

The State of Advertising and Mass Media: Where Are We Headed?

Elizabeth Thomas*

Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky, USA

Introduction

In early October 2016, the editor-in-chief of The Wall Street Journal sent a memo to employees that said, in part, “every story should be as short as it needs to be”. The following week Dow Jones, which owns The Journal, announced an impending newsroom review that would contain “cost-management initiatives”. On October 21, 2016, the Journal employees received another memo stating that it was looking for a “substantial” number of staffers to take buyouts, intimating that layoffs would follow. That’s a tough blow for a scion of American journalism since 1889. With print advertising dropping at an alarming rate, we are hard-pressed to find a newsroom in America that is devoid of tension over the future of advertising-supported media. Now consider the state of broadcast, specifically television advertising. We can look at it in one of two ways. First, that we are in the heyday of high-quality television programming with more superior content than at any time in our history or we can view it as a time of impending doom, with the end of advertising-supported broadcast programming upon us. The facts are that television is being watched more often by more people than at any time in U.S. history. But powerful forces are at play [1].

We cannot deny that the rise in popularity of services like Netflix, Hulu and Amazon Instant Video are changing the broadcast industry. It’s created a conundrum for advertisers and advertising agencies who see the industry being utterly changed by digitization. Digging into these issues and planning for the future has never been more important for professionals in media planning, advertising, marketing or even public relations. Digital disruption is real and it is here to stay. Some may be frightened in light of what Napster and iTunes did to the music industry. Consumers today enjoy a proliferation of devices and screens that gives them the power to serve as their own gatekeepers. It is the all-powerful consumer who decides not only where and when they will consume news and information but exactly how they will be entertained. Standard cable and network broadcasting are lagging behind in the race for viewer loyalty [2].

In recent decades, many communications theorists have subscribed to the Uses and Gratifications Theory which states that the public has the power to pick and choose their channels of information. Previously, the more popular Agenda-Setting Hypothesis credited the power to the communications “source” when it came to deciding what messaging recipients would see. It is time for advertising and marketing practitioners to study what consumers truly want from their technology and programming. Since the late 1990s, television has been the favorite scapegoat of media critics, many of whom predicted the current loss of television ad revenues based on the belief that digital video recorders were “causing” viewers to skip ad messages, thus leading to the general decline of the industry. By allowing viewers to skip advertising, the popularity of the DVR did appear to carry deep implications for both advertisers and television. Add digital proliferation to the mix and broadcast/cable television’s future might appear bleak [3].

Throughout history, the advertising-supported television industry has anticipated each new technological advance with more than a little trepidation. From the first remote control device to VCRs, DVRs and now digital streaming, similarities exist between each of the

technological conveniences which consistently give consumers greater control over television content and viewing. As far back as the 1980s, research concluded that VCR ownership affected leisure-time budgets and overall media consumption in a highly positive manner. The same may be said for digital streaming. In 2004, television viewers using DVR technology to record programming for later viewing were reportedly spending nearly 60% of their total TV time watching programs and skipping up to 92% of commercials. Further study indicated the average DVR user viewed 46% of advertising across all programs watched, similar to results from early VCR ad-skipping studies in the 1980s. Where does this leave advertisers and marketers today?

As anyone who has ever bought a new television or computer knows, technological change is so rapid that your new device is generally outdated by the time you get it out of the box. If advertisers, marketers and agencies are to achieve success in this rapidly changing digital world, they must embrace and understand the changing environment and the changing consumer uses and gratifications. This means more than just understanding technology. It means understanding the far-reaching social ramifications of change and adapting to meet future consumer needs. People will always need and want news and information just as they are hard-wired to seek ways to be entertained. When consumers adopt new services and technologies (i.e., Netflix, Hulu, Amazon Instant Video), print and broadcast outlets must re-evaluate how and what they are offering and adapt accordingly. When Gutenberg invented the moveable-type printing press in 1455, many predicted that it was the end of handwritten text. In fact, it had quite the opposite effect. Naysayers also claimed that television and television advertising would be destroyed by the invention of the VCR and then the DVR, yet television and TV advertising have thrived for many more decades. We can also note that audio books and downloadable digital books have not destroyed book sales [4].

The future of advertising is undergoing change. If history prevails, the digital revolution will lead to positive growth for professionals who stay true to serving the needs of consumers. This revolution has profoundly affected the professional lives of those working in marketing, advertising and public relations. It has resulted in the advent of new technologies that enable consumers to choose when, where and how they consume print, digital and broadcast content. Traditional media is reinventing itself in order to remain viable. But regardless

*Corresponding author: Elizabeth Thomas, Murray State University, Murray, Kentucky, USA, Tel: 270 809 5441; E-mail: ethomas@murraystate.edu

Received November 04, 2016; Accepted November 04, 2016; Published November 05, 2016

Citation: Thomas E (2016) The State of Advertising and Mass Media: Where Are We Headed? J Mass Communicat Journalism S2: 003. doi: [10.4172/2165-7912.S2-003](https://doi.org/10.4172/2165-7912.S2-003)

Copyright: © 2016 Thomas E. This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License, which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited.

of the advances in technology, the decision about which message to deliver via which medium still comes down to the communicator's intended audience and purpose. Let's take a step back and recall a central principle upon which mass media communications is built: "Advertising, public relations, marketing communications, news and editorial all share a common objective of truth and high ethical standards in serving the public". And so, let us serve the public.

References

1. <http://www.mdgadvertising.com/blog/eight-principles-of-advertising-ethics/>
2. Ember S (2016) More wretched news for newspapers as advertising woes drive anxiety.
3. <http://www.thewrap.com/why-the-future-of-tv-isnt-tv-guest-blog/>
4. Guth D, Marsh C (2016) Public relations: a values-driven approach.

This article was originally published in a special issue, [Advertising and Public Relations: Challenges and Implications](#) handled by Editors. Sumit Narula and Elizabeth Thomas, Amity University, Murray State University