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1 Introduction

Advertising as a business, social, cultural and creative practice is undergoing seismic changes. Digital no longer represents fringe advertising media, but rather a set of expanding practices that, as a collective, is progressively becoming a dominant global advertising media form. Unlike other media that have traditionally jostled for position, digital does not compromise. Increasingly other media develop and work with digital as it not only positions itself as the dominant form but also establishes itself as the terrain from where all else spring.

Digital media, the leveraging of vast tracts of data and new creative ways of using media are quickly rewriting the rulebook of advertising. We only need to think about our own media, communication, information and digital purchasing habits to realize this. Although each traditional media form carries its own benefit (for example, newspapers do not require electricity or chargers), digital platforms offer timeliness, relevance and a greater chance for advertisers to understand what happens to their advertising expenditure. They also raise significant ethical questions over privacy.

The advertising community has traditionally spent its time trying to interrupt users and the daily experiences and media content they are engaged with (Kim, 2008). However, people are not entirely happy with this. Whereas people living in advanced economies have in the past been hostage to mass media, these industries seem much less certain now. In many ways control over media flow and methods of consumption now lies with the user. As such, media producers and those in the advertising industry have to pay more attention to the preferences of their audiences. A report produced in early 2009 by the UK's Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) makes similar observations describing that the future of advertising is predicated on a consumer-led world (IPA, 2009). It suggests that 'if social media does take the lead in the future of brand communications then permission-based advertising could become the norm and understanding this is vital for success, requiring a fundamental shift in mindset. Brands will have to earn the right to be in this space' (ibid).

The era of "interrupt and repeat" is coming to an end as advertising segues with users' new media habits. It is becoming very difficult to

gauge differences between marketing and advertising, and if it were not for the fact that clients and marketers still employ agencies to come up with ideas, the title of this book would be different. The current era has more to do with engaging ideas represented through a variety of media. The central word here is *engagement*. Although advertisers and marketers have always sought to capture interest and eyeballs, the contemporary period is more social and interactive. However, despite the apparent relaxing of communication reins, advertisers and market researchers are drilling down ever deeper to find our preferences, dislikes and more importantly other cognate products and services we may be interested in. Digital advertising represents a new paradigm of advertising that perhaps paradoxically, simultaneously gives a degree of control to both the consumer and the advertising community. Cookie data from advertising servers, user data from website analysis tools and attitudinal feedback from survey companies all ensure that, in theory, we see messages deployed for micro-segments including ourselves. Audience targeting is work in process although this development has a long way to go before we find ourselves in the refined targeting scenario envisaged by many science fiction authors, journalists, academics and common folk alike.

I intend to take a critical look at advertising that underpins and generally pays for media services we use, in particular those of a digital nature. This book avoids empty digital rhetoric and instead offers a grounded account of what is occurring and what the techno-social ramifications of digital advertising are. Although the term digital advertising may conjure up images of rage at pop-ups, as we'll see, digital advertising is much more. The big idea of this book is to offer an account of digital advertising in terms of industry practice, media forms, techno-cultural theorization, legal conceptualizations and creative opportunities. Its aims are thus multiple in that it seeks to chart developments in digital advertising and its associated practices, offering analysis and theorization as to what these mean for users and consumers. It also offers critical inquiry into a field more commonly associated with books that delineate the business of digital advertising, rather than offer a techno-cultural exposition of the ramifications of new digital advertising practices and associated audience profiling.

Ubiquity, language and the everyday

In contradiction to a shining modernist conception of the future, our daily-lived reality is now an always-on and on-demand society.

As of 2009, few are without a mobile phone and internet penetration is growing, albeit not as deeply as you may think even in developed economies: for example, internet penetration in the United Kingdom is still only around two-thirds. Notions of the information economy have been in circulation for decades but manifestation at a ubiquitous level is relatively new. Digital now surrounds many of us. Hardware, software and applications have set in motion a whole range of now firmly embedded cultural activities permeating virtually all spheres of life for some people. Try going without digital communications for a few days and it appears that you have dropped off the radar. Such is the normalcy of mediated communication many of my students consider text messaging acceptable in a classroom environment. These changes are characteristic of many electronic media developments historically. Discourses of new media go through the same boom, reflection, introversion and acceptance processes anew as each medium arrives in the public domain and, in part, recreates it in its own image.

Such is the extension of digital technology into everyday life that people regularly use technological jargon to describe how they communicate and get along with one another. Johnson (2008a) argues that digital lexicon mediates everyday life and that we no longer share work but “files”; we do not work on a computer but are “users”; content shared online is “information” rather than ideas; we “send” messages rather than express them. Johnson ascribes this to a shift in how we think about people and their practices and in many ways this is due to the influence of cybernetics in everyday life and communication. Communications scholars such as Norbert Wiener writing in the 1940s about cybernetics and the nature of communication flow have initiated a lingua franca that to some extent underpins how we conceive of mediated, and sometimes interpersonal, communication today. In addition, these language practices seem to have set in motion an argot where it is acceptable to use technological symbols as a means of everyday grammar: for example, emoticons. Notions of systems, information loops and circuits of communication prove a cold metaphor for human relations facilitated by digital technology despite mitigation from the ubiquitous smiley. These technological discourses have permeated all sorts of advertising communications in techno-lite guises. Johnson offers a range of cases where technological tropes and sentiments are used as sales propositions and a vehicle for dressing up new and “advanced” products, or services where people should “connect”. A range of other types of tech-punctuation has also

made their way into art directors', copywriters' and typographers' toolboxes. These include dots, underscores, square-brackets, command line syntax and other programming jargon, not to mention the gratuitous use of text-message and instant message (IM) language styles. We are, in more ways than one, increasingly becoming a digital society.

Globalization theorists and writers for years have been telling us the world is shrinking, and arguably it feels smaller for greater amounts of people. Mediation of other places not only occurs through the news and traditional televisual media but it also occurs in blogs, virtual environments, geospatial tagging and videos produced by "friends" the world over. Another reason that the world seems somewhat smaller is because it is easier to engage with. Traditional mainstream media, as a rule of thumb, engender passivity whereas digital media facilitate participation and involvement. We are more than consumers; we are producers and as Jenkins (2006a) reminds us, we live in a participatory culture. What I find most interesting and perhaps even revolutionary is the ubiquity and everydayness of tools such as YouTube and other video sharing platforms. Whereas early adoption of new media in the past has been an avant-garde activity, the relative lack of fiscal resources needed to get involved has led to an incredibly democratic platform for content sharing.

The technological changes that digital media and their support structures have wrought are seeing a return to greater individuality and salesmanship. Press, television and radio (with significant qualifications) all represent massification, at least in their inception, and with a single media purchase advertisers have been able to reach the eyes and ears of large audiences. However, as Faber and Stafford (2005) note, this came with a cost additional to the media buy. It meant that communication was homogenous and often appealing to the lowest common denominator. When critics lambast advertising for being banal, they have a point: much of it is by necessity. The targeting of niche audiences made its appearance with the introduction of cable television that began in the United States *circa* 1948 with John Walson's endeavours to sell more TV sets, with cable subsequently representing any system that delivers television content through coaxial cable or fibre optics (Anderson, 2006). This, and developments in satellite capabilities, ensured the distribution of greater amounts of content and aided in refining processes of categorizing and segmenting audiences. Digital now forms a third-age pertaining to personalization and re-invokes personal selling, albeit in a mediated fashion. For

advertisers to become intimate with users and consumers advertisers need to know something about us and our preferences, to generate two-way dialogue with brands, or at least create a simulation of reciprocal communication.

Scholars, students and practitioners

Like me, you will probably have an academic or professional interest in advertising and recognize the centrality of advertising to media. You will know that as a general rule both traditional and non-traditional media are largely funded by advertising revenue. You will probably also be savvy and understand that media over which advertising is carried have been changing radically for a good few years now. You will probably also be a bit sick of hearing about the next “Big Thing”. This book thus aims to critically delineate the digital advertising sector and offer insight into key features of the current digital environment. Perhaps more importantly, it aims to theorize the cultural contours of digital advertising and media.

My intention is not to hawk or promote recent media developments; this in fact could not be further from its remit. It instead aims to examine contemporary digital advertising media platforms and offer a balanced assessment of its advertising potential; to examine types of advertising that are already carried, nascent forms and their potential; to query the impact of digital advertising on audiences and assess user perspectives; to describe relevant legislation, and explore regulatory and ethical debates; and to investigate and account for creativity in digital advertising, exploring the role of science and the relationship between innovation and creativity. Given that digital advertising is a relatively young business and creative practice, born in 1994, there are few interdisciplinary studies. Material for this book is derived from interviews with practitioners, industry journals, and a range of academic literature derived from advertising, new media studies, sociology, marketing, art history, law, politics, management, audience studies and technology journals.

For scholars and students of digital media, advertising has long been an aspect of digital culture under-theorized and under-explored. As with traditional media, digital advertising is the key revenue generator for most commercial activities online. This is perhaps a fact that is not always articulated as loudly as it should be within the field of Media Studies. It is fair to say that without advertising the web and

other internet platforms would not look the way they do. Whatever your feelings about advertising may be, the fact remains that it is a vital area of study for anyone interested in media as many services and tools we take for granted are now advertising-funded, and as such, money generated from advertising has, in a large part, created the digital media environment that we now recognize. This book thus aims to delineate key trends and characteristics of the digital advertising industry. It aims to help academics studying digital cultures develop an appreciation of digital advertising, the nature of the digital advertising industry, the types of advertising that exist (it's not all banners and pop-ups!) and ultimately to recognize the role of digital advertising in terms of the political-economy of the web and related platforms and environments. Students from a variety of disciplines should also find this text useful as it encompasses new media, traditional media studies, advertising, marketing, design, communications, consumption studies and law.

This book also aims to be of use to advertising and digital advertising practitioners. In putting this text together I have interviewed a range of digital advertising practitioners and interested parties. All have commented that this is a timely text and that greater understanding of communication flows, audience reception and digital culture are paramount for the advertising industry. Practitioners will be well aware of the enormous amount of commentary on digital advertising with each year forecasters proclaiming that the year of X is upon us (please insert chosen medium). Amongst other writings, this book thus aims to sift through the commentary from a range of trade publications. These include the Internet Advertising Bureau (IAB), Advertising Age and a plethora of other interested parties such as Adland, ClickZ and iMedia Connection. My intention is to articulate theorization of digital culture and offer the reader a comprehensive understanding of substantive changes and also digital practices that have stayed the course since the inception of digital advertising. Although commentators continue to draw attention to the transformational aspects of digital life and rapid media development, this book hopes to elucidate on social uses of technology less prone to vagaries of application and media fads. Marketers and those in control of advertising spend may also find a relatively unbiased, academic, objective point of view useful. Practitioners will also hopefully find historical and theoretical material interesting and if these analytical perspectives serve to obfuscate rather than illuminate, then this will book will have failed in one of its objectives.

Frame of reference

In working out how this book could be best structured and conceptualized I considered using the term “new media” and that I may be restricting myself with the prefix digital. However, digital does seem to characterize what is new about the latest swathe of new advertising media. This, however, presents its own problems; for example, the term digital means nothing more than 1s and 0s stemming comes from the Latin term *digitus* meaning finger. This means that digital is not necessarily electronic. It could just as easily be smoke signals, mirrors, Morse code or anything else capable of being “on” and “off” and standing for something else. However, whether internet-based or set on some other technological protocols, digital does seem to be the differentiating characteristic between recent media and traditional media used for delivering advertising. As such, it is a technology and does not necessarily refer to the character or content that is carried on it. Digital advertising here therefore refers to advertising through digital channels, particularly the internet and mobile communication and locative devices.

Although the title of this book is Digital Advertising it has a distinct bias towards internet-based platforms. This focus is largely determined by how much agencies and their clients are spending on online advertising compared to other new media, such as mobile phone campaigns. Figures provided by the IAB (2009a) record online advertising as accounting for over 18 per cent of all money spent on advertising in the United Kingdom with this figure growing year-on-year. Similar figures are reported from the United States although growth is slowing due in large part to global financial troubles. In addition, although this book does not comprehensively cover digital marketing, it frequently strays into this territory. As McMillan (2007) notes, distinctions between digital advertising and marketing are unclear. Traditionally marketing had more to do with purchase related activities and the retail environment; in contrast advertising had more to do with the media. In digital environments this distinction is far less clear than in a world of bricks and mortar.

This book has two central aims, the first being of a more practical orientation. Initially this book aims to describe key trends within the arena of agencies, advertisers and clients and carve out definitions of advertising within digital media and types of media platforms used. The second aim is to reflect upon, and explore, arguments surrounding conceptualizations of digital media. These include changing

characteristics of digital audiences, concerns over surveillance of personal data and regulation, ramifications of speed and technology, de-mystifying interactivity, discussion of theories of digital consumption and new media advertising and finally a critical exposition of creativity within the new media advertising environment. The USP of this book is thus its interdisciplinary scope and by extension, this book hopes to offer a diverse range of perspectives on digital advertising in relation to a firm grasp of business practice.

Advertising and the technology that mediates so much of it is changing, but then again, it always has and always will. If anything characterizes the current media milieu, it is change. It is probably also a fair bet to say that change and flux are at the heart of digital advertising. In addition, whereas traditional above-the-line advertising media are fixed, digital is characterized by migration. This book does not aim to be a snapshot of the digital advertising market nor is it a coffee table book with beautiful illustrations of ads. Instead it aims to chart the digital advertising environment and lay down some theoretical bones as to what works and why. In addition, it seeks to address some of the concerns over privacy and the political-economy of digital advertising. With the future of advertising being based on information on users and their activities, this book addresses some of the ethical debates these practices raise. It also examines user perceptions of this scenario: does intensely data-driven advertising paint a Big Brother surveillance society or one where advertising might actually be of relevance to us?

Structure of the book

Chapter 2 delineates the history and business environment of digital advertising; it contextualizes the rise of digital media noting the centrality of advertising to media innovation. It explains that online advertising is currently by far the fastest-growing advertising medium, growing at a rate of 21.8 per cent between H1 2007 and H1 2008 (IAB, 2009a) in the United Kingdom. This represents a slowdown in growth due to financial difficulties advertisers found themselves in. This still represents significant growth, particularly when weighed against the traditional advertising media market with only cinema also recording growth. In outlining the variety of new media advertising platforms, new user orientation to digital media, convergence cultures and Web 2.0, this chapter also highlights key new media agencies that are driving the wider new media market forward in reference to specific

case studies of note. I conclude stating that an examination of online advertising is long overdue both in terms of industry practice, as a media phenomenon and also as a techno-social enterprise.

A common misperception of online advertising amongst students new to new media is to equate new media with the internet, and online advertising solely with pop-ups and banners. Although these platforms play a significant role within advertisers' media mix they are most certainly not the entire story, especially given the dominance of search advertising – this maintaining over 58 per cent of the entire online advertising media sector (IAB, 2009a). Chapter 3 is an extended in-depth description of the breadth of formats of online advertising at advertisers' and marketers' disposal, and the relevant advertising opportunities that are offered by these. Platforms discussed include pop-ups and banners (static and rich media); email; search and portals; video; viral; social networks; virtual environments (including an extended case study on Second Life); in-game advertising; mobile and locative.

Chapter 4 describes and critically analyses dataveillance arguments and the notion that we live in a "control society". Dataveillance, advertising and tracking of personal data have been a concern for users since the beginning of the marketization of the online environment. Dataveillance refers to the systematic monitoring of users' activities and personal data through electronic means – in this case over the internet. Some of these concerns are justified, some are not and many are a matter of perspective. In this conception of society, citizens and consumers are monitored through their data trails both online and offline. In a Weberian (1994) sense this is referred to as an iron cage, caused by a desire for control by those who seek to manage people. Users and consumers are configured as dependable variables that can be counted upon by the advertising, marketing and data-mining industries to behave in a predictable manner. Decisions are thus made on how best to market and advertise wares to their data-doubles and are decided upon by impersonal data-aggregators. Chapter 5 asks what users' perceptions of digital advertising are: do they like it or hate it, are they aware of it or indifferent, and why? More centrally this chapter examines user perceptions of digital advertising and potential concerns over privacy. This involves an account of risk, trust and perceptions of threat and contagion. It inquires into what extent users trust marketers' and advertisers' motives through what Giddens (1990) portrays as expert systems, and to what extent legislation addresses these concerns. Although there are many reports from both academia

and business offering quantitative detail of digital advertising audiences, currently there is very little qualitative discussion of how users consume advertising. As a starting benchmark, this chapter initially inquires into countercultural literature as generated in the late 1990s and early 2000s by cybercultural writers and writers who characterized early digital audiences as being anti-advertising. Developing the inquiry into digital advertising audiences, this chapter notes the quietening of cyberpunk-inspired cybercultural discourse and highlights the role of the 'everyday'. However, although bipolar conceptions of utopia and dystopia have quietened, privacy and the encroachment of business demonstrably play a factor in user conceptions of digital advertising.

Chapter 6 assesses these perspectives on dataveillance in terms of international legislation and regulation on privacy focusing in particular on the United States, European Union and United Kingdom. It also discusses the complications that arise, and how these are dealt with, when data moves across borders and zones of regulation. For example, whilst US-based websites are not required by law to inform users about placing cookies on users' hard drives as long as cookies are not combined with personally identifiable information, EU law requires that users be notified when personally identifiable information is collected about them. This chapter does not discuss collection of digital data alone but instead broadens the remit to information technology and the use of genetic data by data miners as a privacy concern. It also explores regulations and laws in the United Kingdom regarding advertising to children and the shift from traditional advertising to online forms of marketing, advertising and solicitation. Finally, it inquires into the legal status of video viral advertising whose content is deemed inappropriate for traditional televisual viewing.

Drawing on interviews with producers, Chapter 7 explores and assesses changing modalities of creativity in the online advertising environment. It also explores tensions with advertising practices pertaining to scientific methods. It examines polar viewpoints of employees of creative departments worldwide that subscribe to conceptions and discourses of creativity predicated upon romantic notions of the artist as genius (Weisberg, 1993; Negus and Pickering, 2004), and those practitioners who see it as a method to be refined (Hopkins, 1998 [1923]). In doing this it explores the relationship between creativity and innovation. In exploring creativity through innovation this chapter touches on artificial intelligence and advertising creativity in Web 2.0. Using a range of examples, it offers an account of interactivity,

telepresence and community involvement. This chapter also explores relevance in regards to the current web and the nascent semantic web that will offer higher degrees of personalization. Whilst one-to-one advertising (Lindstrom, 2001) was part of the failed promise of the dot.com boom/crash years, current models of personalized advertising appears to be having more success with consumers, particularly hard-to-reach youth segments (Nelson, 2007). It also highlights the role of participation and explores in more depth interactive and trans-media storytelling, and media characterized by convergence. These invoke broad strategies conceived in both technical and creative terms where innovation and creativity exist as ideal and happy bedfellows.

The book concludes with reflections on an interview I conducted with Kalle Lasn, both “culture jammer” and editor of *Adbusters*. *Adbusters* represents a range of interest groups broadly anti-corporate and I was very interested to hear his perspective on new forms of advertising given his perspectives on traditional sorts. Thus drawing upon key tracts of our discussion I use this as a vehicle to offer conclusions on topics raised throughout the book. These include the role of digital advertising for contemporary consumption practices; fluidity and immaterial labour; the capacity of personalized digital media to aid in artisanship and postmodern trends of self-image construction; risk, digital and genetic segmentation; haptic developments; *Adbusters* and web 2.0. The book finishes with a consideration of what lies beyond the horizon of what Lasn calls the electronic beach.

Questions for further discussion

- ▶ To what extent should social media form the focus of a brand’s advertising activities?
- ▶ How do current conceptions of information society compare to those incarnations described in the 1970s and the 1980s?
- ▶ To what extent do “classic” distinctions between marketing and advertising still apply? Does the notion of an “advertising agency” make sense any more?

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