

Chapter 9

Social Impact of Digital Media and Advertising: A Look at Consumer Control

Gregory O'Toole
Pennsylvania State University, USA

ABSTRACT

Around the world today we have convenient, fingertip access to continual, informational content. At first the free flow of information seems convenient, empowering, and endlessly beneficial for those world citizens with access to it. This chapter takes a closer look at this relationship in terms of today's consumer and the mediated information they are exposed to and asks the question of whether or not this is necessarily a good thing. The chapter looks at the historical relationship of power and information for guidance in this examination while considering active and inactive audience, corporate and independent media texts, and the possible relationships between Victor Frankl's 'existential void' and mediated messages today.

People can be very moral, but they are acting within institutional structures, constructed systems which only certain options are easy to pursue, others are very hard to pursue. -Noam Chomsky

We shape our tools, and then our tools shape us. -Marshall McLuhan

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-60566-792-8.ch009

THE INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE STAGE

Theoretical Cultivation Analysis

Everything is information. The good news is that in our current information age we have convenient, fingertip access to continual, global content; the bad news is that in our current information age we have convenient, fingertip access to continual, global content. At first the free flow of information seems convenient, empowering, and endlessly beneficial for those citizens with access. We take great pains to bridge the social

agency and access digital divides. Companies are continuously inventing and marketing smaller pocket-sized devices with which can communicate instantaneously and in a variety of ways. We spend vast amounts of money every day for more connections, faster networks, and ubiquitous wifi. All of this can only be a good thing, right? Not so fast. Upon a closer look, we have to wonder if more content can ever be too much content. Are we mentally, emotionally, critically, politically, and techno-psychologically prepared to deal with the amount of information that comes at us once the flood gates are opened wide, and continue to open ever wider? Who is in control? What are the consequences of information overload and how do we deal with this properly?

Historically, information production and distribution has always equaled a certain amount of power for those in control of these processes: in the one-to-many relationship of mass media producers control what the *inactive* viewers see, hear, and read. It has been shown that through the event of broadcast, news outlets have had the power to shape the relative importance a viewer may apply to certain content (Gerbner, 1969). This process can even influence which issues are thought to be most serious and most important to the viewing public. This historic imbalance between the agencies of media producers and those of media consumers is changing as a result of our available media communication technology, creating a new type of media consumer: the *active* viewer. As a result of this influx, as media consumers in the Internet age, we are in need of a critical regiment to control and understand what we choose to digest as part of our own media diets. Through experience we know that too much of anything is not a good thing. As with the over-consumption of sugar, fat, cholesterol, and salt for our bodies, today, as media consumers, we have the individual responsibility of our media diets and in dealing with the potential for information glut.

Further, there is a media outlet available for every point of view that exists. Sure, we can find a blog entry on just about any topic, including posts that fall on both sides of any story. How do we know where to find the facts that the American media is supposed to provide for us in order that we become and remain informed, knowledgeable citizens? Where is the objectification that the media is supposed to lend us in order that we make informed decisions on our own? There is any number of bloggers out there, but which one is correct? CNN runs their content distribution twenty-four hours a day, but is what they are pouring into our living rooms, our computers, our cell phones really important for us to know? If not all of it, how much of it? Today, in the Internet age, these are the questions that can only be answered by each individual as a living member of planet Earth. Gone are the days of a “good,” informed citizen needing only to subscribe and read the local newspaper each morning, and the evening edition at night. In our current information epoch we have many more decisions to make, and the power to make the right ones. With a little thoughtfulness and effort, we can do this to the benefit of ourselves and our communities: The good news is that in the information age we have continual, global information content at our fingertips. The bad news is that in the information age we have continual, global content available at our fingertips.

In our contemporary media-rich world, there is now, more than ever, the need for an applicable theoretical investigation on these questions which involve the ideas of past thinkers like Karl Marx, renowned psychiatrist Dr. Victor Frankl, self-educated sociologist Eric Hoffer, and other writers whose work on the nature of media, power, information and mass movements contribute to an advanced academic foundation in media theory and can help us to understand the effects of the prevailing condition of our world today.

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:
www.igi-global.com/chapter/social-impact-digital-media-advertising/43354

Related Content

Does Demographics Affect Purchase Frequency in Online Retail?

Prateek Kalia (2017). *International Journal of Online Marketing* (pp. 42-56).

www.irma-international.org/article/does-demographics-affect-purchase-frequency-in-online-retail/181557

Effects of Consumers' Social Media Participation on Consumer Behavior: A Marketing Perspective

Ashish Kumar and Ram Bezawada (2015). *Marketing and Consumer Behavior: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1670-1694).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/effects-of-consumers-social-media-participation-on-consumer-behavior/123029

Viral Marketing: A Brief Study of Pre-Established Methods and Models for Understanding the Various Implications on the Corporate Sector

Neha Arora and Ashok Wahi (2014). *International Journal of Online Marketing* (pp. 52-63).

www.irma-international.org/article/viral-marketing/110175

Those Who Rarely Attend Alone: Tribal Sport Fans

David P. Hedlund, Rui Biscaia and Maria do Carmo Leal (2018). *Sports Media, Marketing, and Management: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 386-416).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/those-who-rarely-attend-alone/199128

The Effect of Sociolinguism on Advertising Slogans: Language as a Conveyor of Cultural Characteristics

Juan Miguel Alcántara-Pilar, Ivan Manuel Sánchez-Duarte, M^a Eugenia Rodríguez-López and Álvaro J. Rojas-Lamorena (2019). *The Role of Language and Symbols in Promotional Strategies and Marketing Schemes* (pp. 126-143).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-effect-of-sociolinguism-on-advertising-slogans/213092