Co-creation of impact in marketing management: agency and client research

Abstract

The creation of wider social and economic impact from academic research is an important policy issue and a priority for BAM. This paper presents a case study of efforts to create practitioner impact from research into the co-creation of marketing communications between agencies and their clients. Following initial dyadic research of clients and their agencies, workshops with agency and client practitioner delegates were conducted. The paper analyses the co-creation of impact between researchers and practitioners, in the case, utilising a framework derived from Service-Dominant Logic. The analysis focusses on choosing a clear impact audience; recognizing the nature of the operant resources supplied by both academics and practitioners; providing a motivating value proposition; creating a situation where resource integration can take place, resulting in resource modification (learning) and positive value realization.

Keywords

Co-creation; rigour and relevance; agency and client relationships; impact of research

Word count

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Introduction

The creation of wider social and economic impact from academic research is stressed in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework and the requirements for research funding in the UK (Research Councils UK) and in the 2020 strategy in Europe and the STAR METRICS initiative in the US (LERU, May 2012). Within the management field, BAM has endorsed the need for research to meet the double hurdle of both rigour and relevance (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011). However, creating impact from research in a fragmented subject area, such as management, is subject to many epistemological and practical challenges (Bartunek, and Rynes, 2014).

This paper presents a case study of efforts to create practitioner impact from research in the marketing field into the co-creation of marketing communications between agencies and their clients. The client-agency relationship is central to the marketing process and is of both academic interest and important to the effective working of marketing professionals.

The concept of co-creation underlines every aspect of this paper. It was the subject of the initial research, but the point of view of this paper concerns co-creation as a framework for creating impact between academics and practitioners. Shapiro, Kirkman, and Courtney (2007) demonstrate that the usage of management research can be seen as both knowledge dissemination and a knowledge production problem. That is to say it is not purely about disseminating and translating research from academics to practitioner audiences, but also requires both sides to work together to co-create new knowledge. An approach

conceptualized as Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al.1994) involving engaged scholarship (Van De Ven and Johnston, 2006).

The paper begins with a discussion of the impact agenda and its relationship with the long longstanding rigour and relevance debate within management. The agency/client context for the research is then outlined, as is the conceptual framework for co-creation based on work within Service-Dominant Logic (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008, 2011). The Methods section outlines the research as it took place over two stages, with Stage One being the initial dyadic interviews and Stage Two covering the series of interactive workshops designed to share and further develop the findings from Stage One. The subsequent Findings and Discussion sections demonstrate the usefulness of a co-creation framework in analysing this second stage, in which the authors worked together with client and agency practitioners to consider changes to practice that could be made to meet the various challenges raised in Stage One. In other words, we were trying to create wider impact from our research.

Impact and the rigour/relevance debate

The emphasis on the achievement of wider social and economic impact from research has been evident recently in the 2014 Research Excellence Framework (REF 2014 website) and in the requirement for applicants for Research Council funding (Research Councils UK website). This policy development is based in the belief that publically funded research should add to societal value (Council for Science & Technology, 2010). The impact agenda is not confined to the UK. The STAR METRICS initiative is designed to monitor the impact of science investment in the US and the 2020 Strategy includes impact as a key dimension in the allocation of European research funding (LERU, May 2012).

The changes in REF 2014 incentivise academics to demonstrate the impact of their research outside of academia (Pettigrew, 2011) and relates to a debate, concerning the relevance of research, that has being going on since the 1940s (Caswill and Wensley, 2007). Within the marketing discipline concerns have repeatedly been raised that marketing academia is not meeting the needs of organisations and practitioners (Piercy, 2002; Polonsky and Whitelaw, 2005; Mentzer and Schumann, 2006; Harrigan, and Hulbert, 2011). It is argued that marketing as a discipline needs to be more professional (McDonald, 2009) and the need to meet the needs of practice more effectively has been stressed as the most important issue for marketing academics, both in the UK and the US (Baker and Holt, 2004; Bolton, 2005). The argument that contemporary research lacks practical relevance is not confined to the marketing field. The emphasis on management as a science rather than as rooted in action (Bailey & Ford, 1996) is said to have led to a separation from the management profession (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002). As a result, a pervasive gap between academia and practice has opened up (Rynes, 2007) and much of the teaching and research carried out in universities is said to be irrelevant to the needs to business (Huff, 2000; Starkey, 2001; Bennis & O'Toole, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005; Mintzberg & Gosling, 2002).

However, management research is a fragmented field (Tranfield and Starkey, 1998) and there are many viewpoints on whether the gap should be closed and if so, how this should be done.

Management academics do not just exist to serve the needs of practice (Grey, 2001; Starkey & Tempest, 2008) and knowledge often emerges from fundamental research that is not known to be useful at the time of doing the research (Weick, 2001). A managerial approach can be seen to legitimize a particular elite view of the world (Learmouth, 2008) at the expense of social relevance (Wilmott, 2012). Bartunek, and Rynes (2014) conclude that the academic practitioner gap contains paradoxes that will not necessarily be resolved, and that academics need to engage with practice while acknowledging and working with the paradoxes. While BAM has endorsed the double hurdle (Pettigrew, 1997) of the need to balance both scholarly rigour and managerial relevance in management research (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011), the epistemological and practical implications of focussing on relevance are manifold. At a fundamental level this relates to the relationship between the subject field and the profession and some have advocated a design science approach, emphasising the development of valid knowledge related to field problems (Huff, Tranfield and Van Aaken , 2006; Van Aaken, 2005). Others give qualified support to design science, but remind us that the domain of explanation (Pandza and Thorpe, 2010) and criticism of existing practice (Hodgkinson and Starkey, 2011) must not be ignored.

From a practical point of view, the production of pragmatic science (high on both rigour and relevance) is said to be difficult because most researchers do not possess the required competencies (Hodgkinson et al., 2001). The practice of engaged scholarship, as outlined by Van De Ven and Johnston (2006), involves Mode 2 knowledge production (Gibbons et al., (1994) where research problem definitions come from outside sources, as well from scientific disciplines and where knowledge is co-created with research users participating in the generation of new knowledge. Therefore the social context is crucial to this kind of knowledge production (Nowotny et al., 2001). Knowledge creation requires close interaction between the implicit and tacit (Nonaka, 1994) and researchers must move between different communities of practice (Brown and Duguid, 1998; Rynes et al., 2001). The literature demonstrates that combining business and university activities throws up many challenges (Gulbrandsen 2005; Shinn and Lamy 2006; Tuunainen and Knuuttila 2009) and sceptism remains about the extent to which knowledge co-creation is feasible (Kieser and Leiner, 2012).

The agency/client context in marketing

The practitioner context for the co-created research in this paper is that of the working relationship between marketing agencies and their clients. The client-agency relationship is central to the way marketing communications are developed ($839bn expenditure worldwide in 2011, Deloitte, 2013). The extant literature covers various aspects of the relationship. Agencies need to be proactive and provide creative solutions to their clients' briefs and this creative process can be open or closed to their clients (Turnbull and Wheeler, 2015). While clients need to be decisive in briefing and approving their agency's work (Ryan and Colley, 1967; LaBahn and Kohli, 1997; Davies and Prince, 1999; Beverland et al., 2007). However, if the client gets too closely involved it may sometime stifle creativity (Koslow, Sasser and Riordan, 2006) Effective relationships between client and agency develop through a process of open communication, adaptability, and coordination in building trust and commitment

(Wackman et al., 1986; Halinen, 1997; Duhan and Sandvik, 2009). Interpersonal relationships and even friendships between individuals from each side are highly important and the agency account manager plays a pivotal role in maintaining the quality of the relationship (Ewing et al., 2001; Haytko, 2004; Vafeas, 2010). However, clients change agencies on average once every four and a half years (Michell and Sanders, 1995) and only one in five agency/client relationships survive more than five years (Davies and Prince, 1999). The relationship often ends because of unsatisfactory creative work, poor account service, or simply because the client wants to make a change (Michell et al., 1992; Henke, 1995).

It is important for both clients and agencies to have a successful relationship. Agencies have to invest considerable time and energy in replacing clients and may lose revenue and reputation when a client defects (Buchanan and Michell, 1991). In cases where a small number of accounts provide a large proportion of an agency's revenue, the loss of one account can be particularly damaging (Doyle et al., 1980). For the client finding a new agency and then fully briefing them on their requirements will also be time consuming (Cagley, 1986). It has been estimated that it can take a client up to two years to recover from an agency change (Newsome, 1980). Hence, the interest in improving our understanding of the client- agency relationship continues (Waller, 2004; Duhan and Sandvik, 2009).

In a wider context, the advertising agency provides an example of a professional service, characterised by a high degree of interdependency between the client and the agent. In an advertising campaign "marketers, copywriters, and graphics artists must work closely together to produce a single integrated work" (Wageman and Gordon, 2005, p 687). In other words, campaigns and other creative outputs are co-created between client and agency. It is this co-creation process that is of interest to the authors of this paper, particularly in the light of recent theoretical work on co-creation within Service Dominant Logic (S-D Logic).

Co-creation as a conceptual framework

The theoretical understanding of co-creation has developed in recent years through the work of Vargo and Lusch (2004, 2008, 2011) on S-D Logic. Challenging traditional economic theory (Goods-Dominant Logic), S-D Logic contends that value is not created by the supplier and passed onto the customer. Rather, value is only created when a product or service is used by the customer and is co-created between the actors involved (Vargo and Lusch, 2004, 2008). Value is a perception that is phenomenologically determined by the beneficiary (Vargo and Lusch, 2004). The debate around S-D Logic has put as new focus on value co-creation, which can be seen to be highly complex involving a series of reciprocal actions amongst the actors involved (Gronroos, 2011; Ballantyne et al., 2011; Ford, 2011).

S-D Logic highlights the process of resource integration at the heart of co-creation. A central idea in S-D Logic is the distinction between two types of resources in creating value. Operand resources are "… resources on which an operation or act is performed to produce an effect" (Vargo and Lusch 2004, p. 2), requiring input from an active agent in order to realize value (Arnould et al., 2006; Lusch et al., 2008). The active agent is provided by the

knowledge and skills of the actors involved (Vargo and Lusch 2004, 2008; King and Grace 2008; Layton 2008). Knowledge and skills are operant resources that drive value creation, and create a competitive advantage in business (Vargo and Lusch, 2008). The conceptual framework on co-creation adopted for this paper in in framing the process of co-creation of practitioner impact is illustrated in Figure 1. The starting point is the operant resources provided by the actors involved in co-creation. The next point is that a mechanism is needed to attract the resources of other actors to co-creation. This has been termed the 'value proposition' (Maglio and Spohrer 2013; Frow et al., 2014). The third stage involving resource integration stage represents the major part of the process of interaction. The final stage is that of resource modification. Following resource integration the resources possessed by the actors will be transformed in some way (Lusch and Vargo, 2006). At the centre of the framework there is value realisation. This represents the personal perceptions of each actor of the value derived from the co-creation process.

Figure 1: Framework used to analyse co-creation between academics and practice
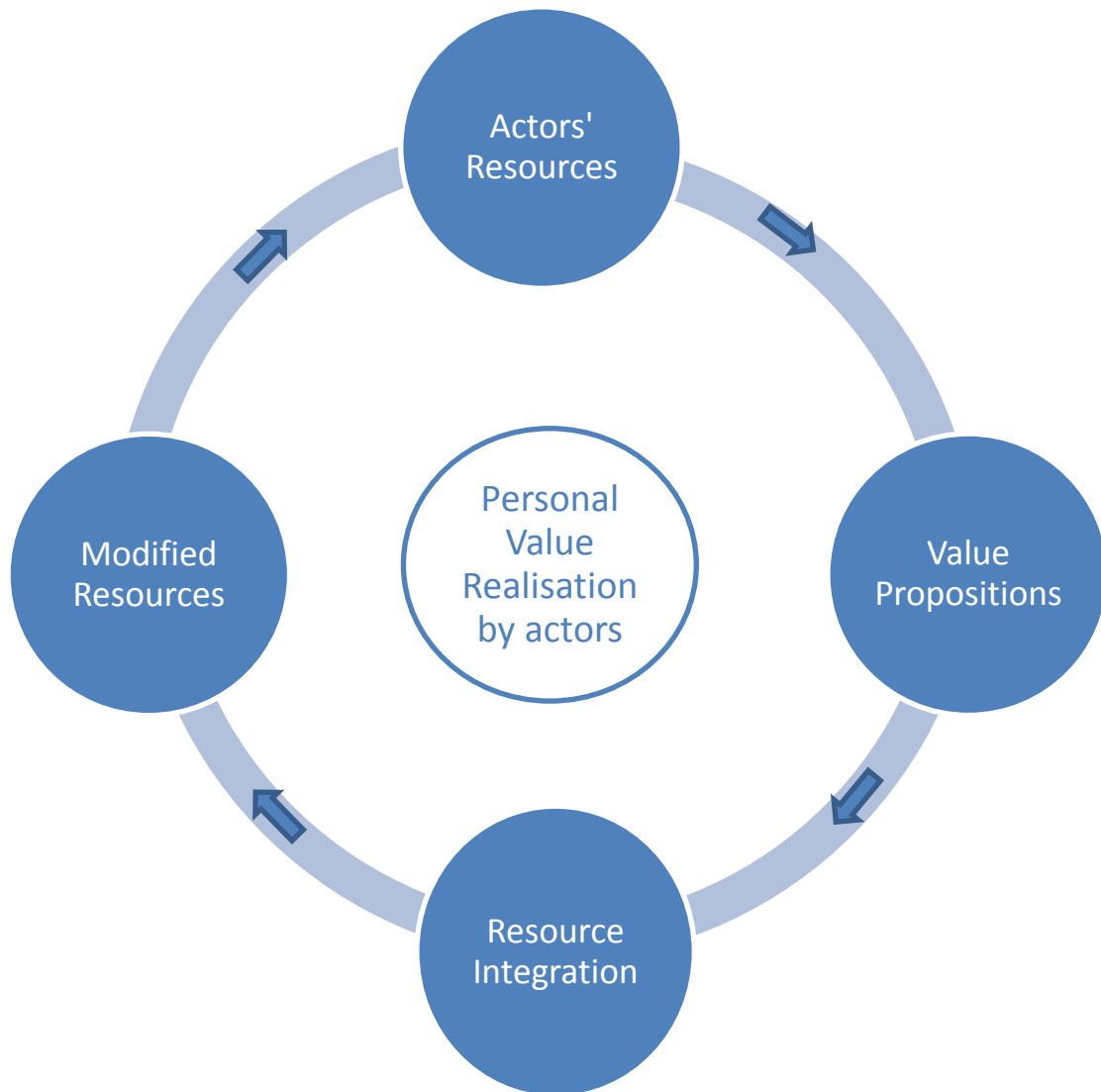
Source: Adapted from Hilton, Hughes and Chalcraft (2012)

Method and stages of research

Critical realism is well supported in the literature, as providing a sound ontological basis for developing management knowledge (Van de Ven, 2007; Hodgkinson, and Starkey, 2011; for example) and is the approach taken in this research. Critical realism accepts the complexity of reality and of the need to examine social attitudes and behaviours in some depth (Magee, 1985; Guba and Lincoln, 1994; Godfrey & Hill, 1995; Tsoukas, 1989). Within this paradigm, qualitative research is recognised as a method to gain depth of understanding (Healy & Perry,

2000; Sammarra and Biggiero, 2008) and to encompass a pluralism of perspectives (Van de Ven, 2007).

Stage one: Dyadic interview with clients and their agencies

Sampling was purposive through the selection of individuals with the potential to provide perspectives directly related to the purpose of the research (Miles and Huberman, 1994; Marshall and Rossman, 1995; Patton, 2002; Silverman and Marvasti, 2008).Thus the validity of the research relates to gaining access to knowledgeable interviewees (Rubin and Rubin, 1995). A semi-structured interview framework was utilised (Easterby-Smith et al., 1991) to ensure coverage of common themes, while allowing the interviewees to answer questions in depth. The initial research comprised of dyadic interviews with clients and their agencies, as a basis for developing case studies. Case studies are considered particularly suited to develop in-depth insights about an area in its context (Bonoma, 1985; Johnston et al., 1999; Ghauri, and Gronhaug, 2002). Initially clients were approached and if the client agreed to take part, their agency was contacted. Twenty five interviews were conducted with seven clients and eighteen agency executives. Two of the clients gave us access to two of their agencies and nine separate cases were developed, each based on the relationship between a client and an agency. As far as we are aware no other published research has obtained dyadic interviews with a both clients and their agencies to examine co-creation in the development of marketing communications. The clients included global, large, medium and small companies across a range of product and service sectors. The client interviewees all dealt directly with agencies and had job titles such as Marketing Director, Marketing Manager or Marketing Executive. The agencies ranged from a top 5 London full-service agency, through medium sized agencies (some full service and others specialists in design, direct or digital marketing) to internal agencies (two cases). The agency interviewees included a member of both the account and the creative team, wherever possible, with titles such as Account Director/Manager, Creative Director/Manager. Research protocols and processes were established to ensure dependable and confirmable findings (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The collection, coding and analysis of data were carefully controlled (Miles and Huberman, 1994). All the interviews were recorded transcribed and analysed using NVIVO to identify common themes and to facilitate inter-case comparison.

The detailed findings from the initial research are in the process of being published elsewhere. What is relevant for this paper is to highlight aspects of the findings that are relevant to practice. Our research found great variability in the quality of client briefs and briefing. Also the client interviews uncovered a significant issue in clients' lack of confidence in judging creative work in many cases. The agency value proposition is closely related to its core operant resource of its creative and executional skills. However clients often look to their agencies to provide strategic support deriving from the agency's wider knowledge of other markets. At the same time knowledge of the brand, market positioning, the client's customers and the way the client works is an important operant resource provided by the agency that facilitates effective creative work and will build over time during the course of the relationship. The difficult balance in this is that while clients may appreciate seeing

creative work that is in line with their expectations, based on a common understanding, this can lead to criticisms that the agency is not providing fresh ideas and becoming complacent.

In presenting creative work and receiving feedback there are issues on both sides on who needs to be present to give and receive effective feedback. Some agencies involve their creative teams substantially in meetings with clients, whereas in other cases account handlers play a larger role in mediating the discussion. On the other side the agency interviews suggested frustration with situations where the prime decision maker for the client is not present and this can lead to delays and lack of clear direction. Effective resource integration requires both sides to manage the process and the relationship. An open relationship, realistic timetables and resource allocation and the motivation of agency personnel (which is partly driven by the attitude of the client and the way that they deal with the agency) are all identified as enablers to effective resource integration.

In summary, the initial research does not provide easy answers or prescriptions for how clients and agencies can work together more effectively, but highlights issues that need to be considered by both sides. The co-creative framework based on the resource integration process that informed the research found many cases of imbalances in resources that impact on effective co-creation. Clients are often considered to be poorly trained and unprofessional in dealing with agencies. Clients themselves privately admit to difficulties in judging creative work, a role for which they usually have had little or no training. On the other hand, agency processes and requirements are often opaque and not made clear to clients and agencies do not always understand the constraints and pressures that cause clients to act in the way that they do. Achieving an effective balance of resource inputs would seem to be of benefit to both parties. It was in the spirit of facilitating agencies and clients to consider the raised by the research and to look for practical ways forward that we entered the next stage of practitioner workshops.

Stage two: Practitioner workshops to disseminate and discuss the implications of the research

The next stage was designed to share the research findings with the practitioner sphere, which we defined as marketing professionals, using marketing communication agencies and executives and managers from marketing communication agencies. The geographical region covered related to the closest major business region to the researchers own university. This roughly relates to the region covered by the West of England Local Enterprise Partnership covering Bristol, Bath and surrounding areas. The Bristol and Bath region has a thriving marketing communications sector and general business community with strengths in creative and digital media; advanced engineering and aerospace; high tech industries; low carbon industries and professional and legal services (West of England Strategic Economic Plan 2013-2030). The researchers approached South West Marketing Leaders (SWML), a joint initiative between Bristol Media and the Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) South West Region to promote and support marketing and creative businesses in the region. South West

Marketing Leaders had access to existing practitioner networks and a track record of putting on successful practitioner events in the region. Following discussion of the results from the initial research it was agreed that this was a subject that would be worth sharing with practitioners and a series of workshops were agreed. The workshops ran over a period of six months. The first workshop aimed at agencies, the second at clients and the third intended to bring together both agencies and clients. The workshops were promoted through the networks of Bristol Media and the CIM and through the researchers' networks of contacts. The workshop delegates were charged for attendance at the workshop (£55 for CIM/ Bristol Media members and £85 for others). The initial workshop was funded by a Higher Education Innovation Funding (HEIF) grant designed to encourage knowledge exchange. The subsequent income from delegate fees made the workshop series self-funding ending with a surplus that will seed fund future activities with SWML. The workshops included presentation of the findings from the initial research; open discussion of the findings; polling of the audience on key issues arising and group work amongst the delegates and panel sessions. The first workshop for agencies attracted 56 delegates; the second workshop for clients attracted 16 delegates (a disappointingly low number that will be discussed further below) and the third workshop attracted 36 delegates. Where possible, delegate discussion and feedback was recorded and delegate feedback was collected at the end of each workshop. The Findings below were developed from this feedback and from participant observation by the authors of this paper.

Findings

Practitioner Workshop One

The first workshop focussed on the agency perspective. There were a good number of delegates, mostly comprising account managers, who are directly responsible for dealing with clients, and also some creative executives. During the day two sets of work groups were run with the delegates working in small groups of six and the outputs were summarised by a speaker from each group (these summaries were recorded and transcribed). The first set of sessions covered briefing, client management, the presentation of creative work and the account management role. The second group working session covered relationships between agencies and clients. Appendices 1 and 2 summarise the outputs to demonstrate the resource integration of our framework (Figure 1) in which the delegates were combining the research findings with their own working knowledge in sharing experiences and a joint discussion of actions that they might take.

Then at the end of the day's sessions the delegates filled in a feedback form. Included on this was a section on: "What did you learn today that you can take away and implement?" Table 1 contains some of the answers on this demonstrating impact on the delegates. In particular comments (3,8,11,15,16,17,20, 21) show intentions to act on specific findings from the research and subsequent discussion.

Table 1 Workshop One: "What did you learn today that you can take away and implement?"

1.The importance of setting expectations and division of responsibilities
2. What clients frustrations are and how we as agencies can make their lives easier
3. Hold 'wrap up' events to mark end of projects and hearing common problems
4. The differences and similarities in how other people manage their client relationships. Some great ideas to improve relationships. That some of the difficulties we encounter are not unique
5. The importance of considering how many routes are presented to clients - three isn't always right. Should we go in with just one strong route?
6. The importance of planning and adding value, putting yourself in clients' shoes and taking time to know their business and time pressures
7. Found it interesting to speak with other people from different agencies and listen to their opinions. Learning from the case studies. How clients feel will be helpful in building relations with clients and going back to feed into the team. Hearing other people's opinions also boosts your confidence in what you are already doing
8.To make more time at the beginning of a process and to see ourselves as experts not suppliers
9.The day confirmed that we are on track. The event boosted confidence to continue to do what we are doing, only faster!
10. I have learned some great external experience. I have also learned to understand that other have similar experiences and how to deal with them.
11. I'm going to think about how I can better educate or train my clients to better understand how we work/processes
12. Client comments are interesting not over and above anything we already knew
13.Interesting conversations about presenting ideas back - 1 or 3. Getting creatives involved in briefing sessions
14.Other agencies' approaches to similar issues/stats of perceptions/insights into client experience
15. Client training is an excellent idea. Our agency is quite 'set in their ways' so trying out new things such as client training and bringing creatives into briefings could make us even better.
16. A lot of agencies face the same issue, have the same insecurities. How to implement the account management team better into the creative process. Need to look into this.
17. All agencies have the same challenges. Good to hear client feedback. Would like to try and find solutions for some of the issues ie: helping clients know their place with feedback and allowing them to give constructive criticism rather than 'moving stuff around'
18. Great to discuss common issues with people in the same roles and facing similar daily scenarios
19. Great talking to other people and hearing their experiences - some different, some similar. Good to think about how we can add value to our clients.
20. We learned how to deal better with clients and set expectations from the outset. Will apply immediately
21. Set expectations at the outset/create a document 'what you can expect from us'
22. Learned about building a partnership and what we should be charging for
23. It's not a battle and relationships change daily
24. It's important to invest more time in how we get the most out of our existing clients

25. To communicate effectively with clients and enable them to feedback effectively
26. Implement some more client management processes rather than leaving everything to written agreements
27. Some useful reminders and good to talk through challenges across a range of agencies
28. Best practice and shared issues
29. Insights into how clients see relationships with agencies. Don't skip PI/objective/expectations stage/more communication is important/how to improve client loyalty

Practitioner Workshop Two

The second workshop was focussed on clients. In contrast to the first workshop for agencies, where the recruitment of delegates was relatively easy, we found it very difficult to get enough clients interested in coming to the event, despite extra efforts to promote the workshop to the marketing departments of the largest organisations in the region. This may well reflect an attitude of mind among clients expressed to a representative from SWML, when promoting the workshops at a regional CIM members meeting, that: "I pay the agency to produce good work and if they do not perform I will get another agency". This suggests a highly transactional view of working with agencies that does not recognise the responsibility of the client in a co-creative process. Hence the second workshop was run with 16 delegates. In view of the smaller numbers the discussion took place amongst the whole group rather than in separate smaller group sessions. Despite the disappointing turn out the quality of the discussion was high. The summary in Appendix 3 shows aspects of the client perspective and a number of points that were stimulated by discussion of the research findings. Table 2 shows client feedback on the event demonstrating specific intention to take action in many cases (1,3,4,5). An important theme of this feedback relates to the need for both parties to communicate more.

Table 2 Workshop Two: "What did you learn today that you can take away and implement?"

1. I gained insight into the agencies experiences as well as other clients, issues, it is reassuring that there are common issues. I have learnt that moving forward I need to be more open and honest and ask for feedback from agency.
2. Interesting to see agency view on how clients engage.
3. Communication is key – openness and honesty. Throughout processes will create better results. Need to be as clear as possible when beginning.
4. Better understanding of issues facing the agency, importance of face-to-face meetings.
5. Communications with agencies needs revisiting in my organisation. We will set up better reviews. I'll also set up training for more of my staff.
6. How better to deal with the agency that we work with. Better understanding of how an agency works as well – not just one-sided!
7. The importance of open and honest communication between client and agency.
8. How important it is that the client/agency 'fit' is crucial. How important it is for both sides to continue to invest in developing the relationship.

Practitioner Workshop Three

The third workshop was originally envisaged to be a coming together of agencies and clients who had attended the first two workshops separately. However, there were many more agency delegates than client delegates, reflecting the pattern at the earlier workshops. Much of the day was spent discussing the points of view that came out of the first two workshops. Table 3 shows delegate feedback of intention to take action. One of the comments from an agency delegate (8) is particularly interesting. Following the first workshop, this delegate had shared the findings with everyone in his agency and clearly felt that the agency had benefited.

"It's mainly re-enforced lots of discussions I've had internally, both with accounts and creative teams (following the first workshop). One key thing is the importance of putting creative in front of clients. I've done it myself and seen it have a massive improvement on the work we produce."

We had quite detailed discussions with this delegate after the workshop and he outlined in more detailed how he was implementing changes across his agency, as a result of the research findings and subsequent workshops. This can be seen as an example of resource modification as featured in our framework (Figure 3).

Table 3 Workshop Three: "What did you learn today that you can take away and implement?"

1.Client: The idea that honesty and communication should be improved with agencies. Interesting to hear issues are same throughout the industry.
2. Agency: That clients needs to be managed very closely. Also collaboration is to be embraced.
3.Agency: Lots of tips and thought provoking ideas about the client-agency relationship.
4. Agency: I think we always feel we have an assumption about the relationship between client and agency- today's taken that on a level and has given some food for thought on how accounts are managed and how we report and interact with clients.
5. Agency: How important it is to collaborate and practice integrated marketing and PR
6. Agency: Knowledge, communication, trust respect.
7. Agency: Most importantly client training/support to assist them in dealing with an agency.
8. Agency: Lots of things- but it's mainly re-enforced lots of discussions I've had internally , both with accounts and creative teams. (following the first workshop) One key thing is the importance of putting creative in front of clients. I've done it myself and seen it have a massive improvement on the work we produce.
9. Client: I've got some plans for in-house training and setting up more client/agency meetings with staff across the organisation.
10. Client: People matter in the relationship on both sides; need to improve the understanding of a good client/agency relationship within the business; Invest in the relationship, it pays off in the long-term; discuss research and workshops with marketing team.
11. Agency: A better understanding of client side views; inter agency working; billing issues.
12. Client: Importance of transparency, communication and maintenance of good agency/client relations.

Table 4 demonstrates further intention to take action following the workshop from 11 of the delegates.

Table 4 Workshop Three: Answers to question: "What impact will this workshop have on the way you do your job?"

1. Client: The inclusion of our agencies and the idea of nurturing the relationship.

2. Agency: I will be giving the agency-client relationship a lot more attention. Help me think more creatively about building the relationship.

3. Agency: collaborate more with complementary agencies.

4. Agency: Open and honest with clients. Give them the ability to feedback controversy.

5. Agency: It will make us reassess the cause of our frustration with client's feedback and communication.

6. Agency: I'll be feeding this back to the rest of the agency.

7. Client: I will be looking at training and induction of marketing staff and induction meetings with agencies.

8. Client: Look to see how we can get the most from our agency relationship;. Review current approach and make necessary changes.

9. Agency: While I think we already have a good grasp and implementation of the values explored, there were a number of good approaches to communicating and presenting those ideas that I will adapt.

10. Client: Be more understanding of client's situations (eg ability to assess creative work and constraints when it comes to decision making.

11. Agency: I will be a lot bolder with my clients and ask more probing question. More open to partnering with others.

More dissemination

During 2015 we gave the Keynote speech at Bristol Media's Masterclass to 84 delegates. In this session we offered follow up workshops with individual agencies. In response to this, eight agencies and one large client company expressed an interest in having a workshop. We have already run workshops for three agencies for 48 agency executives. At the end of each workshop we collect feedback from the participants on "Did you learn anything that we can take away and implement?". We have also agreed a follow up workshop with each agency in six months' time to review progress in implementing changes.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper has been to examine the co-creation of impact between researchers and practitioners in an important area of marketing management, that of the way that agencies and clients work together. The co-creation model based on SD Logic, as shown in Figure 1, covering resources, value proposition, resource integration, resource modification and value realisation will be used as a conceptual framework in much of the following discussion.

Operant resources

The workshops utilised operant resources from the researchers, the delegates and also other practitioners known to the researchers, in a collaborative effort to understand the research topic better. Ballantyne and Varey (2006) point out that operant resources can be made up of both explicit and tacit knowledge, the latter consisting of know-how gained through experience. The nature of the initial research brought in tacit knowledge from the interviewees. However, the workshops built on this by bringing in multiple perspectives, based on contemporary practice from the workshop participants. The approach of valuing the tacit knowledge that the target audience brings as an operant resource is fundamental in creating impact with professional groups such as this, who will tend to be receptive to research findings only if they feel that the research is conducted with an understanding of what is relevant and realistic in the contemporary context of their work environment. The authors of the research both have extensive experience of working in the marketing client and agency context prior to entering academia. We would reflect that the tacit knowledge gained from this was also very positive in enabling us to interact effectively with practitioners at all stages of the project.

The value proposition

The value proposition is the mechanism that attracts parties to collaborate in co-creation (Maglio and Spohrer 2013; Frow et al., 2014). In the case of the workshops the value proposition would seem to be mainly related to the subject matter. Is it considered to be important by the potential participants? Also significant the endorsement of the organisations involved in this case South West Marketing Leaders, Bristol Media, CIM and the researchers own university. The positive response from agency professionals who were prepared to pay for the workshops and give up their time to attend contrasts with the difficulty in attracting professionals from client companies. Informal feedback collected, as part of the promotional process for the workshops, suggests that many clients feel that the responsibility for achieving good marketing communications lies with their agencies. Therefore, the subject of the effectiveness of the input they give to their agencies is considered to be of relatively low importance for these clients. However, all the evidence from the initial research and the workshops suggests that the production of good creative communications is a co-creative process and depends a lot on the quality of input from clients. We would reflect that a motivating value proposition is essential getting engagement from practice. The question remains as to how to motivate and persuade potential beneficiaries from research who do not recognise the potential importance or relevance of the research to them.

Resource integration

Interactivity between the co-creating parties (Ballantyne and Varey, 2006; Gronroos, 2011; Ford, 2011) is at the centre of resource integration. In this case the workshops were designed to maximise interactions between the researchers and the delegates. The participants were encouraged to ask questions or make comments at any point during the proceedings. In the first workshop a microphone was passed to the delegate making a comment, so that it could be recorded. However, we felt that this inhibited discussion and microphones were not used following this initial experience. The group work sessions that took place in the first workshop also encouraged peer to peer interaction with the outcomes being reported to everybody at the end of each group work session. The process of knowledge creation has been described by Nonaka (1994) as a spiraling process of interactions between explicit and tacit knowledge. The workshops were presented by the researchers with explicit knowledge in the form of outputs from previous research and a small amount of theory, which stimulated the attendees to bring their tacit knowledge or 'know how' in exploring the issues. The outputs recorded in the Tables and Appendices demonstrate the results of the resource integration in this case.

Resource modification

As a result of interaction and resource integration the aim is to modify (positively) the operant resources of those taking part. This can be seen as the learning process which, in this case, would provide the participants with enhanced capabilities in dealing with the issues raised in the research more effectively in the future. If impact from research is to be demonstrated the impact audience needs to have learnt something new from the research and then to have operationalised this learning in their subsequent practice. The feedback from the workshops provided in Tables 1-4 and in Appendices 1-3 suggests learning has taken place and that an intention exists to put this learning into practice. Further research going back to the participants once a period of time has elapsed would help build evidence of the impact on the impact audience. As discussed above, the impact will also be restrained by the limited involvement of clients in the workshops.

Resource modification is not confined to the practitioners involved. As researchers we have learnt a lot from the discussions with practice. One very clear conclusion from the workshops is that inexperienced marketing executives usually have little training in dealing with agencies. The researchers' own university runs large marketing programmes at undergraduate and post-graduate level. The findings from the research will be incorporated in the syllabus at both levels to better equip new entrants to industry in respect to this subject. In addition several of the client delegates have agreed to deliver guest lectures to students on undergraduate and postgraduate courses.

Value realisation

As discussed earlier, value is an individual perception (Vargo and Lusch, 2004) and each participant will have their own idea of the value of the workshops. The open feedback provided in Tables 1-4 suggest most participants had a very positive view on the value

obtained. This is backed up by ratings of the workshops obtained, at the same time, using 4 point scales (Excellent; Good; Average; Poor) in which the vast majority scored the workshops as Excellent or Good against a number of criteria. We believe the value of the research and workshops lies in the fact that clients and agencies seldom discuss the state of their relationship. If clients are unhappy, they generally switch provider without explanation (there are plenty of alternative providers). If agencies are unhappy, they generally persevere without confronting the client because they are fearful of upsetting and losing the client. Our research brought to light and shared the beliefs and attitudes of both partners in the relationship. We recognise that it will be necessary to go back to participants at a later date to find out how far they have derived value from the workshops in the longer term in the context of their ongoing practice.

Conclusions

The starting point for our research was to define the impact audience. Before discussing the elements of the co-creation framework in relation to the workshops, it is worth noting that as researchers we were very clear about who we saw as the audience for impact creation. One of the most enduring tenets within the marketing field is the idea of segmentation and targeting. Given limited resources, marketing communications need to be focussed on specific target segments if they are to be effective. This fundamental idea is very appropriate for academics intent on achieving impact for their research outside of academia. Economic and social impact is a wide concept and may include many audiences, including the general public and policy makers. In the case of this research it was very specifically about the quality of practice of professionals working in agencies and their clients. Therefore, it was not difficult to define these as the impact audience. At this stage the impact audience was to the West of England LEP region because of practical considerations and limitations. We are keen to extend the reach further to professionals in other regions in the future.

In this paper we have described and analysed a co-creative approach to knowledge production between marketing academics and an impact audience of marketing communications practitioners. The conceptual framework that we adopted, derived from S-D Logic, focusses on resource integration. The contribution of this paper is to demonstrate the usefulness and applicability of this co-creation framework to the creation of impact in a practitioner context. The emphasis on the operant resources provided by the various actors involved is a useful one in recognising that all stakeholders contribute to different aspects of the process and gets over traditional Mode 1 concepts of hierarchical knowledge production. The idea of resource integration provides a way of considering the process of participation in Mode 2 knowledge production, while resource modification is directly relevant to the creation of impact as it applies to considering the effect that the co-creative process has had on the intentions and ultimately behaviour of the impact audience.

The conceptual framework also recognises the importance of providing a value proposition that is motivating to members of the impact audience, while accepting that every actor involved will experience the value created by the activities in different ways. The feedback from the workshops suggested that value was created for those actually taking part. On the

other hand the value proposition, while motivating for one section of the impact audience, agency executives, was less so for client marketers. This suggests that there is still much work to do to achieve impact from the research with this latter group. One way forward may be to involve the CIM at a national level in raising the issue with current marketing practitioners and in including it in the syllabus for training future marketers. This latter point, about influencing the curriculum for marketing students, is worth noting in that it underlines that ultimately the traditional route of publishing the research in academic journals, in order to inform university teaching, still remains fundamentally important in achieving impact in the longer term.

Finally, it is difficult to over emphasise the importance of working with existing networks and professional associations to access the impact audience if it is in a professional field. Universities are often seen as difficult to access and remote (House of Commons Business, Innovation and Skills Committee Business-University Collaboration, Seventh Report of Session 2014–15), whereas established networks have a relationship with their members. We are very grateful that the practitioner based operations within our target region recognised the relevance of our research and were proactive in setting up and contributing to the workshops. Following the workshops ongoing activities are planned, such as blogs that summarise key points. In widening the impact further we will be dependent on getting support from professional networks in other regions of UK and internationally.

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Appendix 1 Agency Workshop: Key points from first session of group work

Briefing	- Set expectations for briefing right at the beginning - The need for two-way conversations between client and agency - The need for very specific questioning/challenge from the agency - A Brief needs to be concise - Brief must include emotional side as well as hard numbers - Benefit of including creative team in briefing sessions - Must be point of reference for judging creative work
Client management	- Clear communications - Managing expectations - Guiding clients through the creative process - Direct clients into articulating clearly their response to creative work - Transparency on ways of working - Dependent on stage of relationship
Presentation of creative work	- High risk of presenting just one creative route - Key is having confidence in the creative concepts - Sometimes more than one concept helps client to express likes and dislikes about creative work - Danger of three route formula (safe, middle and risky)
Account management	- Demonstrate the value of building a trusting relationship - Often about being the person who has to break bad news - Have to make decisions based on the understanding of the individual client a person - Huge opportunities for account manager to add value

Appendix 2 Agency Workshop: Key points from second session of group work

Who should 'conduct the orchestra' in agency/client collaboration?	- Bit more agency than client, as agency has better knowledge of processes and ultimately agency responsible for the project - Others were less keen on this expression as collaboration should involve everyone taking responsibility - Need to be clear which is the lead agency when a number of agencies are involved
How do you achieve an open and trusting relationship with	- Getting to know the client socially - Making sure that agency has the right contact relationship firmly in place on the client side - Making sure client knows what agency stands for

clients?	• Put the time into understanding how the client's business operates behind the scenes and understanding the nature of the client's job • Get the small things right- do what you say you are going to do • Good communication and continually managing client's expectations • Deliver high quality work on time • Extra challenges where client is global and there is no face-to-face contact • Empathy and understanding everyone's position is key
How can you avoid underachievement in projects?	• Having objectives and agreed measure of success up front, having time and having realistic budgets • Account manager needs to motivate and ensure enthusiasm from creative team on routine briefs • Sometimes you just need to be realistic about what is right for the job given the budget and time allowed
What would you advise clients to do to get the best out of their agencies?	• Set realistic expectations and deadlines • Listen to the agency • Remember why you chose the agency in the first place and trust their expertise in communications • Keep in regular contact and make sure that the agency is supplied with all the relevant information • Thank individuals at the agency when they 'go the extra mile' • Invest your time into the brief at the front end

Appendix 3 Client Workshop: Key points from discussions

Briefing	• Briefing should be more than a piece of paper. Needs a conversation • Example provided of a briefing session for annual campaign that lasted the whole day. Really positive way of making decisions up front • Better results when we sit down and brief the agency face-to-face in a collaborative process. Those teams that spend time with the agency, learning how the process works and learning how to brief properly, deliver better work • When you've worked with an agency for a long time they may have a fear of asking questions about things they feel they should know about
Agency management	• Agency lack of communication – not voicing concerns to clients • We need more guidance from them if that's how they feel (i.e. frustrated). They need to tell us what we need to do to improve our processes and work better with them • Spiralling costs -Money issues can sour the relationship very quickly, sometimes there's no level of realism in their costs • We can be really specific about budget but they still send an invoice with extra charges. Then we have to have discussions about costs and it's hugely time consuming going back and forward • The agency we work with is not an expert in our field. They lack understanding of our target audience and the context we work in • You have a responsibility to keep employees motivated so why

	not agencies? It's costly to keep changing agencies, just as it is employees • We evaluate campaigns so why don't we evaluate relationships? We should have an honest conversation at the end to ask 'what went well and what could have gone better?'
Presentation of creative work	• No one wants to be safe and no one wants to be radical, so you end up going with the middle of the road route • It would be great to have the creative present the work and explain it, and almost make corrections on the spot
The relationship	• Perception of agency disposability • Working with a large full-service advertising agency is different from working with a small digital start-up. All relationships are different and need handling and managing differently • Power imbalance: From an agency point of view, it's their lifeblood whereas from the client's point of view it's just one small part of their day to day. Agency employed by client, not the other way round • Agency staff turnover: loss of knowledge and personal relationships • The longer we work with an agency the less they meet our expectations. The people that worked on the account when the relationship started have moved on and been replaced • Do business with people inside the agency • Getting things delivered on time can be difficult. They don't tell us things will be late. It has a knock on effect for other stakeholders. • You can get staleness in long-term relationships
Client training	• Client training: agency responsibility? At (name of organisation), we go on an induction day with our agency. It's what we ask for when we sign up an agency • You leave university and suddenly you have to manage an agency but you've never been told how to do it. We just have to get on with it
Client situation	• Agency lack of understanding of client world (pressures and multitude of other tasks besides creative work) • Both sides should invest time at the start of the relationship. Just as an employee needs a proper induction, it's the same for the agency • It's getting increasingly difficult to make a case for additional budget. Budget is very limited so we *have* to be more restrictive • The client can be restricted by very tight brand guidelines. • From a business perspective, it doesn't matter about the creative's need for idea time. If something happens, we need to respond to it. It doesn't matter if the creative process *should* take so long, sometimes we need them to think fast