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What is This?
‘We just know!’: Tacit knowledge and knowledge production in the Turkish advertising industry

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Abstract
Drawing on interviews with advertisers in three Turkish advertising agencies, this paper analyses the knowledge production practices of these agencies in order to understand how tacit knowledge has become the main source of differentiation for survival in the advertising sector. Relying on Pierre Bourdieu’s definition of common sense and Alfred Schutz’s social theory of knowledge, I argue that the production of implicit or tacit knowledge – non-verbal, or otherwise unarticulated and intuitive forms of knowledge – is understood not merely as a business strategy and a battleground within and between agencies, but as a socially constructed form of power, working through discursive practices in advertising business. Thus, tacit knowledge, as a practical strategy, is employed for the purposes of improvisation and invention within the structured social order of the advertising field. In advertising, explicit or codified knowledge depends upon and privileges tacit knowledge in knowledge production processes, which are profoundly based on strategies of typification, human capital, common sense and everyday experience.

Keywords
knowledge production, tacit knowledge, advertising, Turkey, advertising agencies

Since the mid-20th century, scholars have begun to view the social organization of consumption – including the meanings circulated through advertising and consumer culture – as a key framework for understanding modern societies. This is seen as a significant shift in emphasis from earlier social and cultural analyses, which viewed social relations as being largely determined by the social organization

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of production. Although consumption has been of major concern to scholars, due to the rise of ‘knowledge economies’ (Olssen and Peters, 2005; Stiglitz, 2002), or ‘knowledge capitalism’ (Burton-Jones, 1999), today forces of production require further investigation. Specifically, this paper explores intelligible assets, such as tacit knowledge, as a means of examining changes in the advertising industry and the means by which it constructs systems of production – especially the production of knowledge. I argue that currently, non-verbalized, unarticulated and intuitive forms of knowledge, called ‘tacit knowledge’, have become visible and intelligible in terms of power relations in the advertising industry. Thus, it is worth examining how tacit knowledge has become the main source of differentiation for survival in the advertising sector and how explicit or codified knowledge depends upon and privileges tacit knowledge in the knowledge production processes that are profoundly based on different knowledge production strategies of advertising agencies: typification, human capital working in the agencies, common sense and everyday life experience; each of which will be defined later.

This paper focuses on a broad understanding of the knowledge production processes in the advertising industry during the rapid globalization period that took place in Turkey in the 2000s. I specifically analyse how advertisers and marketers understand, utilize and produce knowledge in order to differentiate themselves and successfully compete in the global advertising industry. By analysing knowledge production practices of three advertising agencies – one local, one national and one global – I aim to give ethnographic substance to a framework of the processes of knowledge in Turkish advertising. The production of implicit or tacit knowledge is understood not merely as a business strategy and a battleground within and between agencies, but as a socially constructed form of power working through discursive practices in the advertising business. Thus, tacit knowledge, as a practical strategy, is employed for the purposes of improvisation and invention within the structured social order of the advertising field.

In order to explain the social theory of knowledge in the Turkish advertising industry, I utilize Bourdieu’s practice theory and Alfred Schutz’s social theory of knowledge. I also adapt Michel Foucault’s analysis of knowledge/power. Although putting these scholars into dialogue with one another appears contradictory, this juxtaposition elucidates the knowledge construction processes in the advertising business. The phenomenological sociology of Schutz and the practice theories of Bourdieu and Foucault accept the social world as a social construction, demonstrating that everyday life, which people use to draw a coherent and meaningful picture of the world, is actively constructed and constantly sustained by and among social agents. Thus, knowledge is on the human agent. In phenomenological sociology, the human experience of the world, ‘upon which [their] thoughts about the world are based, is intersubjective because [people] experience the world with and through others’ (Wilson, 2002: 2). Schutz defines life-world as not somebody’s private world, but as an intersubjectively constructed social world and its reality as shared by people. However, Schutz’s primary concern ‘is not to describe the particular life-worlds of specific communities, but rather to explore the universal
procedures and competences through which social life as such is made possible, and thus the social skills that underpin all life-worlds’ (Edgar and Sedgwick, 2002: 210–211). On the contrary, the purpose of practice theorists, such as Bourdieu and Foucault, is to find a middle path between methodological individualism and methodological holism, which explain social phenomena as either the outcome of individual actions or of structures to liberate human agency, respectively (Postill, 2010: 6–7). These theorists question the self-sufficiency of systemic structures, as well as the limitations of people’s practical experience of the world and their ability to change the world. Schutz gives more credit to individuality, intersubjectivity and specificity. While Schutz underlines ‘subjectivity’ and the uniqueness of first-person experience in the positive way, Bourdieu’s approach is much more grounded on the model of structures. Therefore, rather than singularity and diversity, subjectivity is grounded in homology and impersonality. Although Schutz criticizes the transcendental phenomenology of Husserl and attempts to relate phenomenology to the social world, he stays within the phenomenological tradition by developing the study of the consciousness. Bourdieu, however, believes that ‘the social world does not work in terms of consciousness; it works in terms of practices, mechanisms, and so forth’ (Bourdieu and Eagleton, 2000: 268). In other words, the sociological knowledge of the advertisers is originated from their socio-cultural environment, what Schutz calls their ‘biographical situation.’ This concept seems similar to what Bourdieu calls ‘habitus’, and both Bourdieu and Schutz emphasize the significance of experience and practice in everyday life for common sense constructs. Bourdieu considers the habitus a subjective, but not individual, system of internalized structures (Bourdieu, 1977). Likewise, Schutz’s common sense construct of everyday life is intersubjective, but not the product of the individual’s private world. Schutz argues that ‘my knowledge of [the world] is not my private affair, but from the outset intersubjective or socialized’ (Schutz, 1953: 7). In this paper, to illuminate knowledge production practices of Turkish advertisers, I put the texts of Pierre Bourdieu into dialogue with phenomenology of Alfred Schutz.

In the first section, I briefly define advertising and approaches to the advertising industry. Then, I describe knowledge, data, information and tacit and advertising knowledge, and review the advertising agencies in which my fieldwork was conducted. In the second section, I offer a rich discussion on discourses concerning the production processes of advertising knowledge and power struggles within the agencies. Following this, I examine the main tools of tacit knowledge production in the advertising industry: (1) typification; (2) human capital; and (3) common sense and everyday life as a source of common sense knowledge. The final section provides concluding comments.

**Advertising and its industry**

Precisely defining advertising and the analysing practices of the advertising industry is a daunting task, not only because of its long history, but also because of its complexity. Among several possible approaches to the study of advertising,
cultural and interpretive approaches, mainly deriving from Marxism in the 1970s and 1980s, provided a critical perspective for understanding capitalist society through its processes, mechanisms and tools of advertising (Arriaga, 1984; Jhally, 1987; Leiss et al., 2004; Mattelart, 1991; Williams, 1961). Within this perspective, advertising was considered a large symbolic system and a source of cultural value in a commodity-sign system (Goldman and Papson, 1996, 1998; Lush and Urry, 1994; Schudson, 1991). However, a managerial–organizational approach focuses on the management of structures, processes and practices of advertising in an organizational context, with regard to social relations in the advertising profession (Alvesson, 1994; Grabher, 2002; Hackley and Kover, 2007; Kover and Goldberg, 1995).

By taking linguistic and semiotic approaches, many scholars of critical cultural studies focus on a textual analysis of advertisements (Barthes, 1972; Goldman and Papson, 1998; Williamson, 1978) and explored ‘advertisements’ rather than dealing with ‘advertising’ (McFall, 2004: 2; Miller, 1997: 154). However, in the last three decades, more and more scholars investigate the advertising industry by focusing on the practices of advertising agencies, either by taking a historical approach (Alvesson, 1994; Kelly et al., 2009; McFall, 2004; Schwarzkopf, 2008) or a critical ethnographic perspective in national (Cronin, 2004; Nixon, 2003; Schudson, 1984) or international contexts (Cronin, 2010; Malefyt and Moeran, 2003; Miller, 1997). With the advent of global advertising after the 1980s, a number of scholars and researchers turned to qualitative research in transnational or local agencies in non-Western consumer societies or post-colonial nation states (Kemper, 2001; Mazzarella, 2003; Miller, 1997; Moeran, 1996).

Much of the scholarship about advertising in non-Western countries focuses on post-colonial nation states. Although Turkey is not a post-colonial country, similarities between Turkey and post-colonial countries’ advertising industries are striking. Advertising literature within the Anglo-American context focuses on locating the current structures of the industry and the transnational market within a historical narrative based on Western ontology. Therefore, while developing world advertising, agencies create ‘an alternative social ontology’ (Mazzarella, 2003: 110, 145): For instance, Sean Nixon draws attention to London-based advertising agencies and ‘the emergence of London as a center of “creative excellence” within the global advertising and marketing industry’ (Nixon, 2003: 8). Within the ontology of global consumerism, Western advertising agencies try to re-establish themselves as the ‘centre’ of the global political economy. Therefore, we have to analyse local advertising agencies within their own ontological and local situations, taking into account their connections to global ad agencies and markets. The relationship among local marketers and multinational companies is very important to our understanding of how advertising practices and production differ in Western (American and European) and non-Western ad firms. Despite contradictions or tensions between local advertising agencies and transnational advertising companies (Mazzarella, 2003), Kemper (2001) explains that American agencies especially prefer to find local agencies to partner with, rather
than establishing fully owned branch offices. They also hire local staff, particularly in senior positions (Kemper, 2001: 25, 27). The same process took place in Turkey in the 1990s and 2000s. Multinational corporations began to operate in Turkey because markets expanded globally and national economic boundaries became permeable. From 1985 to 2007, one-third of Turkish advertising agencies formed alliances with transnational advertising companies through mergers and partnerships. More than 70% of these partnerships were established after 1990. All these developments shaped the production processes of advertising, as well as of knowledge.

**Knowledge and advertising**

According to Michael Polanyi, we are generally unable to tell what particulars we are aware of (Polanyi, 1962: 601). Based on his argument, ‘there are things that we know, but cannot tell’, Polanyi explains two kinds of knowing: focal knowing and tacit (subsidiary) knowing. Focal knowing refers to ‘knowing a thing by attending to it, in the way we attend to an entity as a whole’ (Polanyi, 1962: 601). He defines tacit knowledge as ‘knowing a thing by relying on our awareness of it for the purpose of attending to an entity to which it contributes’ (Polanyi, 1962: 601).

In the long history of advertising, advertising agencies give greater importance to both tacit and explicit knowledge to secure their continued existence, and to distinguish themselves from local and global competitors. Even early modern advertising agencies were fully aware of the importance of the competition over knowledge (McFall, 2004; Schwarzkopf, 2008). Through creating new types of knowledge, specifically tacit knowledge, they differentiated themselves from their rivals to survive in the industry. As Schwarzkopf rightly states, the economic structures of the advertising industry and the issues of tacit knowledge were strongly interrelated and intertwined [in the early 20th century] and tacit knowledge became a key to success in the advertising industry (Schwarzkopf, 2008: 182, 193, 194). In fact, advertising practitioners’ intellectual capability and practical or commonsensical knowledge have always been important and have been at the core of value-creation in the industry, but ‘this truism has become more visible in the info-age, where the “intellective” component of work is increasingly important’ (Kakabadse et al., 2003: 76).

In this understanding, knowledge is the major player in the field (Bourdieu, 1983, 1984) of advertising. In order to explain his notion of ‘field’, Bourdieu uses the metaphor of a game. Similarly, as Kover and Goldberg discuss, many copywriters they interviewed ‘used game and play language to describe their work and its presentation’ (Kover and Goldberg, 1995: 56). From a Bourdiesian perspective, players of the game gain sufficient ‘know-how’ and acquire ‘feel for the game’ or ‘practical sense’ over time, enabling them to produce strategies (Bourdieu, 1990; Postill, 2010). According to Bourdieu, ‘action guided by “a feel for the game” has all the appearances of the rational action that an impartial observer would deduce. And yet it is not based on reason’ (Bourdieu, 1990: 11). Based on observations and
I assert that implicit knowledge is proclaimed as ‘an impulsive decision’ taken in the process of advertising production. This was particularly evident during a brainstorming session between creatives and account executives of the Ivme Group. A young creative was complemented on capturing a good insight and taking the campaign to the right direction. Another example involves discussions from a general meeting, at which every employee of every department was in attendance. In the meeting, while advertisers were discussing a new advertising strategy for a national salt brand, the CEO of the Ivme Group complained about difficulties of getting consumers’ habits to change, despite the huge amount of research on the topic. During the meeting, words such as ‘insight’, ‘feelings’ and ‘common sense’ were uttered multiple times in an effort to employ a new strategy for this brand.

Similarly, in business meetings that I observed, I personally witnessed that advertisers emphasized their stocks of implicit knowledge, which were based on their social experiences, in order to gain ground in intra-organizational power struggles. For example, in numerous meetings between creatives, a new-business director and a media planning director at Ivme Group, young creatives referenced their creative ideas for a renowned national brand, and strove to convince middle-aged media planners and new-business directors by offering insights into the ‘life-world’ of young consumers, which was reified in the words of an assertive creative at the end of the meeting: ‘we know them, men!’ In order to understand the sources of socially acquired knowledge, Schutz uses ideal types. In particular, two of these ideal types – the eyewitness and the insider – provide an appropriate framework for exploring the situation above. The eyewitness observes the world within his or her own reach and reports it to the researcher. The insider has a direct relationship with a group and, thus, is capable of reporting others’ opinions or events. The insider is given authority, since his or her knowledge is considered deeper than the researcher. The insiders (young creatives) claim validity and truth of their knowledge, while they position the new business and media planning director as eyewitnesses, who collect information as outsiders. Thus, as Hackley and Kover (2007: 69) rightly state, rather than research, ‘creatives felt that they could assimilate their own insights informally’ [into the creative process].

The informants in this study, conducted between 2007 and 2010, define knowledge both in its concrete and abstract forms, and recognize it as a socially constructed phenomenon. Therefore, before foregrounding the concept of knowledge and specifically advertising knowledge, it is important to discuss different concepts used in agencies. Although data, information and knowledge are sometimes used interchangeably, from an advertisers’ perspective, their meanings are dramatically different. According to advertisers, data is constructed through quantitative research techniques, and is the raw material used by agencies for developing an advertising plan or message strategy for a campaign. However, all informants agree that they cannot and do not draw conclusions about Turkish society based purely on such quantitative methods, or as my informants put it, ‘just based on numerical data’ (May–August 2007,
personal communication). To understand consumers, advertisers need information that provides insights into their world and, therefore, collect information by monitoring their daily behaviour and attitudes. Thus, advertisers claim to specialize in observing, interviewing and analysing the behaviours, attitudes, motivations and perceptions of large populations (May 2007–November 2010, personal communication). In contrast, knowledge, a much broader concept, is produced or constructed when data and information are interpreted and processed by individuals. I conceive knowledge as a form of power in a process, drawing upon Michel Foucault’s (1980) analysis of the production of knowledge, and define advertising knowledge as a form of power, working through discursive practices in advertising agencies, which is constituted actively by processing advertisers’ experiences and observations of society. In other words, knowledge derives from the accumulation and processing of cultural knowledge circulating in society by observation.

**Advertising agencies: Factories of knowledge in a new era**

This paper focuses on three agencies: the Ivme Marketing Group, Alameti Farika and TBWA/Istanbul – respectively categorized as local, national and global agencies, based on their customer profiles. The Ivme Marketing Group is a local full-service agency with strong ties to international businesses through its global clients, such as Kinder Chocolate and GlaxoSmithKline. However, it also produces campaigns for small- and medium-sized enterprises, and is thus considered a local agency. Alameti Farika is a market leader in Turkish advertising in terms of profit and media volume and produces nationwide advertising campaigns for the top national firms. The third, the Turkish branch of a transnational company, TBWA/Istanbul, was established in 1999 as a partnership between TBWA/Worldwide (70%) and a Turkish entrepreneur, Cem Topcuoglu (30%). By focusing on one example each of a full-service local, a national and a transnational agency, representing three different facets of the advertising business, this study enables the achievement of a full understanding of the techniques and apparatuses of knowledge production in this sector, and the ways agencies use tacit knowledge to survive and succeed in a fiercely competitive industry.

**Power and the sociology of knowledge in the advertising industry**

In the development of a campaign, advertisers produce knowledge using a range of qualitative and quantitative data, including survey questionnaires, observations, phone interviews, consultations with acquaintances and friends and personal experience. In addition, the client’s brief is an essential form of knowledge in defining the project requirements. The head of a strategic planning company states that knowledge is synonymous with ‘brief’ in the advertising industry (17 November 2010, personal communication).
According to Anne Cronin, after getting a brief from a client, ‘the process of securing a contract with [the] client, generating a creative brief, and producing the final ad is unstable and riven with false starts, disagreements, and power struggles’ (Cronin, 2004: 344). During this process, the attempts of advertising executives to change power relations at work can be seen in their rhetoric. The first example of attempts to change the power relationship between account executives, creatives and clients was evident in interviews I conducted, particularly with account executives. One explains: ‘Since the client brief is “an abstract proposition”, the account executives revise the client’s definition before [they] give it to the creative team and make it more comprehensible to creatives’ (13 August 2007, personal communication). One account executive, Bahadrı, proudly describes how ‘the account executive teams personify the general brief of clients and transform it into a “creative brief”’ (14 August 2007, personal communication). As they form ‘a critical link’ between two parties, representing both the agency and the customer, account executives need to be extremely diplomatic in their choice of words. One example of this is the asymmetry that can be seen in the language they use. According to the account executive, while they use the term ‘revise’ to discuss the changes made to the brief of the client, within the agency they use the much stronger term ‘change’ or ‘transform’. The intermediary role between clients and creatives is articulated by this language: the executive points to both the client’s lack of understanding of the agency’s internal dynamics and the creative team’s unfamiliarity with specific industries and products as sources of account executives’ power in the client–agency dynamic and internal agency conflict.

The second example of attempting to modify power relationships is the rhetoric of account executives. Their rhetoric manifests their attempt to change power relations at work. This is shown in the comments of one account executive, who notes their performance of ‘significant marketing activities, such as communicating, servicing, prospecting, and information gathering’, which enables them ‘to serve as a critical link between a company and its customers, as well as between departments of the agency’ (13 and 17 August 2007, personal communication). Within this statement, account executives define themselves as intermediaries who produce discourses on power relations and explain how these relations are linked to interactive communication between different agents.

These changes in power relations reflect transformations in the marketplace. As Liz McFall states, the emergence of account executives, historically, and functional specializations, ‘represent the general approach to the structural organization of work that persisted in many agencies by the 1930s’ (McFall, 2004: 140). Likewise, in the last four decades, a dramatic shift from production to marketing- and distribution-oriented economies has transformed global and national markets. Neoliberal policies and ‘the globalization of corporate production in global economy, [have] rendered production processes relatively invisible’ (Goldman and Papson, 1998: 10); in contrast, marketing has increased in visibility and significance all over the world. Account executives, as the sales force for advertising agencies, have successfully exploited the importance of marketing in the global economy.2
In the next section, in light of these power relations, I examine three major tools of tacit knowledge production in the advertising industry: (1) typification; (2) human capital; and (3) common sense.

**Tools of knowledge production 1: Typification**

Schultz argues that

> ...all our knowledge of the world, in common-sense as well as in scientific thinking, involves constructs, namely, a set of abstractions, generalizations, formalizations, idealizations specific to the respected level of thought organization. Strictly speaking, there are no such things as facts, pure and simple. (Schultz, 1953: 2)

As professional observers of society, advertisers collect subjective perspectives of the Turkish population, which, through a process of abstractions, formalizations and generalizations, become knowledge. One of the most popular examples of these abstractions and generalizations is *typification*. From a Schutzian perspective, ‘the models of human action are created through a process of typification [because] typification is a key process in our sense-making about the world’ (Wilson, 2002: 4). One account executive (Bahadır) provides a rich insight into how account executives contribute to the knowledge production process in their agencies by using typifications. In this specific case, account executives produce an anonymous but a reified character, Ahmet Bey, for attaining typical goals and typical ends. In other words, the creative brief of agencies exemplifies the production process of typification in Alfred Schutz’s terms. Bahadır explains:

> In the creative brief, we transform demographic knowledge into a person: Ahmet Bey. Instead of saying male, between 35 and 45 years old, we say, Ahmet Bey (Mr. Ahmet) is 37 years old, he has two children: an eight year old son and a four year old daughter. He is working in a bank as a clerk. His monthly salary is 1000 Turkish Lira. He has been married for thirteen years and working for twenty years. Then, we specify his dreams, fantasies, and his vision. We say he is looking for a small, fuel-efficient car. (13 August 2007, personal communication)

According to Schutz (1953, 1967) research knowledge is reconstructed through the elimination of infrequent and untypical circumstances, practices and situations in order to create a generalizing typification. Typification is created by anonymity, an increase of which ‘involves a decrease of fullness of content’ (Schutz, 1953: 13). Schutz goes on to note that ‘in complete anonymization, the individuals are supposed to be interchangeable and the course of action type refers to the behavior of “whosoever”, acting in the way defined as typical by the construct’ (Schutz, 1953: 13). On the one hand, despite his personality, motives and typified course of action, ‘Ahmet Bey’ remains an anonymous character with an empty content. However, in spite of this drawback, the account executives are well aware that none of the
subjective personal types can be a perfect representative of an objective type, because of their personal and unique specificities. Therefore, Ahmet Bey was created neither as ‘whosoever’, nor as an actual living person, but as an abstract model that represents the key characteristics of a social group or class. He not only guides empirical inquiry of the advertising agencies, but also is modified in the light of empirical research, and thus both determines and is determined by the advertising discourse.

Another example of typification was given by a TBWA account executive, Melisa. She reflects:

There are products that are bought based on rational decisions and there are products of sentimentality. For instance, buying a luxury car is an emotional decision, but to buy a cheaper car in the lower segment is a rational decision. If you want to buy a cheap car you compare five different models and brands and make a rational decision. Yet, if you buy a BMW you decide emotionally. Yes, BMW is a good car, but it is expensive at the same time. You can buy better automobiles for the same amount of money or similar quality for less. However, you won’t buy them because you want the prestige and a specific status in your life. (7 August 2007, personal communication)

This statement focuses on a central source of a generalization, revealing another form of typification. Melisa describes how, as an account executive, she uses typification to make prior assumptions about customer behaviour and personality in a specific market segment, believing that the difference between rationality and emotional actions depends on social class divergences and social hierarchies. Therefore, in the process of knowledge production through typification, rationality comes into prominence, especially for abstract characters of middle or lower middle class. In advertising, discrete knowledge, legitimized as clear knowledge of everyday life and diverse lifestyles, involves projecting rationality on the consumptive action of the ‘other’ (consumer). In this sense, advertisers anticipate that their model, such as Ahmet Bey, will make rational consumption choices, according to his lifestyle.

Tools of knowledge production 2: Human capital

The next section discusses the role of human capital in the knowledge production processes of the advertising industry. Sean Nixon (1997) argues that to increase knowledge and to produce a fuller account of advertising practices, we need to understand the ways in which informal knowledge enters into the development of advertisements. My informants consider tacit or informal knowledge to be any information not evident in the client’s brief or the qualitative and quantitative research made by research companies. This kind of specific knowledge can be very influential in shaping the execution of the project. A strategic planning
manager believes that advertising knowledge should also take into account the worldview of the ad agency employees. He says:

\[\text{…[for example] you conducted focus groups to get information [from consumers]. What you are [really] doing is interpreting, rather than getting data, and you are doing this depending on your worldview. Thus, advertising knowledge is [constructed through] the worldview [of agency employees].}\]

He clarifies this by emphasizing one important aspect of advertising knowledge: ‘Here, I am specifically emphasizing the quality of staff [the qualifications of employees].…That’s why high staff turnover is very common in advertising industry. It is a pick your brain [contest]’ (17 November 2010, personal communication). His account provides a detailed conception of how advertisers create knowledge and develop ideas about campaigns through interpretations regarding their worldview. His statement, ‘the quality of the staff’, and his definition of ‘worldview’, as necessary for accurate and correct interpretations of account briefs, reflect the nature of human capital: the cultural assets that advertisers possess. The ‘skills of employees’ and ability ‘to pick brains’ are significant, because this accumulation and acquisition of human capital is central to the production of advertising knowledge. The worldviews, in Hackley’s words the differing mental models, of advertising practitioners, ‘are invariably implicit rather than explicit’ (Hackley, 2010: 97).

Human capital is defined as ‘competencies [which] are a key component of value in a knowledge-based economy’ (Olssen and Peters, 2005) or ‘the stock of human capabilities and knowledge’ (Burton-Jones and Spender, 2011). If we define human capital as formation of competencies and skills, then, there is a close relationship and similarity between human capital and knowledge. Human capital, as a discursive construction, is overvalued through discourses of individualism and entrepreneurship (Burton-Jones, 1999; Olssen and Peters, 2005). Therefore, the concept of human capital highlights the role and importance of tacitness of knowledge in the knowledge production process. Regarding the rise of the significance of individual subjectivity, tacit knowledge, more than ever, is personalized and regarded as attached to a person. Advertisers deliberately emphasized this discourse within the context of the concept of human capital. From Polanyi’s perspective, tacit knowledge is central to understanding personal knowledge. It is associated with experience, including sub-conscious and preconscious modes of knowing, as well as conscious knowledge (Spender, 1996: 50) and tradition. It is simultaneously implicit/embodied/personal and cultural/social/ traditional. The former is closely related to individualism and in this regard to human capital.

Although originating in the 1950s and early 1960s (Becker, 1964; Lewis, 1954; Mincer, 1958 ), this new conceptualization of the human agent has become popular again in the 2000s. There have been a number of perspectives on human capital. At first sight, the conceptualization of human agency seems contradictory, because in the wider view of capitalism, humans can be regarded as capital from the
perspective of producers (Marx, 1859). From a classical liberal perspective, individuals, as self-owners, are the proprietors of their own abilities, talents, bodies and labour (Locke, 2003). However, human capital is a complex resource and a constellation of networks. The individual agent is an essential feature that stands at the intersection of various links and systems in the production process, in other words, no more than a replaceable constituent element of the capitalist economy. In the global capitalist economy, the human agent is undermined, and is defined as one of the constituents in the larger framework of global capitalism. However, discursively, she is the main actor and the source of all power in the system. Therefore, in this paper, I conceive of human capital, in its broader sense, as the employees’ skills but also their deeper experiences, education and knowledge. By transforming human agency into a capital-through-reification process, it is emphasized that the value of a human being derives from providing economic value to the company or product, or performing duties in the production of other goods and services (Burton-Jones, 1999). In the production process, human capital is linked to knowledge, especially to subjective forms of knowledge such as tacit knowledge, which is repeatedly examined in the advertising business and this ethnographic study. A new-business director of Ivme Group says: ‘advertising is never explicit, it is qualitative. I wish I could say something very concrete but the ad business is [a] qualitative [thing]...it is all about human relations and informal [tacit] knowledge’ (22 August 2007, personal communication). The same discourse became apparent in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) reports published during the 1990s. The 1996 OECD report emphasizes that ‘tacit knowledge in the form of skills needed to handle codified knowledge is more important than ever in labour markets’ (OECD, 1996: 13).

Tools of knowledge production 3: Common sense

Perhaps the most intriguing example of the rise in the importance of personal, undocumented, internalized and experience-based forms of knowledge is the discourse of advertisers on common sense. According to advertisers, this refers to ‘beliefs and propositions shared by majority’ or ‘what people in common would understand and agree on’ (June–August 2007, personal communication). In the context of this paper, understanding and analysing ‘common sense’ as a source of tacit knowledge is very significant, since it is closely tied to the major role that human capital plays in the conceptualization of knowledge. This kind of knowledge is more important for mid- or small-scale local agencies, whose clients often cannot afford large-scale research. One of the Ivme account executives underscores the prominence of tacit knowledge and human capital by stating that:

If our account does not want to do research—since it has a limited advertising budget—and if we know the product, we use our insight. Because of their experiences, advertising people have foresight, intuition, prudence, and common sense. If we [advertising people] do not have any common sense or foresight, we cannot do
our jobs. Many employees of the advertising industry tell you that, too. . . If we do that, if we favor research over the experience, we only produce boring commercials and arid, educational advertisements. (13 July 2007, personal communication)

What the account executive emphasizes is that rational elements of research, despite mathematical probability, will ‘never reach “empirical certainty” . . . but will always bear the character of plausibility of subjective likelihood’ (Schutz, 1953: 26). As well as highlighting the significance of common sense, she also criticizes the way it conflicts with scientific research. According to advertisers, common sense, as the traditional popular conception of the world, is based on a direct observation of reality and continual experimentation, briefly everyday life experiences.

**Everyday life as a source of common sense knowledge**

Firstly, the advertisers’ job is to reach an understanding of the common sense interpretations of other people’s actions in everyday life. Nesli, a TBWA account executive, emphasizes the importance of experimentation and observation in the process of gaining tacit knowledge and common sense, explaining that advertising executives must be deeply involved in the life of their society (hayatin ortasinda olmalilar). She states that:

> We [advertisers] have to follow cultural and social life closely. When you are in the middle of life [deeply involved in everyday life] you spontaneously know what people want and think, who share this life. If you ask me, if you are in the advertising business you must watch popular TV serials, go to popular movies, and attend popular events. You must have been everywhere that is related to consumption. If you have been there, you know the expectations, demands, lifestyles, and language of consumers. It is impossible to be part of the advertising [industry] and look at everything from far away. You must be ‘in’ it. Is it easy? No, it is not, because the advertising industry demands long working hours. We try to be involved in society after long working hours, and try not to be alienated from the society. We have to make sacrifices in order to ‘exist’ [as an advertising employee]. (13 July 2007, personal communication)

This statement emphasizes both the importance for advertisers of possessing cultural dispositions, built on knowledge of ‘popular television series, movies and . . . events’, and also the source of tacit knowledge, that is, daily cultural and social life. This statement also shows ‘the similarities in the institutions of advertising across the world’ (Miller, 1997: 154). For example, in their ethnographic work, Kelly et al. analyse cultural and social discourses in the advertising industry and explain how creatives ‘feed [their] brains with new cultural material’ in order to ‘keep up to date’ and ‘develop advertising ideas’ (Kelly et al., 2009: 138–139). In addition, my informant adds that in the past, they [the agency’s employees] conducted research in into the purchases and seller–customer interactions at street
markets (Pazar). She believes that true advertisers are street market sellers, who
‘know their customers; they know the best way of selling a product...they just know
it’ (July 2007, personal communication), summing up the importance of the
common-sensical dimension of knowledge in marketing.

To explain the nature of the job, the intermediary position of advertisers in
society and the relationship between the industry and the masses, advertisers fre-
quently refer to concepts such as knowing, understanding and feeling, which are
emphasized as important in the daily activity of informants. Thus, the shared or
everyday life is realized as a social force, which is the source of feeling, understand-
ing and knowledge (Hackley and Kover, 2007: 70–71; Kelly et al., 2009; Kemper,
2001). In the view of advertising employees, knowledge, understanding and senti-
mentality stand together in order to create a successful campaign or to sell products
to a target audience, and understanding consumers is considered as important as
knowing about them. In other words, a superficial understanding of research
results, with no regard for people’s passions, desires or aspirations, is likely to
undermine the purpose of any campaign. Therefore, Gülay, the New Business
Director of Ivme Group, underlines differences between bank and advertising
agency employees, by emphasizing the mechanical nature of the former, stating:
‘We are not like bank employees. We also do research, but personally I do not
believe in research. There is no such thing as complete dependency on research.’
She also adds that ‘there must be sentimentality in it... If you produce a com-
mercial for rapper kids who wear sagging pants, and who carry chains on their butts,
you cannot have a man sitting at the table who says “good energy drink, drink it.”
You have to be one of them [rappers].’ (13 July 2007, personal communication).
Gülay highlights the importance of feelings, passions and desires, and also implicit
knowledge. In other words, advertisers employ subjectivity, by drawing on experi-
ences of their own, and use empathy to understand the experience of other human
agents. A similar type of subjectivity can be observed in Hackley and Kover’s work
regarding the subjective creative process when a creative professional asks, ‘How
can I be creative if I start to think like an MBA?’ (Hackley and Kover, 2007: 70).
Also, a creative director of Alameti Farika, Engin, underscores the importance of
this informal knowledge, pointing out that in addition to the data of research
companies:

... we know since we live in [this] society. By default. I live and I know. I live with old
people, I know. I meet with the young, I know. It is not a precise process like know-
ledge that comes from this specific source, like a computer program... namely, you
know. We all are humans. (6 July 2007, personal communication)

Like Gülay, Engin also emphasizes how the nature of their jobs conflicts with
positivism. He asserts that:

We are not computer processors. If you produce [advertisements] like a computer
processor, it does not work because there is no charm in this kind of work. It looks
like a mathematical solution or a homework composition, and nobody wants to read
or watch it. We know. Plus, there is market research, too... We have knowledge
accumulation since we live in [society] and we combine what we know with research
data. (6 July 2007, personal communication)

According to the advertisers, experience is grounded in the terrain of the ‘lived’. From advertisers’ perspective, human experience is constructed intersubjectively
and through dialog. Intersubjectivity constitutes the social world, what Schutz
calls the ‘life-world’. In order to gain insightful knowledge, advertisers perpetually
deconstruct the mundane practices of the everyday life. They strive to understand
the meaning of experience to produce an intersubjectively constituted objective know-
ledge of consumer profiles, assumptions and attitudes. In this process, they denatur-
alize and de-familiarize the taken-for-granted assumptions. They re-appropriate and
reconstruct them in their own terminology. For example, one creative director says:

[In the ads] we use “things” from their everyday life and integrate these things to our
products/brands. In order to confirm if we have done [it] successfully, global firms use
different research techniques. For instance, if we make a television ad for old people,
the company asks elderly people to watch it and asks their opinion. But this is not a
natural thing. This is not the natural process of producing ads. We do it naturally, but
this is not part of a production process. (20 June 2007, personal communication)

Describing the re-appropriation of mundane things into advertising, he questions
the ‘naturality’ of the knowledge production process. On the one hand, contradic-
torily, he admits that they use data gathering techniques ‘naturally’; on the other
hand, he denaturalizes the process by criticizing methods that global corporations
use for the production of knowledge.

**Conclusion**

In times of extreme competition, to meet the challenges of the global economy and
stand out from rivals, advertising agencies have to identify the services offered by
their rivals, and then legitimize how and why their campaign is stronger. After
analysing the competition, they focus on how to draw the demographics, regions
and end consumers to be targeted. They also analyse the industry and the market
position of their client. In this process, instead of terms such as ‘practices, mechan-
isms and consciousness’, used by Pierre Bourdieu and Alfred Schutz, advertisers
define their sources of knowledge as briefs, qualitative and quantitative research
methods and, more importantly, informal or tacit knowledge acquired and accumu-
lated by agents. Therefore, in examining the rise of tacit knowledge in global econo-
 mies, this paper provides insight into knowledge production processes, such as
typification, human capital, common sense and everyday life experiences. The pro-
cesses of advertising production exemplify reification of power relations and identi-
fication of power struggles within the agency, and between the agency and client.
Advertisers believe that there are two layers to the structure of the constructs of knowledge. The first degree is tacit knowledge. Independent of the observation of social scientists, the work of society is structured through living, thinking, acting human beings who create meanings and structural relevance. The second degree of construction is scientific, based on scientific methods of research, such as surveys, questionnaires and statistical data. However, this can never be entirely disconnected from tacit knowledge. Rather than quantitative data, traditionally the main source of knowledge in the industry, advertisers, as unintentional followers of phenomenology, are placing increased emphasis on tacit knowledge. Therefore, tacit knowledge has been reconfigured to become one of the most important means of knowledge production in the process of making advertising knowledge. As discussed above, since the inception of the industry, implicit forms of knowledge have always been employed by advertisers as a business strategy to create a competitive advantage and to become a distinguished agency in the sector. However, tacit knowledge is also a socially constructed form of power, working through discursive practices in the advertising business that were employed by Turkish advertising practitioners for the purposes of improvisation and invention within the structured social order of the advertising field.

The concepts of Schutz and Bourdieu help us gain insightful knowledge into the knowledge production practices of ad agencies. These include typification, common sense, intersubjectivity, the ‘life-world’ and field. In Schutz’s usage, the structure of the social world is related to its typification by common-sense constructs. Advertising staff, as the human capital of agencies, are linked to subjective forms of knowledge, such as tacit knowledge, closely tied to the concept of common sense. Common sense and subjectivity come into play in the personal experiences of advertisers to influence the customers of agencies. Tacit knowledge is an implicit expression of social unity among advertisers, which although never monolithic, has consistency. In other words, from the perspective of advertising employees, knowledge refers to knowing, understanding and feeling through common sense, typifications, abstraction, idealizations, formalizations and generalizations about the lived world of daily life. Advertisers, thus, claim knowledge of society through mechanisms of power and tools of knowledge production, such as common sense, competencies, observation and accumulating experience both to produce and distribute knowledge.

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**Notes**

1. The study is based on ethnographic research conducted in the summer of 2007 at three advertising agencies based in Istanbul. However, I returned to Turkey for periods ranging between eight and ten weeks in 2008, 2009 and 2010. More than observations, this paper draws on interviews with advertising practitioners, mostly because during my limited time
in the agencies I did not observe profound differences between what advertisers said and did. However, I acknowledge that this point deserves further research.

2. Especially in marketing textbooks, the significant role of marketing in the neoliberal economy is underlined and ‘production’ is mentioned as ‘a necessary’ but an ‘overrated economic activity in relation to marketing’ (see Perreault and McCarty, 2003).

3. Schutz discusses two typifications: a personal (subjective) type and an (objective) course-of-action type. The former is grasped in a ‘We-relationship’ as a unique individuality with a unique biographical situation. The latter type refers to ‘forming a construct of a typical way of behavior, a typical pattern of underlying motives, of typical attitudes of a personality type’ (Schutz, 1953: 12). The course-of-action type is based on exemplars and instances. While executing their jobs, advertising practitioners use the second type of typification.

4. Creating an ideal addressee of the media messages is a common practice in the media industries (see Forsman and Stiernstedt, 2006).

5. Melisa’s account also provides a rich base for the discussion of sign value. Sign value is described as the status function of an object by Goran Bolin, following Baudrillard (see Bolin, 2005 for further discussion).

References


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