

Advertising and the New Media of Mass Conversation

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Abstract

New media studies have tended to focus on the implications of new media for citizenship. The interests of consumers – or more precisely, consumer citizens – in new media remain under-theorised. This paper considers how developments in the co-adaptation of advertising and new media might be theoretically framed. The active role of citizen consumers in new shaping media environments is noted, and a framework is developed for understanding new networked media such as the Internet and mobile phones as new media of mass conversation. This draws upon theories of interactivity. Interactivity is often taken to be the key point of difference between ‘old’ and ‘new’ media, but is rarely adequately elaborated. In specifying these differences, an important distinction is drawn between types of interactive properties of new media and communication systems, and conversation as a characteristic of human communication and social participation. These are important questions to consider in light of the growing new media studies fascination with ‘Web 2.0’ media and commercial business models. Web 2.0 marketing communication propositions open a very interesting window of opportunity for applying critical insights to the imagining and social shaping of economically viable, convivial, new media, markets, and citizen consumers. Identifying the limits to this coincidence of the interests in critical enquiry in new media, and professional marketing communication theory and practice emerges an important challenge for new media studies.

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Home videos of explosive Coke Mentos soda fountains and Coke Mentos rockets started appearing on the Web in early 2006. This association of Coke and Mentos took both brands by surprise. The brand companies could neither control the uses to which their products were being put, nor the dissemination of the images of these uses. The replication, video capture and Web-based sharing of Coke Mentos experiments snowballed. Thousands of experiments were uploaded to the Web, and viewed by millions. A very enterprising team of performance artists called EepyBird took the Coke Mentos phenomenon to new aesthetic heights. One particular experiment, which commentators likened to the spectacular fountains of the famous Bellagio Hotel in Las Vegas, was powered up by virally-disseminated, viewer-generated recommendations to the top of 'most watched' lists on sites such as Revver and YouTube.¹ Mentos was very happy with this popular appropriation and display of its brand, and association with values of youth culture. It estimated this media exposure at US\$10m, equivalent to more than half its annual advertising budget for the US market (Vranica and Terhune 2006), and took immediate steps to build upon this publicity opportunity by partnering with YouTube to run a competition for the best Coke Mentos video. Although early responses reported from Coke were not enthusiastic, the global soft drink giant also elected to explore this consumer-generated media activity as a brand-building opportunity. It mounted a 'Poetry in Motion' competition, which challenged Coke consumers to show the world what extraordinary things they could do with everyday objects (Vranica and Terhune 2006).

The Coke Mentos experiments cut right to the heart of the challenge that the Internet and other new media present for the advertising industry. Historically, advertisers have thought of themselves as top-down communicators, in control of what information is released, to whom and when, as well as the channels of communication themselves. The Coke Mentos experiments point to the ways in which new media stress this model of communication. They provide an iconic illustration of how and why advertisers, media and advertising industries, are increasingly compelled to think about new media consumers as key creative participants in advertising, media, and marketing processes. The Coke Mentos experiments could not be discounted as the antics of culture jammers or the interventions anti-globalization activists. They are proof positive that active audiences now make use of powerful tools for branded content creation and interaction and, ready or not, are coming to a brand near you. That is the central argument of this paper – that new media based on information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as the Internet and cell phones, invite us to think in exciting new ways about advertising, as an industry and marketing communication process, as well as a crucially important influence in consumer and public culture.

This paper introduces considers how these developments might be theoretically framed. It proposes that new networked media such as the Internet and mobile phones are usefully approached as new media of mass conversation. Mass media are the communication services of mass society, mass production and consumption. Niche media tailor these services to market segments, often on a global scale. Conversational media are the communication services of the global network economy and information society. They overlay rather than supersede mass and niche media, and, as the older media forms are digitized, conversational

¹ 'Extreme Diet Coke and Mentos Experiments' and other works by EepyBird', can be found on many websites including: Revver (<http://one.revver.com/find/user/Eepybird>); and YouTube (http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=Eepybird&search=Search); and EepyBird's own website (<http://www.eepybird.com/>).

media also augment and converge with mass media to produce new, niche and one-to-one media forms.

The Coke Mentos experiments illuminate the co-adaptive development of advertising and new media. They also point to the myriad of ways in which new media uses can rapidly re-organize the social relations of media production, commercial communication and consumer markets. In the first instance, people are no longer as dependent upon mass media for information and entertainment. As personal computers and fixed and mobile network connections multiply, reaching the point of ubiquity in many parts of the world, the density of networked conversations increases. Convergent developments in consumer electronics and social software that support peer-to-peer interaction also cause the economic barriers to media production and distribution to plummet. A variety of new commercial media, which take advantage of the conversational productivity of consumers, now extend the range of media choices well beyond mass and niche media.

Conversational media are both the consequences and drivers of new economies of information and networks. They are being used to increase the variety of patterns of interaction and forms of social exchange, organization, and politics. The important distinction between conversational interaction, which is taken here to be a cybernetic property of new media and communication systems, and dialogic exchange, which is characteristic of human communication and social participation, is developed. Corresponding with the Internet's rapid development as a platform for advertising and commerce, conversational views of interaction and participation have increasingly called into question the status of transmission as the natural systemic and social order of media. These developments, both at the coalface of advertising and media industries, and in new media and marketing communication scholarship, are discussed throughout this book, as is their impact on the co-adaptation of advertising and new media.

Advertisers and their agencies often talk about the need to 'break through' the clutter of advertising-saturated media environments in order to command the attention of the consumers they want to reach. As the Coke Mentos case illustrates, this is a problem of top-down transmission. Conversational media can also cut through from the bottom up. Online chatter about Coke Mentos experiments and the first visual demonstrations appear to have initially circulated in niche media and Internet-based knowledge communities dedicated to popularizing and promoting science education. Viewer response finally 'broke through' to the brands after the spectacular EepyBird Coke Mentos experiments were uploaded to Revver. A consensus quickly emerged among Revver consumer critics about the outstanding entertainment qualities of the Eepybird work. It was at this point that the EepyBird team caught the attention of the brands, as well as mass media, and added further fuel to a wider conversation in professional marketing communication networks about the role of consumer-generated brand communications in marketing strategies (Prescott 2006; Sandoval 2006; Vranica and Terhune 2006).

Like YouTube, Current TV and numerous other video sharing sites, Revver makes it easy for viewer-generated recommendations to circulate in the social networks of the Internet. In addition to asking viewers to rate content, the Revver site automatically generates code, which visitors painlessly copy and paste into their own blogs, email and websites, so that others may easily access content hosted by Revver. There is a great deal of variety in the detail of the business models underpinning these new services. Revver is distinguished by its dedication to ensuring that content producers – professional and amateur – can earn

advertising income as they build audiences for their content, while keeping control of their intellectual property. Each clip logged with Revver is tagged with advertising that is charged on a 'click through' basis. Revenue is split evenly between the video maker and Revver. The EpyBird team reportedly earned about US\$30,000 from this arrangement prior to being picked up by the brands (Marketing Week 2006).

The Revver business model is hardly likely to threaten the highly capital-intensive approaches to financing production and distribution of the global media and entertainment industries. However, it does illustrate the ways in which new, conversationally-inspired media diversify the strategies available to independent content producers to build markets and attract investor interest. Revver is one of a proliferating number of interesting and important instances of the co-adaptation of advertising and new media to conversational possibilities of interaction and participation.

There are important similarities between the new commercial conversational and transmission media. Both principally rely on revenue earned from advertising and marketing services. The production of audiences for sale to advertisers, facilitated by the irresistible 'free lunch' of program and editorial content, is at the heart of the advertiser-funded media business model (Smythe 1981, 25). That imperative still operates in new commercial media. However, there are also important differences. New commercial media audiences cannot be conceived as passive consumers of these services. Indeed, their active participation, especially as content creators, is often a crucial ingredient in the new media commercial success recipe. In new media environments, revenues for advertising and marketing services are also applied to supporting the smorgasbord of communication tools, which are essential to mass conversation (Marshall 2004, 59).

Firms such as Google, Yahoo!, YouTube, Revver and the numerous other advertiser-funded new media, mobilize highly malleable ideas of advertisers, consumers and media producers. As the Coke Mentos example illustrates, these media enterprises service the possibility that consumers can be advertisers and media producers; that advertisers can be media producers and consumers; and that media producers are also advertisers and consumers. The implications of new media for subjectivity have also been framed by active theories of media audiences. New media consumers have been variously theorized as the citizen consumers (Hartley 2005, 9ff) of participatory DIY media cultures (Jenkins 2003, 287); as the 'prosumers' (Toffler 1970) of participatory fan cultures (Marshall 2004, 25; Jenkins 2006); as 'viewers' (O'Regan & Goldsmith 2002, 103), 'co-creators' (Banks 2002), and 'productive players' (Humphreys 2005) of computer games; and as the 'producers' of networked social software such as blogs (Bruns and Jacobs 2006). The term 'citizen consumer' has its critics (Nightingale & Dwyer 2006). Although space does not permit a full explanation, it is used here to overcome problems with maintaining the arbitrary distinction between 'citizen' and 'consumer' in new media environments.

Conversational interactivity and social participation

Although usually very loosely applied, interactivity has been a key category of comparison between 'old' mass media and 'new' digitally networked media (Burnett and Marshall 2003, 51-52). Henry Jenkins very usefully argues that in new media contexts interactivity is more precisely understood as a property of the technical systems of communication (Jenkins 2006, 133). Interaction is engineered. It can be broadly understood as the cybernetic control of

information flows, including feedback, in any given communications system. The more interactive a communication system is, the more flexibility and variation in the types of communication and exchange it can support. The Internet is considered the most interactive of all communication because it is engineered to support all modes of interpersonal, mass and computer-mediated communication. Burnett and Marshall describe the interactive adaptability and flexibility of the Internet as the ‘loose web of communication’ (45).

Strictly speaking, this definition applies only to engineered systems of communication. It has been extended analogously to encompass physical media too, such as newspapers and magazines. One of the most influential typologies of systemic interactivity was proposed by Bordewijk and van Kaam in the mid-1980s as an aid to thinking about the policy and regulatory implications of ICTs. It relied on ‘idealised information traffic patterns’ to generate a scheme for differentiating the interactive properties and associated social power relations of various media and communication services and networks, both analogue and digital (Bordewijk and van Kaam 2003). As Figure 1.1 indicates, it establishes ‘conversation’ as an important type of mediated interactivity.

Bordewijk and van Kaam describe the one-to-many architecture of modern broadcast mass media as ‘allocation’. This is the least responsive type of interactivity because it is not designed to support exchanges between the small number of powerful transmitters at the center of the allocutionary media and communication system and the mass of media receivers. Nor does it support interaction between receivers or the audiences that make use of them. The one-way flow of information is under the programmatic control of the information service provider. Audiences do not generally represent themselves in the social relations of allocation. They are more likely to be represented in and by these systems in a variety of ways that are beyond the direct control of audiences. Audiences can turn broadcast media on and off, and change channels. Remote controls and VCRs also significantly extended audience control over broadcast media (Varan 2005). There is, however, no feedback channel built into allocutionary media. This does not mean that these media lack interactivity. Rather, it is necessary to augment them in other ways, for example through audience measurement systems and marketing surveys and, by embedding telephone-based interactivity into programming (Nightingale & Dwyer 2006; Spurgeon & Goggin 2007; Gould 2007).

Figure 1.1: Typology of cybernetic interaction

Type of Interaction	Pattern of Information Flow	Location of Programmatic Control	Social Relations	Example
Allocation	one-to-many	core	representative	broadcast media
Consultation	one-to-many	periphery	representative	print media
Conversation	one-to-one	periphery	participatory	telephone
Registration	one-to-one	core	representative	subscription media; utilities
Digital	multi-patterned	dynamic	representative; participatory; intercreative	Internet; cell phone

Adapted from Bordewijk and van Kaam 2003; Mielke 2002.

The type of interaction supported by newspapers, magazines, and multichannel television services, is described as ‘consultation’ because consumers exercise programmatic control in selecting information from a pre-determined menu of content, usually for the cost of a one-off purchase or an ongoing subscription. As with allocution, control is also centralized. Peer-to-peer interaction is not supported and audiences are generally indirectly represented in the content and social relations of these media. As with allocutionary media, the lack of in-built feedback loops is re-mediated through other systems.

The reciprocal flows of interaction that occur in telephone and telecommunications networks are described as ‘conversation’. Control in conversational systems is far more distributed than in either allocution or consultation. Anyone connected to the network can initiate or terminate an interaction at any time with anyone else, or any other node, in the network. Consumers of these systems are configured more actively as users rather than passive audiences or readerships because these communication media rely upon participation and direct representation. This type of interactivity is of particular interest in this discussion, and is one to which I frequently return.

Telecommunications networks and subscription media also exhibit the functionality of another type of interactivity, which Bordewijk and van Kaam described as ‘registration’. This refers to the remote monitoring, information capture and datamining capabilities of communication systems that are essential, in the first instance, to bill for services and collect receipts. Registration systems harvest information from consumers rather than issue them with it, and are designed to represent consumers, not facilitate direct participation or representation. Programmatic control over the collection of information resides with the registration system, not the consumer. This type of interactivity is extremely important to new media environments because it can generate incredibly rich data. The importance of this type of interaction to enabling the co-adaptation of advertising and new media is discussed elsewhere (Spurgeon 2007). Importantly, registration also augments conversation in new media environments. It is often also used to substitute for conversation in advertising and new media.

As Bordewijk and van Kaam also acknowledge, most communication services and networks actually exhibit multiple patterns of information flow and interaction. The allocutionary features of agenda-setting newspapers are often more prominent than their consultation features, especially when compared to magazines that are usually targeted to narrower niche markets. Telecommunications networks rely on registration and conversation, and multichannel television systems principally deploy a mix of consultation and registration. In digital networked media such as the Internet, programmatic control is highly malleable. It can be dynamically deployed to support all types of interactivity. Control over programmability can also be distributed and networked. Digital, networked ICTs such as the Internet and cell phones can be programmed to support multi-patterned flows of information and a dynamic mix of types of interaction. This dynamic, multi-patterned, interactivity includes explicit conversational capabilities that enable peer-to-peer exchange, direct participation and representation. This capacity for conversational interaction distinguishes the new media from modern mass media, and is crucial to understanding the breadth and depth of consumer interest in these new media.

Bordewijk and van Kaam’s scheme has been widely taken up in media and communication studies as a foundation for more detailed theoretical work on the human interface with communications technologies (for example, Jensen 1999; Downes and

McMillan 2000; McMillan 2002; Meikle 2002; Van Dijk 2006). Importantly, there is general agreement that the cybernetic properties of communication systems do not in any way account for the cultural complexity of meaning or the social significance of mediated communication. Approaching the same problem of interactivity from the perspective of cultural studies, Henry Jenkins helpfully proposes 'participation' to differentiate the practices and protocols of communication in living cultures from the interactive affordances of engineered systems (Jenkins 2006, 133). Where interactivity is a property of non-human actors, participation is a characteristic of human actors. Interactivity describes the technical possibilities of communication in closed systems, while participation denotes the will to communicate in cultural and social contexts. Thus, conversation comprises at least the two interrelated dimensions of interaction and participation.

Mediated communication is inherently a collaborative and socially constitutive process involving both human and non-human actors. Yet the interactive capabilities of different communication systems have different consequences for social participation. The possibilities of participation in markets, media and consumer culture that conversational media facilitate are qualitatively different to those of allocutionary mass media. Users are able to blend conversation with other types of interactivity to further their own interests, and those of their social networks, in and through direct participation. New media environments extend the possibilities of conversational interaction and participation to new levels of consumer productivity. They encompass direct involvement in the selection and distribution of media content, the appropriation and transformation of media content to create new content, and the generation and circulation of original content.

The significance of the productive potential of conversational interaction and participation, especially as it is routinely encountered in the World Wide Web, demands further analysis. As a type of interactivity, conversation is more open-ended than allocution, consultation, or registration. It differs from other types of interactivity to the extent that it is not an end in itself, 'but a means to a creative end' (Mielke 2002, 32). As the Coke Mentos case illustrates, participants in conversational interaction can deploy an extensive array of media literacies in these processes, which exceed the ordinary meaning of conversation. They stretch it to include the collaborative creation and circulation of very elaborate performances and media productions, and are not limited to texts, images, or hyperlinks. In considering the growing expanse of conversation-based practices, Graham Meikle proposes 'intercreativity' to describe the social relations of these developments in conversational interaction (Meikle 2002, 32). This term draws upon the vision of the HTML and World Wide Web creator, Tim Berners-Lee, who believes the Web is a medium for convivial intercreativity, not just interactivity. Meikle suggests that intercreativity can be used to differentiate the more complex forms of online creative collaboration. As Figure 1.1 indicates, intercreativity is a useful way to differentiate the social relations of new media from earlier forms of conversational media. Arguably, it is in the practices of intercreative participation, that we are seeing some of the most interesting and challenging developments associated with the new media of mass conversation.

In their survey of the World Wide Web as a cultural phenomenon, Richard Burnett and David P. Marshall identify the 'promise of production' as a key factor to understanding its success (Burnett and Marshall 2003, 75; 201). The 'will to produce' (201) that is now evident in the uptake of the World Wide Web is not exclusive to the Web. Rather, prior to the Internet the capacity for widespread and routine participation in cultural production was frustrated by the control architectures of mass media which constrained interaction and

participation in quite specific ways. Notable German culture and media critics have argued that the dominance of the transmission model in mass media and markets in the twentieth century was a consequence of deliberate choices made by governments and capital. They sought to limit the participatory capacity of citizens to talk back and of consumers to be producers, by constituting them as audiences (Enzensberger 1974; Brecht 1979). These perspectives were clearly influenced by a personal familiarity with the instrumental importance of allocution to the rise of European fascism and authoritarianism in the first part of the twentieth century. They also point to the immense political and economic investment concentrated in transmission as potent obstacles to diverse communication ecologies. Cultural studies have also highlighted the ways in which audiences constantly circumvent these constraints upon interactivity and participation (Marshall 2004) and suggest that we should not be surprised by the speed at which mass markets for conversational media have developed.

The desire for ‘tools for conviviality’, which could be used by people to ‘invest the world’ with meaning, was also articulated by Ivan Illich (1985). Illich coined this term in the early 1970s to describe those tools, technologies, and techniques, ‘which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his or her vision’ (21). Industrial tools, Illich argued, ‘deny this possibility to those who use them and they allow their designers to determine the meaning and expectations of others’ (21). In opposing convivial and industrial tools Illich points to the fluidity of the technology/society relation. When extrapolated to mediated communication, Illich’s analysis suggests that the extent to which a culture is shaped by its media and communication systems is strongly influenced by the ease with which these systems can be used for individual and collective expression. The Internet is a highly convivial medium (Lim 2003) and consequently a major source of user-led innovation in the development of communication tools (Tuomi 2002). Mobile phones support anywhere, anytime conversation. Because they are proprietary networks, however, the possibilities of user-led innovation are severely constrained (Goggin & Spurgeon 2007). Where mass media have been crucially important to shaping mass markets and mass society, conversational media theoretically enhance a multiplicity of market and social relations.

For much of the twentieth century, transmission – allocution in Bordewijk and van Kaam’s scheme – was the prevailing model of communication, not conviviality. Not only did it dominate in the development of mass media technologies and institutions but it also shaped the professional communication disciplines of advertising, journalism, marketing, and public relations. The transmission view had the effect of naturalizing unequal interaction between senders and receivers as the commonsense view of communication (Carey 1992). It legitimated restrictions on participation to those occasions where media gatekeepers chose to accommodate systemic augmentation, for example letters to the editor, talk-back radio, or the more recent development of tele-voting in television shows. It also legitimated the concentration of the systemic and social power of communication in the sender, presupposing a high degree of certainty, if not rigidity, in wider social relations whereby, ‘producers produce and communicate, while consumers receive and consume’ (Varey 2002, 20).

The coincidence of the transmission view of communication and markets with Coca Cola’s initial response to the Coke Mentos experiments drew some sharp comments from a number of marketing blogs (for example Adrants 2006). Coke brand managers did not initially consider the quirkiness of the consumer-generated Coke Mentos images to be well-aligned to the Coke brand personality. One brand manager was reported in the *Wall Street*

Journal as having said that she preferred to think that consumers would do what Coke intended, and drink the product rather than perform experiments with it (Vranica and Terhune 2006). The contrast with the more nimble, any-publicity-is-good-publicity response of Mentos was striking. Mentos was praised in online marketing networks for responding so favorably to its capture by the public imagination.

The implications of media and communications systems are not easily fathomed when interactivity is considered in isolation from the practices of participation. The disjunction that arises between communication conceived in de-contextualized systemic terms, and communication conceived in terms of culture, becomes even more pronounced as conversational media technologies become more ubiquitous. Conversational media confirm the passive receiver of mass media to be as much a fiction as the compliant consumer of mass markets. Despite its incongruence with conversational media, the transmission view of communication is proving hard to shake. Richard Varey observes that 'marketing thinking and practice has not more generally adopted the participatory conception of communication' (75). He provides one of the very few managerial accounts of marketing which views communication 'as inherently collaborative and cooperative visible behavior, rather than as merely personal cognition' (24) and argues that conversation, not transmission, is the core mode of communication in markets and society. Because mass media producers, distributors, marketers and communication professionals, including advertising agencies, 'want to maintain their traditional dominance over media content' (Jenkins 2003, 286) they struggle with the social implications of participation that accompany the rise of conversation-driven media and communications at the opening of the twenty-first century.

The social consequences and implications of networked conversational participation, especially intercreativity, are far-reaching (Benkler 2006). For advertising and advertiser-funded media the impacts of mass conversation are also enormously varied. The destabilizing effects of new media on agency services and structures, as well as incumbent 'main' media markets and revenues (so-called because they are the media from which advertising agencies have historically derived commissions) are a source of on-going anxiety in the trade press. The conversational paradigm has also been successfully embraced as a foundation for new market opportunities by e-businesses and new commercial media, such as Amazon.com and Google. Despite the setback of the 2000-2001 dotcom market crash, new media start-ups continue to enter the market in proliferating numbers. Many appear to strengthen the position of individuals in the 'conversational haggle' of the 'virtual agora' that is the Internet, where flows of communication, commerce, culture and politics intersect (Burnett and Marshall 2003, 106).

New Media Studies and the commercialization of new conversational media

Cluetrain Manifesto co-authors Rick Levine, Christopher Locke, Doc Searles and David Weinberger were in the first wave of new media marketers to grasp the role of Internet-enabled conversation. They recognized the Internet as a particularly efficient means of communication that would empower those people, 'so long ignored, so long invisible, that....they're figuring out what to do with the Internet much faster than government agencies, academic institutions, media conglomerates, and Fortune-class companies' (Locke 2000, 175). Sociological studies show that Internet users are far more historically and culturally specific than this analysis admits (for example, Castells 2001). Although exhilarating in its challenges, the underlying *Cluetrain* claim – that only civilized forms of

capital which are willing and able to act on the understanding that ‘markets are conversations’ (Locke et. al. 2000, ix) will prosper in the rapidly developing network economy – was also inadequately problematized. Nevertheless, another important *Cluetrain* proposition – that workers and customers would lose no time in making up for the ‘two-hundred-year-long industrial interruption of the human conversation ... both inside companies and in the marketplace’ (Weinberger 2000, 163) – is now daily borne out by numerous examples, including those discussed in this book.

This line of thinking within marketing communication about the implications of conversational media continues to develop. It has since been schematically elaborated upon in the Web 2.0 approach to making conversational media commercially productive. Popularized by Tim O’Reilly (2005), Web 2.0 broadly differentiates those Internet businesses that survived and prospered following the collapse in the market value of technology stocks in 2000, from those that did not (Web 1.0). Where Web 1.0 firms viewed the Internet as a platform for publishing and selling, Web 2.0 firms, such as Amazon.com and Google, used it as a services interface. They understood the primary importance of developing web services to facilitate advertiser and consumer participation and interaction. They turned away from the commercial mass media model and the associated ‘push’ techniques of advertising. Instead, Web 2.0 firms understood that consumers would seek out advertising when they needed or wanted it, and found ways to integrate advertising unobtrusively across the Web.

Web 2.0 firms also grasped the changed economies of scope and scale that the Internet opened up. For example, the inventories of web-based firms were no longer limited by the physical constraints of the shopfront. It was possible to operate in micro-markets as well as mass markets. Furthermore sales in micro-markets came to be cumulatively more valuable than sales in mass markets. Consumer expertise and knowledge of markets, products and services could also be tapped by advertisers and consumers alike. These Web 2.0 features have also been popularized by *Wired* journalist, Chris Anderson (2004) as ‘the Long Tail’ of the network economy.

Both the *Cluetrain* and Web 2.0 propositions are highly suggestive of new ways for thinking about how Web-based markets might be constituted, how the relations of new Web-based markets might be developed and maintained, and how these new markets might be, indeed are, perceived and used by many consumers and advertisers alike. Web 2.0 propositions also highlight the extent to which advertising and marketing communication is still hamstrung by ideas of transmission, and draw attention to the radically disruptive potential of conversational media. For these reasons Web 2.0 is being debated with a great deal of seriousness in new media and communication studies.² Both *Cluetrain* and Web 2.0 can also be understood as the brand propositions of self-made marketing communication gurus in a highly competitive industry where research is the industry’s own currency for market differentiation. The question for critical researchers is how to engage with this kind of branding research.

It is interesting to consider why Web 2.0 has not been immediately discounted in new media studies as a product of the unworthy discourse of marketing communication. Critical political economists of media and communications could be predicted to argue that this development is further evidence of the complicity of new media and cultural studies in the

² See, for example, the list of Web 2.0 publications being maintained on the twopointtouch blog, available at: <http://twopointtouch.com/2006/10/31/10-free-ebooks-about-web-20/> (accessed 10/8/07).

relentless colonisation of social space and the commoditization of culture by capital (Graham 2006). Cultural studies critics might be predicted to counter with the claim that there needs to be a more nuanced, but no less critical, appreciation of the historical contribution that advertising and marketing communication disciplines have made to understanding the social specificity and complexity of consumption and markets.

Kathy Myers (1986) argued in her analysis of the major economic critiques of advertising made from both the left and right of the political spectrum over the last century, that advertising 'comes nearer to a research-based theory of consumption' than any other discipline (48). Modern economic thought, from which modern marketing sprang, has regarded consumption as a reaction to 'that which has already been produced' (130). However, one of the key discoveries of advertising has been that commodities and needs, like consumption, 'are social in origin' (131). The strength of advertising lies in the fact that it escapes the historical 'intellectual division of labour' (Slater 2002, 71) that plagues most academic approaches taken to advertising, consumption, and markets. Ultimately, advertising seeks to integrate its economic and cultural roles, and the best advertising disregards this disciplinary compartmentalisation. Advertising's success depends upon its ability to match both these aspects of social life to the particular relations of production and consumption of concern at any given time.

Both critical political economy and cultural perspectives offer valuable insights on the problems of advertising and marketing communication, but a problem that many political economy critiques have not yet adequately addressed is the presumption that consumers are systematically duped by advertising and its ideological influences on commercial media (Myers 1986, 204). New media studies tend to inherit from cultural studies the resistance to any presumption that media consumers are unknowing participants in communicative relationships with commercial media and advertisers. Critical traditions that proceed from an assumption that the social relations of mass communication in capitalist mass societies are inequitable and unfair, are not always helpful for navigating the surprising terrain of conversational media. While questions of media citizenship are a central theme of new media studies, the new economics of information and networks are also compelling new media dynamics. For these reasons, new media studies seem quite curious about the window of opportunity that marketing communication disciplines might open for applying critical insights to the imagining and social shaping of economically viable, convivial, new media, markets, and citizen consumers. Identifying the limits to this coincidence of the interests in critical enquiry in new media, and professional marketing communication practices is, undoubtedly, an important challenge for new media studies. Rational self-interest in profit or material gain explains only a small proportion of consumption practices, including those encountered in conversational media, but it remains the core motivation of commercial enterprises.

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