

The Hybridisation of Advertising Under Convergence- from Text to Paratext

Abstract

The strategic attention of global brands is shifting from traditional mass media advertising to hybrid genres such as branded content, product placement, brand blogs, Facebook advertising, sponsored TV 'pods', and 'native' advertising. In this conceptual paper we attempt to open up a cultural level of conceptualisation of this phenomenon by drawing on literary critic Gérard Genette's (2010) work on paratexts. We suggest that paper-based paratexts, both peritextual and epitextual, such as titles, prefaces, footnotes, authors' correspondence, serialisations, parodies and reviews can be seen as analogous in some respects to the hybrid advertising forms noted above, since they are dependent for their existence on, but are ostensibly secondary to, the primary texts of mass media advertising. We suggest that the analogy of the paratext articulates the iterative, provisional, participative, polysemous, liminal and intertextual character of much contemporary brand communication under media convergence.

Introduction

For almost 100 years, advertising has been conceptualised as a sales message the rhetorical appeal of which hinges on giving the consumer a compelling reason to buy. John E. Kennedy's (1924) notion of 'reason why' advertising, later to be framed as the Unique Selling Proposition (USP) by Rosser Reeves (McDonald and Scott, 2007), is still typically presented in business and management text books in the context of a linear model of behavioural responses (Attention, Interest, Desire, and Action, or AIDA). AIDA was originally a conceptualisation of personal selling that was adapted for advertising by Edward Strong (1929) and Harry D. Kitson (1921). The sales model of advertising remains highly influential but there have been many alternative theorisations of advertising in the academic research journals (e.g. Sherry, 1987; Stern, 1993a,b; Scott, 1990; Mick and Buhl, 1992; O'Donohoe, 1994; Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Heath and Feldwick, 2008). Works such as these offer penetrating insights from anthropological, psychological and literary theoretical perspectives but there is a need for more culturally informed conceptualisations of contemporary advertising communication that embrace the profound changes in the production as well as the consumption of advertising since the rise of social media.

In the convergence era (Jenkins, 2008; Meikle and Young, 2011) characterised by a 'third wave' (Toffler, 2008) of economic and technological development, the character of consumption is profoundly changed as end users become quasi-producers in an electronically mediated economy of brands. The notion of the passive consumer, if it was ever apt, is radically transformed under convergence into the engaged consumer. Advertising communication under convergence is designed not merely to inspire but to activate the consumer (Peñaloza and Thompson, 2014) into sharing, liking, Tweeting, chatting, and perhaps even buying. The need to engage consumers via social media has facilitated the rise of share-able hybrid advertising genres such as native advertising, brand blogs and branded content that are difficult to conceptualise as sales messages. They are hybrid forms because, for example, native advertising is journalism, crossed with advertorial: brand blogs are often produced by journalists, but the content is flecked with sponsorship and PR: branded content is many things but can include video content that is, in effect, product placement crossed with celebrity endorsement, but with full creative control for the brand.

What is more, these hybrid advertising styles frequently contain no product information and no explicit promotional message, and they feature content that may have no obvious connection with the brand. Indeed, not only the new genres of content but many mass media advertisements now adopt the genre conventions of entertainment or info-tainment rather than selling (Thielman, 2014), making even many traditional advertisements difficult to distinguish from other forms of entertainment content. As entertainment becomes the dominant idiom for media brands (Wolf, 2003) mass media advertising is becoming creatively closer to branded content.

In this paper we attempt to open up a new conceptualisation, building on the extensive tradition of applications of literary theory to cultural perspectives on marketing and advertising (e.g. Stern, 1993; Ahuvia, 1998). Our approach draws on the work of Genette (2010) on paratexts as we try to characterise a putative shift in marketing practices from mass media advertising toward non-advertising promotion and branded content. This shift is both quantitative and qualitative in character, since it reflects not only a realignment of global adspend but also a change in the creative logic of promotional strategy. Brand communication is no longer focused mainly on the primary texts of advertising, such as the traditional mass media advertising campaign, but is, instead, distributed through secondary texts, paratexts in our analogy, which manifest in media content that has an intertextual relationship with the brand.

Genette (2010) divides paratexts into two main categories. Peritexts are those texts that are constructed or legitimated by the author and/or the publisher and published within the book as accessories to the primary text, such as the title, publisher's blurb, preface, foreword and afterword, cover notes, footnotes and endnotes, and dedications. Those texts with a paratextual relationship to the main text that occur outside the book, such as reviews, abridgements, serialisations, author's correspondence or margin notes on first drafts, he terms epitexts. Applying the analogy to advertising, the primary text would be the brand in its primary manifestations, such as the product or service tangibles, the packaging, and the mass media advertising. Secondary or paratexts could include peritexts that are authored by or approved by the author or publisher, such as branded content, product placement and native advertising commissioned by the brand but ostensibly secondary to it, and epitexts, such as consumer comment threads on brand Facebook pages, customer

reviews published on review websites and fora, critical journalism in the mass media, or take-offs, parodies and satires.

The reason why there is a need for a new cultural level of analysis of advertising is because the prevailing logic in advertising practice has changed. The loud hailer model of mass media advertising that trumpets a USP is, in the social media era, seen as too unsophisticated, too unidirectional and too costly to have the strategic weight it once did. It is being supplanted by the brand building logic of transmedia (Jenkins, 2008; Jenkins et al. 2013) campaigns that are manifest in many forms of content that are designed to engage, rather than merely reach, the relevant audiences. Reflecting this trend, non-traditional forms of advertising, especially digital and branded content, are driving global growth in adspend. In particular, short videos that can be shared on social media are leading this trend¹ while digital advertising in all its forms is now outstripping TV in global adspend growth². Not all global brands have followed Coca Cola's 'Content 2020'³ with the same commitment (although many have, for example Unilever set up a branded content unit)⁴ but the Coca Cola initiative, launched in 2012 and the subject of two explanatory films on YouTube, indicates the extent to which branded content and brand storytelling have caught the imagination of major global brands. Sales messages are still important at the retail level, but the more strategic goal of building a brand's long term market share by increasing its presence and salience in social media has become a priority for many global brands.

It may be the case that the movement away from mass media advertising into digital and branded content is also driven by hard-headed issues such as by the perceived accountability of digital and programmatic advertising and the rise in mass media costs per thousand target consumers reached. There may also be a shift in strategic logic away from the 100-years old AIDA sales model of advertising toward a brand-building model of advertising as publicity (Ehrenberg et al. 2002). The outcome seems to be that the brand

¹ <http://www.thedrum.com/news/2015/03/30/online-video-drive-44-jump-global-ad-spend-2015-brands-move-budgets-away-tv> accessed 1.1.17

² <http://digiday.com/agencies/charts-forecasting-2017/> accessed 31.12.16

³ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LerdMmWjU_E accessed 31.12.16

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http://www.digitalstrategyconsulting.com/intelligence/2016/10/unilever_plans_inhouse_branded_content_division.php accessed 30.12.16

accountants and the advertising creatives, if still not seeing eye to eye, might be meeting half way. A piece of branded content that does not have a sales message is easier to sell to a main board if it can be accompanied by impressive social media data.

The need for an inclusive form of theorisation would be disputed by some practitioners who insist that the traditional categories of non-advertising promotion, formerly known as ‘below-the-line promotion’, such as branded content, product placement, sponsorship, public relations, native advertising and so forth, have a specific scope and meaning, even if they are the subject of endless definitional wrangles within the industry. For example, the precise meaning of one of the latest hit phrases in marketing, branded content⁵⁶⁷ is keenly debated⁸. From a theoretical perspective, the lines demarcating categories of the promotional mix are becoming increasingly blurred under media convergence. There are profound implications for advertising, brand marketing and consumer culture, but theorisations lack purchase because of the fragmented nature of knowledge in this area. There is a need for a conceptual take on this phenomenon that gathers some of its major characteristics and facilitates a more culturally resonant analysis. We attempt to open up a possible route forward in the foregoing. We will begin by elaborating on the literary notion of the paratext and its relevance to contemporary promotional communication.

Text and Paratexts in Academic Marketing Research

The analogy between literary paratexts and marketing communication may not be immediately clear, but, as noted above, there are many precedents for using literary criticism to analyse marketing phenomena, notwithstanding ongoing debates about the proper scope of the notion of text as an analytical concept (Stanitzek, 2005). Stern (1989) advocated the use of literary criticism to enrich consumer research and, later, used it to analyse the history of marketing thought (Stern, 1990) and to deconstruct advertisements (Stern, 1991: 1993a; Stern and Schroeder, 1993b; Scott, 1994). Other uses of literary

⁵ <https://contently.com/strategist/2014/04/18/the-best-branded-content-of-2014-so-far/> accessed 3.1.17

⁶ <http://www.thedrum.com/news/2016/12/21/red-pills-branded-video-review-the-best-branded-content-2016> accessed 3.1.17

⁷ <http://bobcm.net/category/features/> accessed 3.1.17

⁸ <http://www.contagious.com/blogs/news-and-views/15693212-wtf-is-branded-content-it-s-complicated> accessed 3.1.17

concepts to analyse marketing include Hirschman's (1983) analysis of marketing ideology, and Brown's (1997; 1999; Brown, Stevens and MacLaran, 1999) analyses of the writing styles used by authors in the marketing literature. Other analyses of the language and rhetoric of marketing writing have been conducted by, for example, Sawyer, Lara and Xu (2008), Tonks (2002), Cook (2002) Tanaka (1994), Hackley (2003) and Brownlie (1997). Marketing and consumer practices have been analysed using literary approaches in, for example, Scott's (1990; 1994) analysis of the rhetoric of advertising jingles and her use of reader-response theory in consumer research, Ahuvia's (1998) examination of the role of literary theory in analysing social criticism of advertising, Miles's (2013) analysis of the rhetoric of persuasion in various marketing fields, and various analyses of the uses of language and rhetoric in constructing practical marketing expertise (e.g. Ardley, 2005; Svensson, 2007; Nilsson, 2015).

The literary paratext embraces the texts around and about the literary work that constitutes the primary text. Paratexts include the texts noted above and also the author's name on the work, the title of the work, the commentaries, illustrations, margin notes on original manuscripts, reviews, précis and criticism, sequels, and publisher's notes. Literary criticism has traditionally focused on the analysis of primary texts, including novels, plays and poems, while the associated paratexts, texts about the book, that are linked with but separate from the primary text, are treated as sources of insight into the primary text rather than as texts in themselves. Gerard Genette (2010) showed that analysis of the paratexts that surround the primary texts can be a worthwhile focus of study for generating insights into the construction of literary meaning since the paratexts place the primary text within a cultural context and thereby are necessary to the various constructions of meaning placed on the primary text. In this sense, we argue that brands have many potential sources of meaning, and the various genres of branded content encountered by consumers all serve to contextualise the brand and inform its cultural meaning.

As we note above, Genette (2010) breaks paratexts down into peritexts, those within the book, such as title, subtitle, publisher's cover notes and so forth, and epitexts, texts about the text but exterior to it, such as critiques, interviews with the author, abridged serialisations, advertisements for the book, and any subsequent copies, parodies or other forms of imitation of the primary text. Epitexts may be public, such as publisher's

advertisements, or private, including the private correspondence of the author, handwritten margin notes on original drafts that are later reproduced in biographies or literary analyses, personal diaries or early drafts. Paratexts are important because they contextualise primary texts and consequently influence how those texts are read and interpreted.

Genette (2010) makes use of additional distinctions in his literary criticism including hypertextuality. Hypertextuality seems to have some overlap with epitextuality since it includes all subsequent texts superimposed over the primary texts, like parody, pastiche, and imitation. For simplicity, we will refer to paratextuality to embrace epitexts, peritexts, and hypertexts. The key point, we feel, is that the paratext informs the cultural meaning of the primary text, while branded content and other forms of hybrid advertising text inform the cultural meaning of the brand.

As Genette (2010) states, the paratext "...is the means by which a text makes a book of itself and proposes itself as such to its readers, and more generally to the public. Rather than with a limit or a sealed frontier, we are dealing in this case with a threshold...between the text and what lies outside it, a zone not just of transition, but of transaction; the privileged site of a pragmatics and of a strategy..." (Ibid. p.261).

A focus on paratexts, then, illuminates the mechanisms through which readers engage with texts to actively construct meanings. The paratext exists by virtue of the original work, but it also confers meaning on that work by supplying a context within which the work is understood. In literature, one might encounter paratexts before encountering the primary text, such as advertisements for the book, reviews or works of criticism, abridgements, or even comments of friends. Indeed, many people know classic texts only by their paratexts, having never read the original work. Similarly, brand paratexts facilitate the cultural construction of brand meaning for many consumers who might never directly experience the brand itself. For example, many people who will never own one understand the cultural meaning of a Mercedes-Benz car from its paratexts in the form of songs, movies, and other media content.

Convergence culture and the shift in advertising from text to paratext

We live in technologically driven, socially mediated communications landscape variously defined as a participatory (Jenkins, 2008) or a collaborative (Shirky, 2010) economy, by the consumption of experiences rather than products (Gilmore and Pine, 2011; Rifkin, 2000), by the battle for the consumer's attention amidst a fragmented media landscape (Davenport, 2001), and by a merger of advertising with entertainment so deep it constitutes an entertainment economy (Wolf, 2003; Sayre, 2007), amongst many other characterisations. In this new media environment, the traditional distinctions between promotional media channels and genres are, as we note above, blurring into new, hybridised forms of promotional communication. As we note above, this reflects a putative shift in the prevailing logic of advertising and promotion away from the dominance of discrete, explicitly sales-orientated promotional communications in mass media, toward implicitly promotional, brand-building vignettes with a transmedia (Jenkins, 2008) execution. These vignettes are often free-standing and inherently entertaining (Lehu, 2008). The brand often has a major role, for example, as producer/director (in sponsored content), as star (in contracted product placement) or as script consultant (in advergaming or digital placement in computer games). The transmedia storytelling (Pratten, 2015) element has been imported, and perhaps Bowdlerised, from media brands to apply to the advertising and promotion of anything that can be branded. In the media branding of, for example, of a movie or book, the transmedia storytelling might consist of free-standing but connected stories linked by theme, setting and characters. For non-media brands, the storytelling might be discrete and discontinuous, linked only by the guiding narrative of the brand values.

As we note above, under convergence the strategic priorities of brand communication have changed. For example, there is greater concern with creative themes that are 'spreadable' (Jenkins et al, 2013) and shareable across social media platforms. Today, we are seeing a shift in strategic focus towards transmedia brand storytelling (Jenkins, 2008; Pratten, 2015) that is iterated or serialised across multiple channels and genres of branded content and non-advertising promotion. Many of these promotional sub-genres, such as native advertising, brand blogs, vlogs and social media pages, personalised programmatic advertising, product placement, sponsored events and media content and public relations

initiatives, are open to consumer participation and collaboration (Shirky, 2010) through sharing, commenting, contributing, liking, re-Tweeting, or parodying. Indeed, the potential for collaborative engagement by participants other than the owner(s) of the intellectual copyright of the brand is one of the key features that gives these promotional texts a paratextual (epitextual) character. They are not definitive expressions of the brand authored by the owners of the intellectual property in the brand. They are communications produced by the brand owners or by intermediaries or consumers, and they are linked (only) by their intertextual dependence on or reference to, the brand. Many are also polysemic, in the sense that they do not carry an explicit and direct sales message but, rather, tell a truncated story that, by inference, relates to and reflects the values and priorities of, the brand that paid for the content.

All, including brand-produced media content, vines or video clips of sponsored events, sponsored blogs or news features, comments from consumers and so on, refer to the brand, often implicitly rather than explicitly, but none could be conceived as a primary text. They are iterative and provisional, and their often polysemous character invites further iteration. They are ostensibly, peripheral to, and dependent for their existence on, the primary texts of the brand. The primary brand text subsists merely as an intertextual reference to an essence or to foundational values that reside in another, primary text, perhaps in a brand strategy document locked in the safe at head office, or even as an imaginary text locked inside the mind of a visionary proprietor.

Forms of paratextual advertising

Paratextual advertising is not new. There are many forms that pre-date the social media era. For example, product placement (Balasubramanian, 1994) is a quintessentially hybridised promotional form since it borrows genre conventions from advertising, celebrity endorsement and sponsorship. A character or star in a TV show, char show or movie, or indeed in a computer game or a novel, might use or speak of a brand on a scene in a way that is not overtly promotional but is part of the plot development or characterisation. Moving from product placement to branded video content, some global brands create short movies aired on social media that are essentially product placement vehicles since there is no promotional element other than the presence of the brand as the silent star of the story,

as car brand BMW and Jaguar have done. For example, the latest offering from BMW in a long series of action movies⁹ starring major movies stars such as Clive Owen and Madonna , called The Escape, has garnered more than 5 million views on YouTube in a few months¹⁰. Many of these views are, no doubt, by people who will never buy a BMW, but the movies contribute to the brand's presence and mystique. Completing the circle, many contemporary TV advertisements are in effect pieces of entertaining film in which the brand appears as a scene prop or as a visual symbol. Many examples can be seen from amongst the Superbowl ads in the USA, or the UK's Christmas retail TV ads, many of which are designed to entertain and to be shared and commented upon via social media. In news media, 'native' advertising refers to what was once termed advertorial, the difference being that the sponsored content is presented as if it were editorial, looking 'native; to the page, but with a subtle and unobtrusive cue designating it as a paid for piece of journalism. In some cases, native advertising does indeed consist in genuine journalism, but it is sponsored by a brand for PR purposes. Advertising, then, can look much like branded video content, or, like a clip of a film in which the brand was placed, or, it can look much like news editorial. Promotional genres now reference each other in a tightly intertextual system.

The lines that distinguish promotional genres are blurring not only because of changes in the commercial logic of brand communication but also because of the imperative for cross-platform creative executions. The commonalities between the examples above are A) they are inherently entertaining to both target consumers and non-target consumers, thus broadening the brand's presence, for strategic reasons that will be touched upon below, and B) they can easily be shared on social media.

As yet, the tendency for genres of promotional communication to merge into each other has been noted by media researchers such as Grainge and Thompson (2015) but has not been fully theorised by in marketing and consumer research. Even practitioners are struggling to articulate the underlying themes that connect the countless hybrid genre variations that are evolving. Any attempt to do so is usually met with definitional objections, but one nebulous term which attempts to capture the commonality of this diverse yet connected category on non-advertising promotion is proving fairly enduring, and that is the catch-all term branded

⁹ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=bmw+the+hire+series accessed 31.12.16

¹⁰ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jzUFCQ-P1Zg> accessed 31.12.16

content. We suggest that branded content deserves closer attention since it seems to be a quintessentially paratextual vehicle for hybridised advertising.

Branded content and the paratext

For many practitioners, branded content means something quite specific that distinguishes it from non-advertising promotion genres such as native advertising, product placement and sponsorship. However, they generally disagree on definitions and the term is used here in a spirit of inclusivity. Branded content, broadly conceived as a superordinate category for media content that contains and/or is paid for by, a brand, seems to share five defining features. Firstly, even though it can be conceived on any medium or platform, it is typically accessed via a screen (Grainge and Thompson, 2015) on a TV, a laptop, tablet, smartphone, or other mobile device. Secondly, consumers are given opportunities to participate in conversations with, in and/or around the content, by engaging with it, sharing it, and/or commenting about it on social media. Thirdly, it is conceived as non-interruptive, in the sense that it is not usually distinguished from editorial content and is seamlessly integrated into the consumer's experience of mediated entertainment or information. Fourth, it is inherently informative, entertaining, amusing or otherwise diverting regardless of the viewer's level of interest in the brand. Branded content often passes as editorial content and is ostensibly seen and consumed as such by many readers/viewers who may not necessarily pick up on the branding. Finally, the narrative conventions are far broader than for traditional advertising and promotion (notwithstanding the trend for some traditional advertising spots to mimic branded content's subtle storytelling tone and style). Branded content might make use of journalists, feature writers, film production teams, animators, scriptwriters, gag writers, graphic artists, actors- the creative possibilities seem to be limitless.

The various examples touched upon above, and there are many more, share the commonality that they depend on the brand intertextually for their existence, and indeed for their true meaning, but they do not offer definitive and explicit authorial statements of brand values or attributes. As we note, they may not even mention the brand. They operate as secondary texts, iterating the brand story, perhaps with another set of characters or a revised plot, but there is always the possibility of a new interpretation and another iteration

further down the narrative highway. In this sense, branded content brings a sense of liminality (Turner, 1969) to the brand- the brand story is moving on in ever more subtle iterations. As Genette (2010) states, paratexts are 'thresholds', which is the same term Turner (1969) uses when describing liminal states. The meaning of the brand is opened up to a possibly new interpretation, just as a liminal (or liminoid) experience opens up the individual to the possibility of a new identity.

Brand paratexts are often created by the owners of the intellectual copyright in the brand, or at least approved by them at arm's length, but they do not constitute primary texts. Advertising sub-genres such as paid-for testimonials on social media, sponsored Tweets, movie and TV show trailers and teasers, sponsors' or TV channel idents, 'director's cut' or 'the making of' videos of ad campaigns, and other evolving forms of marketing content are just a few (more) of the evolving forms of paratextual advertising that are subsumed within a promotional screen industry (Grainge and Johnson, 2015). They are evolving not only to serve changes in media consumption, but also because media production is becoming horizontally integrated in the sense that practitioners in digital marketing, digital design, marketing and consumer research, advertising, direct marketing, television and film production, brand consultancy, script and copywriting are flowing between agencies in the ostensibly different sectors and being deployed on the same integrated projects, sometimes all in the same physical space. The paratextual techniques of promotional communication are becoming less easily differentiated from primary promotional texts in creative content, technical skill, production standards and origin.

Paratextual marketing is by no means novel if it is conceived loosely as non-advertising marketing communication. However, the analogy of the paratext opens up nuanced distinctions between forms that could aid theoretical purchase. Paratextual analysis focuses on spatial, temporal, substantial, pragmatic and functional characteristics (Genette, 2010, p.4). A paratext is assessed on where it is in relation to the primary text, when it takes place, how it is constructed or what form it takes, for and to whom it is addressed, and why, the functions it is intended to perform. In principle, brand paratexts could be categorised by adapting the literary categories of paratexts. Of course, for this to happen there would also need to be a more substantive declaration of what, exactly, constituted the primary texts of a brand.

We hope, then, that we have sketched out the beginning of a new theorisation of the emergence of hybrid advertising forms in the convergence era, drawing on the literary notion of the paratext. We will now offer some concluding points on the possible implications of this nascent theorisation.

Concluding comments

In this speculative paper we have outlined what we feel might be a potentially fruitful starting point for paratextual conceptualisation in brand communication. We feel, though, that the looseness of the analogy is also a strength, in the sense that the paratext as a concept conveys a broad insight about the secondary and intertextual character of much hybridised contemporary advertising. The details of the analogy would, in any case, be difficult to account for accurately since the hybrid forms of paratextual advertising communication are evolving so rapidly. These caveats notwithstanding, our tentative conclusion to this opening iteration of the analogy focuses on three main issues around the practices, ethics, and consumer cultural implications of paratextual advertising.

Firstly, there is a need for greater understanding of the practices of paratextual advertising. To take just one example, branded content, academic research is not even on the page, whilst practitioners are battling over the most resonant (and commercially lucrative) conceptualisation of this new superordinate category for various hybrid advertising forms. For practitioners, mapping the field has implications for skills, recruitment and professional career paths, not to mention for the future of media, advertising and branding agencies. Once professionals understand what is happening in the industry, there is likely to be a shakeout of various agency sectors, and perhaps of entire professions. For example, if native advertising becomes the principal revenue earner for digital news and information, what role remains for the Public Relations professional?

Secondly, there are clearly fraught ethical issues around many forms of paratextual advertising. Epitextual forms such as customer reviews are subject to gaslighting, fake news and outright fraud. There are also broader issues of where and when advertising becomes too embedded in propagandistic styles of communication. For Tofler (1980), each wave of development evolves its own superideology or Zeitgeist which becomes a frame of reference that orients and rationalises values and behaviours. The convergence era has seen

the emergence of 'post truth' politics and the establishment of propaganda as a geopolitical tool in social media. Elliott and Ritson (1997) posit that advertising is (or perhaps, was) the superideology of our time. But advertising itself has evolved under technological and ideological influences into hybrid promotional techniques that now merge with every aspect of mediated information and entertainment. Under these conditions, Holt and Cameron's (2010) cultural branding model seems apposite, since brands are seen as myths informed by ideologies, rather than as bundles of consumer benefits. Paratextual advertising in general seldom makes use of USPs, product or service features, sales pitches or price comparisons. Rather, it weaves the brand intimately yet subtly into the consumer's lived experience of media consumption (or into our mediated experience of consumption) in ways that are often only connected to the brand by an oblique intertextual reference. Paratextuality expresses the Zeitgeist of advertising in the convergence era- we are no longer sold to- we are drawn into a consumer cultural world of which brands are so intimate and taken-for-granted a part that the sale is no longer necessary. The ideological reach of mass media advertising prompted Wernick (1991) to postulate that the West had become a thoroughgoing promotional culture, but instead of being corrupted by advertising's dramatic force, we have become enveloped within its through our engagement with social media. Hybrid forms of paratextual advertising often present as editorial content and there can be little doubt that many readers do not know or care that they are not independent. There are profound ethical dilemmas here that can only be fully grasped through a totalising conceptualisation. An atomistic appraisal of paratextual advertising would appear mischievous but essentially harmless- the ethical questions come into focus when we consider the totality of our experience of mediated news, entertainment and information.

Thirdly, there are questions of how consumer culture is being affected by the proliferation of paratextual information about brands. Is this tendency creating a smokescreen through which clear brand evaluations are becoming ever more difficult? Is it more difficult to hold brands accountable for the communications they create, given the rise of paratextual techniques such as product placement in vlogging content, which is often not declared as such in spite of advertising regulations?¹¹. Are consumers becoming polarised into those

¹¹ <http://theconversation.com/why-product-placement-on-youtube-cant-be-regulated-like-television-34732> accessed 5.1.17

who have a sophisticated grasp of paratextual techniques and are able to read them critically, and those who do not and cannot therefore make critical evaluations of the inferred claims about brands that are contained within paratextual advertising? Do we now occupy a world of commercially driven cognitive disorientation? Brand values are produced iteratively through the aggregated dyad of creative content and reader response. These values are nebulous and indeterminate, and the subjectivity of the reader is valued, rather than the authority of the author. Are there wider, and perhaps negative, implications for citizens, for choice, for democracy?

The analogy of the paratext may not appear compelling to some readers. We hope that, at least, we have illustrated some key points that convey the secondary character of much contemporary advertising. We suggest that the conceptualisation of this phenomenon in hybrid advertising is captured by the paratextual analogy since it embraces a huge range of hybrid advertising practices, epitextual, peritextual, and hypertextual, within one conceptual scheme, and thereby facilitates a cultural scope of analysis. In our concluding comments we have noted some possibly negative implications, but we would end by adding that the emergence of paratextual advertising and the many hybrid forms it takes also has immense possibilities for adding to the well of advertising creativity and enriching consumer experience.

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