work on, that must be worked on together with programmers since a lot of concepts are dealing with coding.

Scenarios such as this suggest a constructive learning atmosphere, where creatives learn by interacting and talking to each other within a community of practice (McLeod et al, 2011). However, the traditional relationship between newcomers and old-timers does not always appear to exist in this context. [Here, for example, Curtis was in a more senior position than Kitty and he had six years more practical experience than she did, yet he was asking her questions and was eager to learn more from her about work in digital agencies. Kitty explained that her work in the digital agency was too narrowly focused and that she wanted to learn more about branding and integrated advertising campaigns. This shows how creatives seek to learn from their colleagues who come from diverse backgrounds, regardless of their levels of seniority. Creatives in more senior positions may not necessarily have more experience than their junior colleagues in responding to the challenges of digital media. Indeed, creatives who possess deeper understanding about digital platform, like Kitty, might be able to share her knowledge and experience with their superiors without showing any sense of awkwardness. This is because, in the light of what the Chinese cultural context might suggest, juniors need to show deference and respect to their seniors in work by letting the senior talk while the junior listens. However, given its emphasis on novelty and innovation, the advertising industry is less observant of cultural norms in this respect.

It seemed that this multinational full-service advertising agency was attempting to expand its range of services on digital platforms by recruiting new staff, like Kitty, with digital media expertise in order to offer more peer sharing and learning opportunity for the existing creative team. Moreover, the hierarchy of creatives became less significant among juniors and seniors members during idea generation and sharing processes. The creatives in Agency-M not only developed new
knowledge from books or online sources, but also learned from their new colleagues, who might be more expert on digital media, through exchanging ideas and points of view in everyday interactions. Fuller and Unwin (2004) stated that learning is a two-way system, Senior creatives learnt from newcomers through sharing and knowledge exchange.

Turning to Agency-R, this digital agency had recruited a new member of staff in 2011. Rick, an account director, joined the agency because, having recently expanded its business in China, it needed an account director to manage business accounts across two countries. The creatives in Agency-R seemed to like talking to Rick and sharing ideas with him. Rick was a very pleasant guy and seemed very mature; he had an MBA degree and very good presentation skills. When Rick joined Agency-R, he was taking care of the clients for a baby milk powder brand that integrates business in Hong Kong and Greater China. Recently, Rick had started to expand the business of Agency-R by looking for direct clients as well as expanding the range of services provided to existing clients, through integrated communication planning. For instance, Rick had suggested some integrated communication ideas for interactive media and game activities for a client, expanding the ‘big idea’ to a road-show concept in addition to advertising it on the Internet. Occasionally Tom and Rick conducted presentations together. On these occasions Rick tended to present account planning on a strategic level, including consumer insights and brand positioning, while Tom focused on advertising concepts that build on the strategy. Rick also brought clients some research data, such as Internet user profiles and behaviour of Hong Kong consumers.

In Agency-R, Rick’s workstation was just few feet away from the creative department and he sat next to two project managers, Jenny and Crystal (see Figure 26). Rick was a very talkative man and he was always telling jokes and making fun. He was willing to share and therefore creatives in Agency-R called him ‘big brother’, suggesting that there was a very close relationship between them. Moreover, the term ‘brother’ also indicated that Rick was very enthusiastic about teaching and sharing knowledge, like a big brother in a family.
With his business and marketing knowledge, Rick took responsibility for expanding Agency-R’s business to a wide range of integrated communication perspectives. For instance, on my seventh day in Agency-R, Rick briefed us in the conference room on a new job for Brand M, a baby milk powder brand. He shared with us about a detailed analysis of baby milk powder brand positioning in the Hong Kong market. He explained to us the competitive situation that the client was facing. Rick also drew on some users’ personal stories, illustrating their concerns when purchasing baby milk powder. In this briefing session, although it was very lively and informal, I realised that Rick had shared a lot of marketing concepts and strategic insights with us. I also saw how much all the creatives in Agency-R seemed to enjoy talking with Rick and learning from him.
5.7.3 Learning from potential suppliers

Advertising agencies, particularly multinational agencies, co-operated with different smaller agencies and production suppliers. For instance, Agency-M co-operated with independent digital agencies and outsourced various digital design and production jobs to them. Working with these suppliers allowed full-service creatives to interact with digital experts beyond the advertising agency and to develop their knowledge and skills during the process of collaboration. Once they had established a good relationship, creatives in Agency-M called these suppliers directly and asked them questions whenever they encountered technical or production questions during their work that could not be answered in-house.

Creatives also learned about social media techniques and some of the latest technological possibilities for advertising from potential suppliers. For instance, account managers in Agency-M requested meetings with people from media agencies to exchange ideas with creatives and introduce some new media possibilities. As well, some sales representatives for digital equipment companies came to meet creatives in person and introduce some of their new products. Those representatives were usually digital experts, willing to share up-to-date information with creatives in order to create business opportunities.

For instance, on my fourteenth day in Agency-M, two representatives from Digitax, a digital technology supplier, came to Agency-M and demonstrated their augmented reality services. The representatives presented an example of augmented reality applied to the projection of a 3D visualisation of a car, showing how users could visualise a car through scanning a code and changing its colour. The creatives in Agency-M were very interested in this presentation and asked the representatives many questions about the creative possibilities of the technology. They exchanged business cards at the end of the meeting for further contact (Figure 27).
On another occasion, the creatives learned from a TVC production house. This happened on my eighth day in Agency-M, while I was sitting at Philip’s workstation. Emily, the secretary in the creative department, asked all the creatives to go to the large conference room. Philip told me that a film director, TK, had come to the agency to show his and his partners’ showreel (director’s portfolio) to the advertising creatives. They came to Agency-M seeking opportunities to work with the agency. I followed Philip and the other creatives to the conference room, where there were ten creatives, two producers and the chief creative officer, Louis, from the agency. As they greeted each other, it seemed that many creatives, especially at the more senior level, knew TK quite well. In fact, he previously worked in the advertising field as a creative for more than 10 years before becoming a film director. TK had brought four other directors with him to introduce them to the creatives in Agency-M. TK took the lead and start introducing the directors’ respective backgrounds while showcasing their portfolios. TK also reminded the creatives about the strengths of each director and the personal filming style that each of them favoured. For instance, Vincent’s preference and strength were in the area of fashion and beauty products. TK also
emphasised his company’s expanding social media video production services. For that, his company had a new director, Kit, who specialised in producing video on social media. Kit mentioned that social media videos had to look more ‘real-life’ than TVCs and should not incorporate commercial messages too obviously. In other words, Kit argued that an effective video on social media should be subtler in their use of commercial messages, appearing more like a video produced by an amateur. Kit showed us some of his previous work and he explained to the creatives that videos would lose their effects if they were produced ‘too professionally’.

The ‘amateur-like’ video interested the creatives and they had a discussion among themselves after the meeting with TK. Their conversation was not about the technical problems of making these videos, but about the problems of getting clients to accept them. Joseph described to Mark the difficulties of producing effective video on social media because clients do not always understand that the video should be done without incorporating obvious selling messages. Chris also expressed frustration because, even though he understood that some videos should not be ‘too professional’, he believed that clients would not like their videos to be produced in an ‘amateur-like way’ and would not agree not to incorporate their products or brands into it.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Joseph</th>
<th>Day 8</th>
<th>15:45</th>
<th>corridor</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
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<td>Curtis</td>
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**Joseph:** That sounds too perfect! I don’t think clients will pay us much to produce such kind of video.

**Mark:** Of course. They [clients] will ask ‘Where is my logo? Where is my product? Can you make it more prominent?’ Phew…

**Curtis:** Though we understand their [director’s] point…but it is certainly hard for us to persuade clients to accept these kinds of productions…they will ask us to produce it eventually. I do not want to get myself into trouble.
The creatives understood the strategy of producing effective video on social media from their potential suppliers and realised that videos shown in social media should not incorporate obvious commercial messages. However, they expressed their concerns that clients would not fully understand how social media should be used for advertising. They believed that their clients would use the same criteria to judge social media advertising and TV commercials and liked their selling message and products to be obvious in the video, whereas creatives and commercial directors accepted that advertising on social media should be more ‘amateur-like’ and subtler in the use of promotional messages. They reported incongruence between client and creative beliefs about social media advertising, which suggested some tension and frustration for creatives in handling social media advertising for their clients, echoing the creatives’ interview comments about clients’ lack of knowledge in relation to social media.

In the case of Agency-R, they focused on smaller-scale projects for local brands, mainly focusing on digital advertising for Internet and mobile devices. In the creative department, particularly in the programmers’ working areas, there was a lot of hardware (the computers and digital device), and also innovative computer software, such as ‘UNITY’ for generating interactions. I saw programmers usually working on two or more devices at the same time. Some mobile devices, such as iPads, were connected with their desktop computers. Figure 28 shows the working area of a back-end creative, where the monitor appeared to be handling a large amount of data processing.
Creatives, both front-end and back-end, were interested in learning about new technology for advertising media. They learned from suppliers directly or from attending seminars offered by their hardware/software or computer system suppliers. Fig 24 illustrates the creatives of Agency-R paying attention in a seminar demonstrating some applications of software in generating interaction with multi-touch technology. It seems that the learning focus of Agency-R from external sources was on technical issues.
5.8 Summary of Chapter 5

This chapter has described the process of gaining access in order to undertake participant observation in Agency-M (a multinational full-service advertising agency in Hong Kong) and Agency-R (an independent digital agency in Hong Kong). Having outlined the two research sites, it discussed key themes emerging from the participant observation phase of this study. First, it reported on how the creatives merged their work and personal interests, and how the blurring of these boundaries seemed important for their sense of autonomy and freedom in relation to their creative identities. The creatives liked to share their personal interests, thoughts and work-related ideas online through posting on Facebook. The fusion of personal interests and advertising projects, in other words, work and leisure, is essential to develop the job commitment of practitioners in the creative industries (e.g. Csikszentmihalyi, 1996; Cohen, Duberley & Mallon, 2004; Nixon and Crewe, 2004).
Sharing personal interests is an essential characteristic of social networking, and this practice helps the creatives to understand and use social media in their creative work.

The chapter then discussed the engagement of creatives in multiple roles, namely marketing strategist, creative content provider and media technologist. This observation echoes the findings from the in-depth interviews reported in Chapter 4 and enriches our understanding of creatives’ broadening roles. The creatives in both agencies have been expanding their knowledge and skill sets throughout the spectrum on strategy and ideas development as well as technology applications. Furthermore, the creatives in this study seemed enthusiastic about expanding their work to incorporate digital technology and social media, since they believed that it offered greater new creative possibilities, but particularly for the full-service creatives, this required them to expand their skill-sets. Their social media knowledge and programming skills were developed in three main ways: they learned from doing, reading and talking with each other; from new creative positions; and from external experts and potential suppliers. It might be important to note that the creatives also worked continuously to develop their presentation skills and negotiation skills through the interactions with each other during internal and external meetings.
Chapter 6 Discussions and Implications

This closing chapter of the thesis first provides an overview of the study. It then theorises the main findings in terms of the key experiences identified among Hong Kong advertising creatives in relation to the rise of social media. Building onto these experiences, this chapter highlights the triadic nature of the creative role emerging in this study, and explains how this research contributes to theory in advertising and organisation studies. It also considers implications for advertising agency management, particularly in terms of the development of creatives’ skills in the social media era. Some limitations of this study are also identified. Finally, recommendations for further studies of advertising organisations are offered to expand on the work presented in this thesis.

6.1 Overview of the thesis

This study investigated Hong Kong advertising creatives’ working lives, focusing on the development of their roles and identities in the social media era. Creatives are key stakeholders in the advertising industry, and even the ‘life-blood’ of advertising agencies, given their responsibility for the creative expression of advertising strategies (Pratt, 2006). They work at the boundary between agencies, clients and consumers, so understanding their experiences of the rise of social media should provide insights into how these media are changing the nature of the advertising industry and advertising work. This study aimed to address important research gaps by focusing on an Asian perspective, and on how the growing importance of social media are shaping creatives’ work experiences, roles and identities.

Chapter 1 provided the background to this study. It set the scene for this research by outlining its origins and describing the emergence of digital technologies, the increasing importance of social media in the advertising landscape, and the implications for advertising agencies in general and advertising creatives in particular. Three major areas of knowledge were introduced in this chapter: (1)
changes to the advertising landscape in the social media era; (2) advertising agencies’ response to the rise of social media; and (3) the organisation of the advertising industry, advertising agencies and creative roles. The relationship between these areas of knowledge had not been examined sufficiently in previous studies. In particular, there has been a lack of research on the roles of creatives and how they work and see themselves in the social media era. Most previous research exploring creatives’ working lives has been based on western countries (Hackley & Kover, 2007; McLeod et al., 2009) and studies of agency challenges in the changing media landscape adopted a macro perspective (Pratt, 2006). Therefore, this study aimed to fill the research gap about Asian creatives’ role in advertising organisations in the social media era, through the lens of individual Hong Kong-based agencies and advertising creatives.

Chapter 2 explained the theoretical framework for this research and elaborated on the research gaps in previous literature. It explored the worldwide adoption of social media and how they are not only a form of technological advancement, but also play a role in shaping consumer culture, the marketplace and the advertising landscape. One of the major influences on consumer culture has been that consumers are no longer as passive as they were in the past; social media have empowered consumers to generate, share and publish content online, so that they are now increasingly engaged in brand-related activities on social media. The phenomenon of consumers building and sharing user-generated content on social media has had a significant impact on the advertising industry, marketers and advertising practitioners, offering many opportunities and challenges. On one hand, social media have allowed marketers and advertisers to engage consumers in brand-related activities. On the other hand, they have created pressures on advertising business revenue, and required changes to be made to the organisational structure of advertising agencies and to agency working practices. However, little was known about how advertising practitioners in general, and Asian advertising creatives in particular, experienced their working practices and their work roles in the social media era. This chapter, therefore, provided a framework for exploring these issues by reviewing literature on role and role identity in organisation studies. In particular, it explored theories of role
and role identity from structuralist and symbolic interactionist perspectives. Identity theory and social identity theory provided a useful framework for understanding roles in a social system, and how identity work plays an important part in roles. This suggested that role identity, to a certain extent, would shape individual’s expectations, behaviour, and work performance (Ashforth, 2001) and that a clear and robust identity would be important for creative professionals working on the development of strategies and ideas for advertising. The tremendous development of digital and social media has worked as a catalyst for the change from traditional advertising strategy and production. Indeed, the rapid speed of information exchange and personal sharing on social media platforms has influenced relationships between clients and agencies, and also between consumers and creatives. Therefore, social media were likely to be shaping advertising creatives’ working practices and identities. The literature reviewed in Chapter Two provided a strong reason for furthering the investigation of the professional and organisational identities of advertising creatives through understanding their experiences in the rise of social media. It also justified the focus on Hong Kong-based advertising creatives, since Hong Kong is the hub of the advertising industry in the Asian Pacific region, one of the critical economic cities in China, and an area where consumers are very active in digital and social media.

Chapter 3 presented the research methodology of this study and explained the stance of the interpretive, qualitative approach being adopted. It explained the adoption of a symbolic interactionist stance, based on the belief that peoples’ behaviour is shaped by their subjective interpretation of phenomena and environments. It explained the research design, including the research aims and research questions, the adoption of an interpretive approach, the method and process of generating the data from interviews and participant observations. It presented the sampling strategy for the research and explained the logic of interviewing creatives at different levels of seniority, in agencies which differed in ownership (multinational and independent) and orientation (full-service and digital), as well as the focus on a multinational full-service agency and an independent digital agency for the participant observation phase of the study. It explained the participant-as-observer role adopted. This chapter
also explained the discourse analytical approach used in interpreting the data generated, and it reviewed the study’s limitations and the ethical issues involved in this research project.

Chapter 4 presented the analyses of the qualitative data generated from 32 interviews with creatives at different levels of seniority working in four types of advertising agency in Hong Kong. First, it revealed divergent identities and perspectives between ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives and the tensions and role struggles found among traditional and digital creatives, and between junior and senior creatives. Second, it explored creatives’ perspectives on tensions in client-agency relationships triggered by different understandings and conceptions of social media advertising held by clients and creatives. Third, it analysed the creatives’ perspectives of their role identities and changes. Based on the creatives’ accounts, it was suggested that creative autonomy, personal style and flexibility in scheduling work are crucial components of Hong Kong advertising creatives’ role identity. There was also a shift observed from creative production to strategic facilitating of creative ideas and their implementation. Some insights were also offered into the knowledge and skills required of creatives in digital and full-service agencies as they moved towards this facilitating role. The chapter also considered the positive views that creatives expressed about consumer engagement and the creative possibilities of social media.

Chapter 5 presented the ethnographic stories and researcher reflections arising from the participant observations in Agency-M (a multinational full-service agency based in Hong Kong) and Agency-R (a Hong Kong-based independent agency that was a digital specialist). It aimed to show how the participant observation data enriched understanding of creatives’ working lives and experience gained from the interviews. The chapter began by explaining how access to the two agencies was gained and describing the settings of both agencies. Experiences of fieldwork in the two agencies were analysed, focusing on the creatives’ working practices, work roles and identities in relation to the rise of social media. More specifically, it reported on how the creatives merged their work and personal interests, and how the blurring of these boundaries seemed important for their sense of freedom and their creative identities.
It discussed the engagement of creatives in multiple roles, namely marketing strategist, creative content provider and media technologist. It described how the creatives developed their marketing and social media knowledge and their programming skills in three main ways: they learned from doing, reading and talking with each other; from interaction with colleagues in recently created positions; and from external experts and potential suppliers.

The remainder of this chapter reflects on the study’s key findings and their implications for theory and advertising agency practice.

6.2 Theorising the findings

This study has identified three key experiences of Hong Kong advertising creatives in relation to the rise of social media. First, the creatives were generally found to have divergent role identities linked to their identification with either traditional or digital communication approaches. Second, the rise of social media led creatives to experience new tensions in their relationships with clients. Third, the role of advertising creatives seemed to be in the process of transcending the digital/traditional distinction across both traditional and digital advertising agencies. Their roles appeared to be increasingly blurred with those of clients, account managers, media planners and consumers over the course of the advertising development process. Creatives now seemed to be playing a hybrid role that involved switching between three identities: creative strategist, creative facilitator, and creative producer. Each of these role identities required skill sets beyond those of ‘digital’ and ‘traditional’ creatives, and these new skills appeared to be developed through a process of situated learning. These key findings will be discussed in the following sections and related to theory in advertising and organisational studies.
6.2.1 Creatives have divergent role identities in response to the rise of social media

The first key experience identified in this study was that creatives generally face divergent role identities that are distinctly ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ in responding to the rise of social media, in which these identities evolve in relation to the working organisation, workgroup and relational identification.

Creatives continued to negotiate their roles in the social media era and their role identities developed over time, resulting in an interpretation that linked with their current agencies, whether these were traditional or digital. However, the expansion of advertising services in Hong Kong required the integration of traditional and digital media work. Creatives in Hong Kong have been adopting social media and other forms of digital media continuously for advertising, and the participants in this study were positive in suggesting social media ideas for campaigns where the client or account managers had not requested this.

In this study, the creatives’ roles appeared to be internalized; based on their personal experiences and social interactions, they constructed a specific identity-based creative role which also influenced their behaviour. They used the terms ‘we’ and ‘they’ when they differentiated between traditional and digital creatives. However, the rise of social media and the integration of traditional and digital forms of advertising media seemed to have left the creatives struggling to create a stable definition of their roles, identities and careers. According to Ashforth (2010), individual role transition involves engagement and disengagement, both psychological and physical. Supporting organisational identity theories (e.g. Ashforth & Mael, 1989; Dutton et al, 1994), creatives’ roles in the social media era were found to be evolving continuously, and this required constant adaptation to new identities and responsibilities (Ilgen, 1994; Hall & Mirvis, 1995; Ashforth, 2001).

The creatives were psychologically and physically engaging and disengaging in divergent ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creative identities in response to their work role transition. This study indicated that creatives’ role identities were linked to their role sets (Katz & Kahn, 1978; Ashforth, 2001), and to the set of expectations of the role...
held by other members in the organisations. Creatives’ role identities, as defined by the role set linked to traditional and digital communication agencies, were often multifaceted. For instance, Henry, the creative director of a multinational digital agency, reflected on his multiple roles in relation to creative idea generation within the creative department, strategic planning with the account managers, and production management with external suppliers. This study shows how the changing media environment influenced the creatives’ identification with either the traditional or digital camp, typically based on the communication agencies where they were working. That is, creatives usually identified themselves as digital creatives if they were working in a digital advertising agency even if they were working on traditional media advertising such as poster and print advertisements.

This study also found some confusion and struggle in this creative identification process. According to the data generated from the in-depth interviews and observations, creatives in both the full-service and digital sectors found that their role identities could be ambiguous, and that they were not always clear about how ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives should work or be integrated together in the creative department. This was particularly obvious for those creatives who had changed their jobs from multinational full-service agencies to digital agencies or vice versa. For instance, Kitty, an art director in a multinational full-service agency, had previously worked in a digital agency. She had moved to a multinational agency because she wanted to work more on branding and integrated advertising campaigns, but she was struggling with her role because she felt that other colleagues in the creative department treated her as a source of digital technical support rather than an art director. Kitty’s experience supports Judeh’s (2011) argument that a lack of clarity about identification can create role struggle. In fact, the creatives were not clear about how ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives were defined or the expectations, skill-sets and the different types of work to be done in both roles. These uncertainties led to struggle and confusion during the creatives’ attempts to construct a professional identity in the social media era. Clear organisational identification (Dutton et al, 1994) and associated organizational values (Corley, 2008) are crucial for employees to make sense of their belonging and eventually affected employees’
behaviour, and role confusion can eventually reduce productivity in an organisation (Hamilton, 2002). It is arguable that unclear identification among advertising creatives in the social media era is creating role ambiguity, potentially leading to dysfunctional performance in advertising organisations.

In terms of workgroup and relational identification, an employee’s identification partially involves looking at the definition of his/her work in relation to other employees (Copper & Thatcher, 2010). This study found that the creatives in Hong Kong sought to understand the roles of traditional and digital creatives based on the understandings and expectations of colleagues such as account managers and clients. These stakeholders did not seem to make a clear distinction between traditional and digital creatives, in full-service, digital, multinational or independent agencies, leaving creatives to define their own identities. This is consistent with the work of previous researchers (e.g. Larson & Pepper, 2003; Press & Arnould, 2011), who have described the process of negotiating and constructing a professional identity. In other words, the creatives in Hong Kong made sense of ‘we’ and ‘they’ by negotiating their own experiences and others’ expectations regarding their work identities.

Despite the divergent role identities of ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’, there are characteristics in common and this is important to creatives’ identity work. Their work draws on a sense of personal style, the fusion of work, leisure and personal interests and the importance of freedom, both in terms of flexible working patterns and creative autonomy.

6.2.2 Creatives experience new tensions in their relationship with clients

The second key experience identified in this study was that the rise of social media led the creatives to experience new tensions in their relationships with clients. The rise of social media has previously been seen to change the consumer-market relationship (Carroll, 1988) and the agency-client relationship (So, 2005). This study has identified new tensions experienced by the creatives in their relationships with
clients in response to the rise of social media. The interviews and participant observations both suggested that the creatives had several negative beliefs about their clients’ understanding of and attitudes to social media. The creatives believed that their clients were ignorant about social media, and that this led them to (1) have the wrong attitude towards the adoption of social media, (2) expect ‘free’ media and cheap production; and (3) mis-spend their budgets on social media advertising.

This study provided further evidence that the roles of advertising creatives in Hong Kong are changing in response to the rise of social media. The creatives from both traditional and digital agencies reported struggling with what they saw as clients’ ignorance and expectations of social media advertising. Divergent beliefs about social media diminished the trust between creatives and clients that is a vital element for designing and implementing successful advertising projects (Korgaonkar et al., 1985; Beard, 1996); the clients no longer trusted the creatives’ expertise and knowledge and vice versa. Such tension, according to Kover and his colleagues’ early studies (1995), can harm long-term agency-client relationships. This finding identified potential conflicts that can harm creative-client relationships, which is particularly important in a collective culture. Repeated complaints from creatives about client ignorance about social media also reflected distrust and problems of communication between these two groups. The creatives also felt frustrated because they did not find common ground and understanding with their clients about social media in developing creative projects. Kover and Goldberg (1995) mentioned that distrust can contribute to a strong sense of dissatisfaction in their related work and performance.

The creatives’ belief that their clients had the wrong attitude towards social media created stress and conflict in the creative-client relationships. In the interviews, many creatives indicated that they had experienced social media becoming an essential advertising medium for current and future advertising activities. Nuytenmans (2009) stated that the rise of social media has had strong influences on consumer markets. Although creatives are enthusiastic about social media and they are eager to take initiatives to propose social media ideas for advertising, their ideas might not be able to be carried out because, as the creatives in this study felt, the clients do not have
sufficient knowledge of social media for planning advertising campaigns. This research may not be able to describe the pros and cons of adopting social media for advertising from the creatives’ perspective; however, it was clear that this perceived misconception on the part of the clients contributed to a degree of distrust in creative-client relationships.

The data from the interviews also suggested that the creatives believed their clients had other key misconceptions about social media, specifically that it is a ‘free’ medium with ‘cheap’ production costs. In other words, the clients assumed that their budgets for social media advertising could be very low since the media platform is free of charge. This client assumption also appeared to harm creative-client relationships because the creatives believed that more budget and attention often had to be allocated to social media advertising in order to use it effectively. Previous studies have shown that arguments about budget allocation have a direct impact on trust in the agency-client relationship (Davies & Prince, 1999). Social media, and clients’ perceived misunderstanding of them, add further tensions to budget arguments, and this situation might also affect the agency-client relationship in the long run.

In summary, this research has found some incongruity between creative and client beliefs about social media, which appear to create additional tensions in the creative-client relationship.

6.2.3 Creatives’ role transcend the digital / traditional distinction

Creatives appear to be increasingly expected to work directly with clients and media agencies. For instance, Teddy, the creative director of an independent full-service agency, stated that he had to do brainstorming exercises with clients and media agencies on strategy and advertising planning. Teddy had more than 20 years working experience as a creative in Hong Kong. He reflected that work on advertising strategy formulation would have been beyond his understanding of what
a creative should do in the old days, when advertising planners and account directors were responsible for this. In the past, creatives worked on creative ideas and production based on an advertising strategy that was formulated by clients and planners. With the rise of social media, however, this practice had changed. Teddy thought that clients and other colleagues often had very different understandings of social media. These incongruities had led to conflicts and misunderstanding during working processes and relationships with clients. In order to resolve this problem, creatives, especially creative directors, said they prefer to work together with clients and planners on marketing and advertising strategy at an early stage before the strategy is agreed. In other words, creatives needed to become involved in the strategic formulation of marketing and advertising activities together with planners and clients. This study found that collaboration on advertising strategy happening in both multinational and digital agencies. The creative directors did not just generate advertising ideas, they also had to take responsibility for suggesting marketing ideas as well as working out strategic plans for their clients on products and services in the social media era. In other words, these Hong Kong creatives had expanded their range of work beyond advertising concept generation; they were also providing creative ideas for marketing activities, advertising strategy and social media strategy. That is to say, they felt they had to be more knowledgeable about marketing and strategy, and to have a more strategic mind-set for planning as well as brand activities in the social media era.

The expansion of creatives’ duties to a more strategic level had implications for their identities. According to Cook (2001) and Hackley and Kover (2007), creatives are commonly stereotyped in popular culture as insecure and self-centred. Alvesson (2000) stated that professional identity is related to self-image and self-concept in relation to work tasks and social relationships. This study suggests that the construction of self-image is particularly important to advertising creatives because it is a tool to gain the clients’ trust and respect, and to be seen as more than just a ‘hired hand’. As researchers including Alvesson (2000) have stated, identity construction is related closely to an individual’s self-concept at work, their organisation and social influences. In other words, if clients perceive creatives as
self-centred and insecure, their work relationships and trust issues on creatives’ performance will be reflected. Therefore, it was crucial for creatives to negotiate a professional identity in the social media era. The self-identities of employees are critical in the construction of organisation identity as well (e.g. Alvesson, 2000; Alvesson & Willmott, 2002).

This research suggests that an important new element of advertising creatives’ role in Hong Kong is a facilitating role instead of that of a ‘hired hand’ for clients. The creatives expressed their dissatisfaction at being treated like ‘hired hands’, implementing or executing creative ideas rather than originating creative advertising ideas in traditional or digital media. This was because many ideas were constrained by fixed advertising strategies and plans that the creatives had to follow. However, they saw their role as changing from an executional level to a strategic level in the advertising process. They contributed ideas on marketing and advertising strategy, going beyond advertising production ideas. Referring to the theory of identity construction proposed by Alvesson and Willmott (2002), an individual’s identity is improvised by a period of construction, re-forming, maintenance, strengthening and revision. The creatives indicated that they were beginning to transcend the traditional creative role, constructing and negotiating a new, more diverse role in relation to the different stakeholders involved. They were changing the nature of their work, from concentrating on creative idea generation to the facilitation of advertising campaigns. Moreover, as consumers had become empowered through using social media platforms, the advertising creatives were responsible for new ways of bridging advertising communication and consumer culture (Thompson & Haytko, 1997; Dewall, Malefyt & Moeran, 2003). This study indicated that, with the rapid development of social media and empowerment of consumers, the creatives had expanded their role sets and included a wider range of stakeholders in the advertising process. These included digital experts, interactive designers, programmers and animators, which they referred to as the ‘tech team’. They also described consumers as playing a more active role in brand activities. The creatives facilitated the advertising process by providing their clients with knowledge and solutions regarding formulation of strategy, technology applications, and tactics for consumer
engagement, in order to achieve the advertising goals. This suggests that the role of creatives is changing from a traditional ‘idea generator’ to a ‘solution facilitator’ in response to the rise of social media.

6.2.4 Creatives expand their roles by learning

Creatives have expanded their roles by learning new knowledge and skills, and they appeared to do so through situated learning within a community of practice (Wenger, 1998). Lave and Wenger (1991) described ‘communities of practice’ as the knowledge creation teams where knowledge and skills are socially constructed and agreed among groups of similar professionals, and they also design the set of underlying assumptions of the practices. An important part of situated learning and communities of practice is that members learn not just what to do but how to think, feel and respond.

Creatives in this study were expanding their work to incorporate digital technology and social media and this offered new creative possibilities but, particularly for the full-service creatives, this required them to expand their skill-sets. Creatives, like other professionals in knowledge-based organisations, must engage in continuous learning (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996a), and in this case their continual learning involved individual reading about areas about which they felt less knowledgeable, exchanging ideas with other creatives in their departments, and seeking information from a range of other experts within and beyond their own agencies.

Advertising creatives absorb values and perspectives as well as learning routines and practices through their community, and develop it through social action (McLeod, 2011). Creatives learn new roles through situated learning by doing, reading and talking among the creative community. Such inter-relationships within the advertising’s creative community are crucial in shaping their career trajectories (McLeod, et al., 2011). The creatives in this study reflected that they have to meet with clients, media agency and suppliers requiring them to develop negotiation, interpersonal, and presentation skills in order to effectively communicate with clients and other stakeholders and to maintain their professional competency in the social media era.
6.3 Contributions of this study

This section outlines the key contributions of this study. Building upon the key experiences of advertising creatives in Hong Kong, this study’s contribution revolves around the triadic structure of Hong Kong advertising creatives’ emergent role that was identified from the analyses of interview and participant observation data. The contributions to both theory and practice in advertising and organisational studies are examined next.

6.3.1 Towards a triadic creative role in response to the rise of social media

McKenna (1991) stated as a principle of marketing that ‘marketing evolves as technology evolves’. This study explored the many ways that social media were shaping Hong Kong advertising creatives’ working practices, roles and role identities.

The rise of social media opened up creative possibilities for marketing and advertising, and in responding to the changing media landscape, Hong Kong advertising creatives appeared to be moving beyond traditional/digital media and traditional/digital creative dichotomies. They had to work on duties beyond what they previously saw as the responsibility of advertising creatives. Cherry, an art director in a full-service advertising agency, expressed this very well when she said

‘...I did not expect I would have to work on marketing strategy as an art director originally, but in work practice, it is very difficult to differentiate your responsibility. Now I am always involved in the strategic planning on ideas of marketing activities together with advertising ideas, joining the meeting with clients and brainstorming with account and media executives.’
In other words, it seemed that, with the emergence of the social media era, the Hong Kong creatives’ work involved not only creative idea development but also strategy and technological production. In short, there appeared to have been a shift towards a triadic creative role, which required them to engage in more tasks, and with more stakeholders. This expanded creative role highlighted the importance of collaboration and integration in this particular creative industry. They engaged in strategy formulation with account managers and clients; in idea development and creative activities with clients, agency colleagues and sometimes with consumers; and in production supervision and management with internal colleagues and external suppliers.

This study has shown how the growing importance of social media required the creatives to work more closely and directly with clients and advertising planners in generating marketing and advertising strategy. The planning function of advertising campaigns previously relied on advertising account planners (Hackley, 1998; Crosier et al., 2003; Grant & McLeod, 2007). Today, with the rise of social media, and the associated changes in consumer culture, the planning function has to embrace diverse sources of strategic input. The role boundaries between creatives and account planners were increasingly blurred and the creatives no longer seemed to able to focus solely on artistic ideas with little concern for marketing and strategy, as Hirschman (1989) had described. Working strategically with experts outside the creative department requires creatives to develop strategic thinking and negotiation skills.

Their responsibilities for creative idea generation, implementation and production in the social media era meant that the creatives studied in this research had to work with a range of experts within and beyond the advertising agency. For instance, they had to collaborate with computer programmers and other technological experts in producing advertising campaigns. Indeed, this study found that some agency suppliers had expanded their services by strengthening their technical support for creative production. Malefyt (2003) and Grant et al. (2012) noted that, for creative content producers, negotiation skills and interpersonal skills are more crucial than ever before. This study found creatives in Hong Kong working with different
technological experts and programmers on creative production. They played a producer role, managing and supervising production teams for both traditional and digital media elements of a campaign. As creative content producers in the social media era, they functioned beyond the traditional roles of creative copywriter or art director (Young, 2000), since they were involved actively in the preparation, production and post-production of advertising campaign materials, and worked within more complex networks of social relationships that included media, strategy and a range of technical experts.

As social media have become so popular, they have altered how people communicate with each other and also led to new forms of consumer behaviour (Hill & Moran, 2011). Consumers’ brand-related engagement and interactions on social networking sites have had a strong impact on marketing and advertising practices (Chiou & Cheng 2003; Villanueva et al., 2008). For these Hong Kong creatives, the process of advertising development (and creative idea generation) had started to involve collaboration with diverse experts who could develop engaging activities for consumers, which were not limited to traditional media, but incorporated a wide range of creative ideas and platforms. With the rise of social media, the creatives in this study also had more direct and indirect contact with consumers. They appeared to welcome consumer input, embracing online consumer research and consumer feedback into their creative development processes, and drawing on consumers’ online activity as a form of collaboration. In this case, the creatives did not see consumer research as controlling or restricting their ideas (Grant & McLeod, 2007), but as a way of developing creative ideas and even justifying these when presenting them to their clients.

All in all, the triadic role of Hong Kong advertising creatives identified here illustrates the complexity of creative work in the social media era. As presented in Figure 30, this triadic role involved three role identities: creative strategist, creative producer and creative facilitator. The creatives played the role of creative strategist while they provided creative input into marketing activities and strategy, working with clients and account planners or managers. This role identity required a more strategic mind-set and the ability to communicate effectively with clients, planners
and other industry stakeholders to come up with insights for advertising. The creator facilitator role identity required them to embrace a wider set of collaborations in the process of idea generation, and the creative producer role identity required them to engage with technical production and management, and to collaborate with a range of technical and production experts.

This new hybrid role was found to involve creatives switching between these three identities over the course of the advertising development process, and each identity was constructed in relation to particular activities and stakeholders. Thus, each role identity required its own set of skills, although all required the merging of ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ media knowledge and skills and the ability to work with a broader range of stakeholders, within and beyond their own particular agency.

As their role and working practices evolved, the creatives needed to develop new knowledge and skill sets. The participant observation suggested that those in the multinational full-service agency wanted to learn more about digital technology while the digital creatives wanted to develop their technical skills further as well as learning more about strategic planning. The triadic structure of the creative role identified in this study involved three role identities (i.e. creative strategist, creative facilitator and creative producer); three stakeholder groups (i.e. client, consumer and advertising industry partners) and the three interwoven activities correspond to each of the role identities (i.e. strategic planning, creative idea development and creative content production).
Each of these role identities requires creatives to expand more from the merging of ‘digital’ and ‘traditional’ knowledge and skills. Since the contemporary role of creatives requires them to work with a lot of different stakeholders, they also indicated the need to be involved in a wider range of activities that involve planning, idea development and creative content production, to develop skills beyond traditional/digital distinction, and to further their interpersonal and negotiating skills in order to be competent in the social media era.

The Hong Kong creatives in this study reflected that they had taken on the responsibility of learning these new roles through diverse ways. They enriched their knowledge and skills about strategy and digital media by reading books. They also learned and developed knowledge in the creative community with creative peers and suppliers. For instance, they searched online for help, and discussed their ideas with each other. They also sought help from working peers within and beyond the agency, including junior members of the creative department, and from suppliers and other
experts in digital technology. In addition, we found that agency management in Hong Kong had created new posts, such as Kitty’s in Agency-M, as a way of developing the skill set of traditional creatives.

However, there seemed to be little systematic attempt at training or informally mentoring creatives on the interpersonal skills required to work with clients more effectively in advertising agencies in Hong Kong. Such training, formal or informal, is essential for the creatives to learn and to develop their competence. Therefore, the identified triadic role of Hong Kong advertising creatives is a valuable guide for advertising agencies that require formal structure changes.

6.3.2 Contribution to theory

The thesis of this study is that, in the current social media era, these Hong Kong creatives were experiencing a period of transition towards a triadic role, which was beginning to transcend digital/traditional distinctions and which required them to develop new skills and a wider set of professional relationships. Some of this developmental work was supported by agency management practices, some of it was undertaken by the creative professionals themselves, but much of it took the form of situated learning within the advertising creatives’ communities of practice; they shared knowledge with each other and obtained advice from a diverse set of experts within and beyond their individual advertising agencies.

This study contributes to knowledge in the disciplines of advertising and organisation studies by offering insights into how working practices, roles and role identities were evolving in an important creative industry in response to the rise of social media. It has offered a micro-level perspective on advertising creatives’ practices and advertising organisations, which is still relatively rare in advertising and organisational literature (Hackley & Kover, 2007). It also contributes to knowledge by exploring these issues from an Asian perspective, building on previous studies that explored creatives’ working lives and agency practices in Western countries, including the UK and America (Hackley & Kover, 2007; McLeod et al., 2009).
This study deepens understanding of how social media are influencing marketing and advertising practice (Choi, 2011; Hill & Moran, 2011), offering a detailed examination of their implications for advertising creativity and the advertising development process (Allen, 2009). The study also highlights the importance of networking and collaborative relationships between agencies and clients (Grant & McLeod, 2007) in the social media era. The triadic creative role identified in this study suggests that creatives, at least in Hong Kong, are having to expand their working practices by doing more tasks and collaborating with more experts in the social media era. This study highlights the importance of understanding creatives’ experiences and their roles in agency-client relationships, as these appear to affect the advertising planning process (Grant & McLeod, 2007; Grant et al., 2012).

This study illustrates how Hong Kong creatives’ roles were socially constructed in responding to the rise of social media. Building on previous research on exploring creatives role (e.g. Hackley and Kover, 2005), it suggests that that the identity of creatives in Hong Kong draws on a sense of personal style, the fusion of work, leisure and personal interests and the importance of freedom, both in terms of flexible working patterns and creative autonomy.

The interviews explored creatives’ experiences in this changing media environment, offering insights into their negotiated identities as creative professionals in their advertising agencies and within broader communities of practice involving both ‘traditional’ and ‘digital’ creatives, although the boundaries between these identities were becoming blurred.

This study explored the many ways that social media are shaping advertising creatives’ working practices and the construction of creative identities in the Asian organisations. Most of the previous research on studying creative practices focused on Western countries and relatively little was known about creative roles from an Asian perspective, particularly in relation to social media. In a Chinese cultural context, advertising creatives tends to be deferential to their seniors as well as their clients. Junior creatives may show their respect by following the guidance of their
seniors. In the interviews, the Hong Kong creatives, particularly those at junior levels, reflected their dissidence about their seniors’ understanding of advertising in response to the rise of social media. For instance, Angel, a junior interactive designer in an independent digital agency, commented on her dissatisfaction with her seniors’ guidance. However, in the participant observations, there was evidence that most of the junior creatives had chosen to reserve their judgements by keeping silent and reflecting deference to their seniors because they had a strong fear of presenting rejections to their seniors. Eventually, junior creatives such as Angel may choose to leave their jobs. This scenario about junior creatives’ internal dissatisfaction in a Chinese cultural context may eventually cause problems with regard to the cooperation creatives cooperative work, and it is important for the advertising management to understand the knowledge of practices in an Asian context.

The focus on Hong Kong advertising creatives in this study has highlighted the importance of particular Asian values for advertising practice, particularly for the construction of creative roles in the social media era; these findings enhance understanding of the roles and role identities of creative industry practitioners. More specifically, this study shows how Chinese creatives, working within a strong collective cultural context, constructed their creative identities to emphasize group goals in relation to creative peers, seniors and juniors, their other colleagues, or the types of agencies or divisions they belonged to. Their beliefs and experiences in responding to the rise of social media may lead to roles and role identities that are unique from those of other cultures, including the US and UK. For instance, in an independent agency such as Agency-R, Tom emphasised working with each other and promoting brotherhood to work better toward a more strategic direction reflecting a typical Chinese style of management.

This study extends the knowledge of identity work (Watson, 2008) in role theory. The triadic role of creatives identified here help to shape contemporary creatives’ identities in the social media era, providing insights into employee perspectives on organisational roles (Morrison, 1994). The need to switch between the three creative role identities over the course of the advertising development process contributes to
understanding of the complexity of contemporary role identity construction (Ashforth, 2001). The creative experiences analysed in this study illustrate how creatives’ roles were socially constructed in Hong Kong advertising agencies and how their understandings of their roles and identities were interwoven (Gini, 2000; Pratt & Ashforth, 2003). This study enhances understanding of the creative professionals’ sense of self (Burke, 1991) and the role-taking process shaped by shared expectations associated with particular role sets (Ashforth, 2001). During the role-taking process, ambiguities and tensions involved in responding to the rise of social media also highlight the salience of role and role identity for contemporary creative professionals.

This study contributes to role theory within organisation studies by identifying the triadic structure of contemporary Hong Kong creatives’ roles. It follows the argument in classical organisational theory that roles are embedded in social systems comprised of interdependent or complementary roles (Biddle, 1979). Building upon symbolic interactionist perspectives on roles in society and organisations, this study illustrates the complexity of contemporary organisational roles and role identity construction. The triadic creative role identified here challenges the simplicity and stability of roles in a social system (Ashforth, 2001), and it shows how roles and role identities are bound up with communities of practice (McLeod et al, 2009).

6.3.3 Contribution to practice

This study can inform creative industry practices in general, and advertising and marketing practices in particular. It provides insights for advertising agency managers that could be used in structuring creative departments for effective performance in the social media era. It suggests for example that the hierarchical structure of creative departments, or advertising agencies more broadly, could be revisited given the increasing importance of social media in the advertising landscape. The identified triadic role of creatives suggests that creatives should be incorporated in terms of strategy, ideas development and content production.
This study also offers insights for advertising agency and human resources managers in relation to recruiting advertising professionals. As discussed, a wider range of work roles and a more diverse skill set are required of contemporary creatives. The background of contemporary creatives is thus becoming more diversified and so recruitment practices need to draw on a wider pool of candidates. For example, Macro, a creative director in a digital agency, was working in relationship management for investment banks before joining his advertising agency, rather than starting his career as a junior creative. This illustrates that today’s creative directors are not necessarily equipped with formal advertising college training and do not necessarily follow the traditional creative career trajectory (Collins, 2004; McLeod, 2009).

Another managerial implication of this study is related to the frustration expressed by junior creatives about the nature of their work; because of the rise of social media, and their familiarity with digital and social media platforms, even in full-service agencies, junior creatives complained that they were treated as technicians rather than given broader opportunities to learn by working on creative tasks. This situation led to disappointment about the mismatch between their work expectations and experiences. Lack of clarity about the skill-set and nature of work in the social media era may cause a mismatch of roles and skills, and this could harm the career progressions of junior creatives and the longer term effectiveness of advertising agencies.

The current study extends past scholarship in advertising practice and creative role identity by investigating how Hong Kong advertising creatives constituted their roles and the sense-making activities of creatives in responding to the rise of social media. It provides insights for advertising management by exploring how the creative function in advertising agencies has developed to meet the challenges and opportunities of the social media environment. The study also highlights the importance of creatives’ roles in affecting agencies’ performance in the social media era. The triadic creative role identified here suggests that creatives are becoming
more diversified in their job responsibilities. This study sheds lights on training practices for creatives and other advertising professionals. The knowledge and skill sets required of contemporary advertising creative are becoming more diverse and beginning to transcend distinctions between traditional and digital media. For instance, the creatives in this study were required to work with business people in generating business and marketing strategy. The individualized, informal and ad-hoc approaches to continued professional development found in this study are not surprising given the creatives’ desire for flexibility and autonomy, and the importance of situated learning within this community of practice (McLeod et al., 2011). However, for educators and trainers, being aware of the widening set of skills expected of creatives should help them to identify new training needs, and understanding their role identities, values and beliefs could lead to the design of more appropriate training programmes for them in the social media era.

6.3.4 Contribution to research methods

This study contributes to knowledge regarding the use of qualitative research methods in advertising and business and shows how a mixed method qualitative study can contribute to the understanding of creative culture and practices for both academic and managerial purposes. By combining qualitative interviews with a small-scale ethnographic study in advertising agencies in Hong Kong, it was possible to illustrate the value of ethnographic practices for studying creative organisations and culture, contributing to a better understanding of advertising culture and practices (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). Both the interviews and the participant observations contributed qualitative insights for advertising theory and organisational studies (Silverman, 2001).

The study highlights the importance of creating mutual trust and an open, sharing atmosphere during the research process and the benefits of participant observations from an insider point of view. In this study the researcher’s previous work
experience provided her with relevant knowledge and skills that allowed her to be a participant as well as an observer within the field.

The observations and opportunities to become involved as a creative practitioner working with agency staff created opportunities for researcher interaction and self-reflections through immersion in the creatives’ lived experiences at work (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). Most of these interactions with practitioners in the advertising development process involved conversation (Kelly et al., 2005); discourse analysis offers insights into agency practice, and the value of this approach was evident when examining metaphors used by participants, such as ‘hired hand’.

6.4 Implications of the study

As discussed, the emerging triadic role of these Hong Kong creatives involved frequent engagement with many other stakeholders. The creatives had to collaborate with diverse experts over the course of an advertising development project. For instance, they collaborated with computer programmers to work out innovative technological logistics for online brand activities. Thus, the creatives in this study had to extend their knowledge beyond traditional advertising media, and they also had to learn to communicate and negotiate with different parties during the process of collaboration. As the creative role evolved, much of these Hong Kong creatives’ work involved engaging with other stakeholders, and this raises questions about the relevance of their traditional skillsets and training. The emergent creative role makes interpersonal relationships and negotiations with non-creatives crucial, and also highlights the importance of other skills, including strategic planning and ability to master technical processes.

This study also shows how the creatives were having increasingly direct contact with clients rather than depending on account managers (McLeod et al., 2011). Nicholson and West (1988) suggested the need for role development as well as personal change among creatives. This study provides support for their arguments, showing how creative roles appeared to be developing in the social media era and also how
individual creatives were taking responsibility for learning new skills and ways of thinking about their work, and also for developing their role identities. Changes involved ‘reactive change in the individual, ranging from minor alterations in daily routines and habits, to major developments in relationships and self-image’ (Nicholson & West, 1988, p. 105).

Beyond the dyadic client-agency relationship, this study also supports the collaborative client-agency relationship and the network relationship between parties who were internal and external to advertising agencies (Grant & McLeod, 2007). This study highlights how the role boundaries between different parties within the network were increasingly blurred in the social media era. The study also suggests that, if the creative’s role has changed, there are implications for the roles of other stakeholders within the network of relationships responsible for agency planning, including account managers, media planners and researchers. It also suggests that advertising agency structures and practices could usefully be revisited, in an attempt to facilitate more collaboration and integration within and beyond the creative department. For instance, advertising agencies can strengthen their creative competencies by introducing new creative roles in account teams, such as creative strategist; and new roles in production teams, such as creative producer. Each of these creative roles emphasises innovation and also plays a facilitating function in terms of negotiation with clients, consumers and creative content producers.

Social media have had notable influences on the advertising industry globally, and this was also evident in Hong Kong. This study explains these influences as extending beyond technical areas: social media also influences marketing and advertising practices by shaping consumer culture, and changes in consumer culture serve as a catalyst for change in Hong Kong advertising creatives’ individual and collective working practices, roles and identities.
6.5 Limitations of the study

While this qualitative mixed method study combined interviews and participant observations so as to generate richer data, it is important to note the that qualitative research findings cannot be generalised in the same way as quantitative studies of agency practice (Koslow et al., 2006). The interviews involved the construction and negotiation of meaning between the researcher and Hong Kong creatives, and this suggests that the appropriate form of generalisation here is reader analytical generalisation, which refers to linking the findings from a particular case to a theory (Flick, 2007).

It should be acknowledged that the sample of advertising creatives and advertising agencies included here represents a small proportion of Hong Kong agencies and creatives. Although the study included informants at all levels of seniority and in different types of agency in the Hong Kong advertising industry, it may not have represented the experiences of creatives who worked outside advertising agencies, in film production and design firms for example. Moreover, this study examined creatives’ working practices, roles and identities from the perspective of creatives themselves, but it did not provide a full spectrum of views from other stakeholders in the advertising development process, such as account planners, account managers and clients.

The participant observations in this study were relatively short and focused since they were designed to complement and explore further key themes arising from the interview data. A total period of one month for participant observation across two agencies was relatively short and, while other studies have also been based on quite short periods of immersion in agency life (Kelly et al., 2005), a longer period of time in each agency could have offered deeper and richer insights into advertising agency practice and advertising creatives’ working practices and culture (Malefyt & Morais, 2012). It can also be conducted in a wider range of agencies, including those smaller agencies that are not industry leaders. The selected agency in the participant observation is likely to pick up on best practice in the field and, while other findings
in smaller agencies could be useful for benchmarking, it might paint a more positive picture of roles and role transitions in the social media era.

### 6.6 Recommendations for future research

During the four years of my journey towards completing this PhD thesis on the working practices, role and role identities of Hong Kong advertising creatives, the process and the findings deepened my understanding of advertising culture, advertising creativity, agency practices and how social media have influenced individual and organisational working practices and identities in the advertising industry. This experience also extended my knowledge of role and role identity, guiding me to open up other possibilities of researching advertising in the digital era.

This was a cross-sectional study, at particular points in time, of how creative working practices, roles and role identities were developing in the social media era. Hong Kong creatives’ roles appear to have been moving toward being more multi-tasking and complex and there is much to learn about how creatives might experience this role transition over time. A longitudinal study of Hong Kong creatives’ roles, identities and role transitions could, therefore, offer further insight into how their work, roles and identities develop over time. Further study of motivation, antecedents and outcomes related to creatives’ taking on this new role would also contribute to knowledge of advertising creatives’ roles.

The triadic role identified in this study involves a more diverse networking relationship with other stakeholders. This study shows that the creatives experienced frustrations while working with clients and account managers. This raises questions about how the other stakeholders’ roles develop in relation to advertising creatives’ new role. Future research could explore other stakeholders’ roles in the advertising planning cycle (Grant et al., 2012), focusing on the experiences of clients, account planners and account managers. Given the tensions identified here between creatives and clients in relation to social media, the client perspective is particularly interesting and should be studied further.
Moreover, although this research has not significantly addressed gender issues in Hong Kong advertising agencies in the social media era, this would indeed be an interesting topic for future exploration. Issues such as the gender identities of creative people are pertinent in a creative advertising culture. For instance, Alvesson (1998) explored gender relations and identity in a Swedish advertising agency, and he discusses the ideas of masculinities and femininities in the advertising workplace. Other researchers (e.g. Nixon and Crewe, 2004) have also paid attention to gender issues, specifically masculinity, within the creative industries and their culture. Nixon (2003) contented that the male representation among advertising creatives in the UK would exert a strong influence on their creative work. Although gender issues were not a focus in this study, it was observed that there were indeed more men than women among the creative staff of Hong Kong advertising agencies in general. In particular, men held most of the senior positions in the interview samples. Broyles and Crow (2008) posed an interesting question about gender in their research, asking why there are so few women in the creative departments of advertising agencies. They argued that the ever-changing nature of advertising practices and the highly flexible working procedures might not be suitable for women. This idea suggests interesting research questions for investigating gender issues in the creative industry in Hong Kong. Such an enquiry could enrich our knowledge of gender issues and identity in the creative industries in the social media era. Expanding the research on gender in relation to creative identity in an Asian context should be fruitful.

This study provides an Asian perspective on creatives’ roles, focusing on the particular case of Hong Kong which has an advanced social media culture and is an advertising hub for the Asia-Pacific region. Further research could explore creatives’ work and roles in other parts of China, such as Shanghai and Beijing, or in other rapidly rising Asian markets like Taiwan and South Korea. Further research is needed to examine whether creatives in other cultures experience similar working practices, role identities and role transitions as the ones identified here.
Finally, advertising is just one of the creative industries. Further research could also be extended to explore experiences of key stakeholders in other creative industries, such as film, music and design.

6.7 Discussions

This study explores how and to what extent Hong Kong advertising creatives’ working practices, roles and role identities have been developing in response to the rise of social media. It builds on contributions to knowledge from other researchers who explored creatives’ roles in recent years (see for example Nixon, 2003; Hackley & Kover, 2007). This study has adopted the sociological perspectives of symbolic interactionists (Mead, 1934; Blumer, 1969; Reynolds, 2003) in viewing roles as emergent and negotiated between individuals rather than associated with given positions in the social structure (Ebaugh, 1988). This study explored many ways that social media are shaping advertising creatives’ work practices and identities. Even if the traditional creative roles of art director and copywriter are still performed in most full-service advertising agencies (Stuhlfalt, 2011), it seems that Hong Kong creatives are beginning to think and act in ways that transcend the traditional/digital distinction.

The triadic structure of contemporary Hong Kong advertising creatives’ emergent roles involved them switching between three identities during the advertising development process: creative strategist, creative facilitator, and creative producer. Each of these role identities required them to perform different functions in relation to the broad range of advertising and marketing challenges encountered in the social media era. They increasingly found themselves having to work closely with diverse stakeholders within and beyond their own agency. The diverse role identities and advertising activities involved required the creatives to process and develop skills beyond creative development, and entailed greater management, interpersonal and negotiating skills than ever before. Although agency management supported the creatives’ new learning to some extent, it tended to happen in an ad-hoc manner,
relying on their communities of practice. Although situated learning is a valuable part of advertising creatives’ work and identities (McLeod et al., 2011), more could be done in terms of recruitment and training to help them to make the transition to this new role and the three identities it involves.


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Appendix A : List of Publications

Academic Journal Publications


Conference-papers Presentation

- Lee, P. Y. (2012). How do advertising agencies response to the rise of social media. Paper Accepted at the 12th International Conference on Knowledge, Culture and Change in Organization.


Appendix B: Interview Guide

Title: Roles of advertising creatives with the impact of social media: a study of the Hong Kong context

This research is an investigation of how social media impact on the role of advertising creatives in Hong Kong. The purpose of this research is (1) to explore the role and identity of advertising creatives nowadays; (2) to understand the impact of social media on advertising creatives’ role; and (3) to describe the experiences of advertising creatives facing the digital media impact. Hence, your opinions and experiences provided as an in-service advertising creative is very valuable to this research. Please be sure that all information that you provide will be kept strictly confidential for research purpose only. The results of this study may be presented in my PhD thesis or published in academic journals in the future, but your name will not be revealed in any case. Please feel free to interrupt, ask clarification and questions during the interview if necessary.

We are about to start the interview; may I seek your permission to take tape-record during this interview?

Questions:
1) Tell me about yourself as an advertising creative.
   (a) When and how did you start as an advertising creative?
   (b) Why do you work as an advertising creative?
   (c) What is your current position and what is it about? What is it about?
   (d) You have been working as an advertising creative for _ year(s), how do you feel about this career? (what do you like/ not like?)
   (e) What is your goal?

2) Please describe ‘An advertising creative’ from your perspective: - What does he/she look like? (free association) (personality? adjectives? metaphor?)
   (a) What kind of person is he/she?
   (b) What qualities does he/she possess?
   (c) What does he/she like to do?
   (d) What do people expect an advertising creative to be?

3) How do you see yourself as an advertising creative? Do you think you are a professional?/ In your opinion, what is a professional?

4) What is the role of an advertising creative in an advertising agency?
5) How do you see the advertising industry of today? Any distinctiveness (uniqueness)? Any differences?

Social media are media for social interaction through web-based technologies. The most recent popular platforms are Facebook, YouTube, Wikipedia, Blogs etc.

6) How do you understand social media?
7) How do social media influence the advertising industry and the advertising creatives’ work? e.g. challenges/ opportunities brought to advertising creatives?

8) How could advertising creatives be competent in the digital era?

9) What concern(s) do you have when facing the impact of social media?

10) How will you project your career as an advertising creative for the future?

Ending: Confidentiality; Give contact details
Appendix C: Initial Coding and Themes
Brown
B1. Building Trust between creatives and clients for tackling social media advertising
B2. Client becomes a creative, creative becomes a hand.
B3. The lack of clients’ knowledge on media creates challenge to creative
B4. Account service becomes a client and a creative.

Green
G1. Social Media are changing advertising ecology and creatives
G2. The changing role of creatives
G3. The ‘new’ structure and nature of digital agency
G4. The revenge from digital agency

Orange
O1. Social media offer opportunities for free imagination
O2. Social media extend the communication channels and markets
O3. Social media create stress and threat for creatives
O4. Low budgeting on advertising

Pink
P1. Social media are about strategy, not technology
P2. Social media change creatives’ skill sets
P3. Social media create a new set of game rules
P4. Clients expect creative ideas on social media
P5. Clients expect creative ideas on social media
P6. Creatives’ stress on social media
P7. Creatives are reluctant to use social media
P8. The difficulty of recruiting capable digital creatives.

Yellow
Y1. The change of ecology, the change to amphibian
Y2. Understanding social media is a must-do
Y3. Doing advertising on social media should be free?

Blue
BL1. The conflict between trust building and creative freedom
BL2. Creatives has to work with different experts in digital age
BL3. Creatives’ dissatisfaction with clients’ appreciation
BL4. Creatives’ dissatisfaction with job overload and paid scale
BL5. Creatives’ dissatisfaction with their role
BL6. Ladder of hierarchy of advertising creatives
BL7. The importance of team work over creative jobs.
BL8. Creating new post in digital age
BL9. The importance of consumers’ networking in digital age.
BL10. Creatives as facilitators.
BL11. Advertising needs diverse expertise in creative production
BL12. The ‘new’ professionalism of advertising creatives.
BL13. Sharing and learning is essential in social media advertising
BL14. Technological and digital competency in digital agency
BL15. Different identities between traditional and digital creatives.
Appendix D: Sample of Field Notes

7th Nov 2011_Agency-M_10:30am

...Agency M is a full-serviced advertising agency and it a renowned agency working with many famous international and local clients. There are around 30 creatives in the creative department, separated into 6 smaller teams organized into different sections. Philip took me to his workstation, which was located at the corner of the creative department just next to the room of the Chief Creative Officer (CCO), Mr. Wong. They called them ‘ah sir’. Apart from Mr. Wong’s room, all other work stations in the creative department were set-up in an open-office design setting with 4-feet partitions, so the activities in the creative department could be seen when you stood up. Hence, by a glance, you could see there were many small group discussions happening around the creative department. Philip’s workstation was comparatively larger than the other creatives’ work-stations, equal to double-sized of the other advertising creatives’ spaces; that allowed him to place a 2-seated couch in his work station. In front of Philip’s workstation was the desk of the secretary of the creative department, Cherry Li. Philip introduced me to Cherry and she gave me an access card for the creative department, which gave me free access into the creative department. I have known Philip for ten years but we did not get in touch to exchange ideas about our recent work very often. Hence, we started to chat about some recently life and his work as well. Philip gave a brief introduction to me about the projects that he was currently working on. He told me that every creative is very busy nowadays and each team has to handle many accounts at the same time. After a short chat with Philip, he introduced me to some of his colleagues in the creative departments. I then met Jangel, the traffic officer, who has worked in here for more than six years. She was responsible for the flow and control of the artwork and print production among creative, account serving department, artwork production and print production.

Philip, who took the role as the group creative director (GCD), had to look after the work progress of different creative teams, including project management, creative ideas generation, creative idea review as well as conducting presentations. Moreover, Philip told me that, apart from the creative work that took up most of his work time, he also had to communicate to the clients directly sometimes. Just after a few minutes chat, Philip’s phone rang and he said to me: ‘Well, let me ‘KO’ some stuff first and let’s continue later.’ ‘KO’ was the team in the video game world that originated from the video action game ‘Street Fighter’. ‘KO’ will appear as super at the end frame whenever the player has won the fight in each round. The term KO used by Philip reflected that he was a person who liked playing video games and he also blurred his life and work with play at the same time. While I was waiting for Philip to continue our chat, I looked around his work station. There were many figurines and Gundam models placed in his workstation. It occupied more than half of the space of his bookshelf. I sat on the couch while Philip was busy with picking up phone calls: P:’Ok, ok. Got it!’, replying to emails using his Mac notebook and someone dropped by his workstation and asked for a discussion. Philip replied to
them: ‘Let me call you back later’ and they left. After Philip answered the call and email, he went back and forth from his workstation and checked on some of the work progress from his other colleagues in other teams. When he came back he said: ‘Phew…it was a hectic job and I do not have one-second to breathe every day! You will see how my life is while you are here’. Philip expressed this with a frustrating smile on his face.

Philip was one of the key persons who took up most of the communication and decision making between the creative department and the account servicing department. His role was like a gatekeeper, keeping and controlling the work in and out-flow of the creative teams and the account servicing department. Most of the account servicing, grouped in 2-3, would come to seek Philip’s consensus or comments before briefing the respective creative team, that was composed of an art director and copywriter. Most of the account servicing people showed respect and patience to Philip during the communication process. Client servicing reported what the clients comment to Philip and seek for his comment. Philip’s role was to turn the clients’ comments into practice or into a more solid solution before he briefed the creative team on the creative work.

I settled down in my assigned workstation, which was just located in the center of the creative department where it was in fact an open-desk for all the creatives to have discussions. I found it was indeed a good location because I could have an overview of the creative department and this allowed me to observe their activities easily. I could also take the opportunity to be there in some meetings and causal discussions carried out in this space occasionally. While I was trying to get familiarised with the team distribution in the creative department, Chris, a copywriter, was chatting with another art director, Kitty, near my workstation. The content could be heard from my place though it was not very exactly clear. They were discussing some possible ideas to work on a project. After finishing some discussion regarding the revision of a layout with Kitty, Chris started asking her about her previous job while she was working in Fish (a digital agency under big holdings). That short conversation captured my attention because it covered a session talking about social media. Kitty expressed that the use of social media in advertising had become more and more popular nowadays. She told Chris that is why Fish had got more and more business and leading her to become even more busier when compared to the previous years. She mentioned about how busy she was at the time she left Fish about half a year ago. Kitty believed that there should be more and more advertising business on advertising on social media platforms.