



Video ethnography, researcher reflexivity, and constructions of advertising response in the Australian family living room



Laknath Jayasinghe *

Department of Marketing and Management, Faculty of Business and Economics, Macquarie University, North Ryde, NSW 2109, Australia

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ABSTRACT

This article adopts perspectives of family identity practice as an analytic lens to understand advertising response and attention in the family living room. By using an emerging approach that examines ethnographic data through the reflexive role of the researcher, the article brings a novel conceptualisation of advertising response as a set of domestically constructed consumption practices. Through this approach, it is shown how advertising response is performed by viewers in the family living room embedded within a network involving cultural ideologies, domestic discourses, advertising literacies, and viewing practices, but argues that the very configuration of these performances is itself developed by the researcher through broader scholarly debates about the politics of advertising response, viewing, and attention in the marketing and advertising research literature. The article argues that advertising response is not value neutral, it takes on different meanings for viewers beyond an advertising text's informational orientation, and response is understood to be a product of the research method that uncovers it. To better conceptualise advertising response and attention, the findings suggest that a deeper exploration of advertising response is required in terms of the researcher's reflexive role in constituting it.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

本文以家庭特性习惯的角度作为分析视角，以了解家庭客厅内的观看者对广告的反应和关注度。通过使用一套全新的方法（即通过研究者的自反作用来研究人种学数据），本文从家庭结构性消费习惯的角度，提出了全新的广告反应概念论。通过这一方法，显示了在家庭客厅内，融入到涉及文化意识形态、家庭交谈、广告文化、及观看习惯等相互关系中的观众如何对广告作出反应，然而，文章认为，研究者通过对市场营销和广告研究文献的广告反应、观看、关注度等策略的更广泛的学术争论，而形成这些行为的特有构成。原稿认为广告反应并非价值中立，对于观看者而言，它除了具有广告文本的信息导向外，还含有不同的含义，而反应则应被理解为是揭示它的研究方法的产物。这些研究结果表明，为了更好地对广告反应和关注度进行概念化，需要从研究者设定广告反应的自反作用方面，对广告反应进行更深层次的探究。

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1. Introduction

Contextualised television advertising responses are increasingly important to contemporary householders. This study highlights that instead of developing through hyper-individualisation and isolation, patterns of advertising response, viewing, and attention in the family home are embedded within the social situations of family members and contextualised through the discourses and values guiding everyday family life in the living room (Jayasinghe and Ritson, 2013). Instead of being simply viewed as disruptions to either program viewing or domestic interaction (Danaher and Dagger, 2012;

Nelson et al., 2009; O'Donohoe, 2001; Swaminathan and Kent, 2013), the program break and advertisements broadcast within it have become part of the very texture of everyday household life; they are consumer culture particles furnished within the basic patterning of our lives, inserting themselves into the practices and performances of our close familial engagements. This article grants the reader access into the diverse and complex social life of a few ostensibly similar – yet very different – suburban Australian family living rooms. Examined through ethnographic narratives and observation notes selected from a rich body of recorded video and interview data, a number of moments in household time are explored to demonstrate how family situations, interactions, and settings hugely impact the patterning of advertising response, viewing, and attention in the putatively ordinary family living room. A vital part of this account is the role of the researcher in the construction of

* E-mail address: laknath.jayasinghe@mq.edu.au.

advertising response, especially the role that researcher reflexivity plays in shaping the direction of ethnographic accounts of advertising response and attention in the family living room.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. Advertising response, viewing, and attention

The distinction between traditional (experimental and survey) approaches to television advertising response and understanding viewing behaviour through socially situated and contextualised advertising frames – a distinction which pervades marketing and advertising research – has been recently critiqued by scholars (Jayasinghe and Ritson, 2013; Ritson and Elliott, 1999; Scott, 2006). These critiques outline how the notions of advertising response and engagement (Raghunathan and Corfman, 2006; Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999), advertisement viewing space (Calder and Sternthal, 1980), and viewing practices circumscribed to “eyes on screen” approximations of visual screen attention based on measures such as brand recall and attitude towards the ad (Brasel and Gips, 2008; Higgins et al., 2014; Krugman, 1977, 1988; Krugman et al., 1995), are used to separately carve off the textual and product orientation contexts of advertising reception from the situated and sociocultural contexts of viewing. Interpretive studies that read and interpret advertisements through their textual, intertextual, and allusory media features alone are also included within this corpus of decontextualised notions of attention and engagement (e.g., Oswald, 2010; Scott, 1994).

This split has led to what Ritson and Elliott (1999, pp. 260–1) call the “asocial, acontextual” perspective of the hyper-individualised “solitary subject” at the centre of much advertising research. The separation opens up an important gap of focus in marketing and advertising research, whereby the geographies of viewing and situated activity contextualising advertisement meaning are largely unexamined – the point of interest in the present video ethnographic data. Jayasinghe and Ritson (2013) suggest that advertising researchers’ predominant focus on how viewers respond – through particular practitioner-based notions of attention – to the “formal features of the broadcast advertising text, the commercial pod, and the surrounding [television] programming” (p. 105) has increased an understanding of advertising viewing space as almost inherently linked to controlled experimental settings, with a markedly reduced understanding of the role of situational and temporal influences upon advertising response and attention. Yet as recent experimental and survey studies have shown, television advertising response surely cannot be discounted from its functioning in viewers’ everyday lives (Aribarg et al., 2010; Moorman et al., 2012; Mora et al., 2011; Puntoni and Tavassoli, 2007), with a slow recognition that television viewing and the family home redefine and reconstitute each other (Jin, 2011; Morley, 1986).

2.2. Video ethnography

Ethnography is reasonably well established within scholarly approaches to marketing and consumer research (Arnould and Price, 2006; Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Belk, 1987; Cayla and Arnould, 2013; Holt, 1995; Sherry, 1990). It is largely carried out through various levels of immersion in a bounded site of consumption activity, commonly called a “consumption community,” and data are collected through observations gathered from researcher participation in the life of the community and detailed interviews with community members (Geertz, 2001; Gold, 2001; Kleinman et al., 2001; Snow et al., 2001). The aim is to develop “thick descriptions” (Geertz, 1973) and a deep understanding of the consumer systems and the culturally instituted values and emotions (Benedict, 2005 [1934]) that organise particular consumer lifestyles and

practices within a selected field site. Within consumer research, ethnography offers a heightened awareness and sensitisation toward the social and cultural forces arranging everyday, mundane, and quotidian consumer behaviours across various consumption fields or real-life consumption contexts (Arnould and Price, 1993; Holt, 1995; Penalzoza, 2001), including consumer practices within household contexts (Coupland, 2005; Epp and Price, 2008, 2010). “Good ethnographies,” Arnould and Price (2006) write, “uncover tacit knowledge, referring to the largely unarticulated, contextual understandings that are manifest in routines, nods, silences, humor, postures, and gestures as well as statements about belief and values” (p. 251). When researchers have, in rare studies, examined advertising viewing within the family home using ethnographic techniques, they have understood it either through unproblematic ways that replicate acontextual managerial preoccupations of “effectiveness” (Krugman et al., 1995; Pearson and Barwise, 2008) or through static sociological lenses to examine advertising audience’s literacy skills (Frazer and Reid, 1979; Reid, 1979; Reid and Frazer, 1980) or dynamic social forces beyond the domestic viewing setting that nonetheless influence advertising engagement in the living room (Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Yet none have concentrated on how a viewer’s actual practices – their “routines, nods, silences, humor, postures, and gestures as well as statements about belief and values” – are embedded in the particular contexts of domestically-shaped advertising experiences.

Recorded video ethnography is an established data collection technique in consumer research that allows complex and difficult sets of advertising viewer action to unfold in front of the camera and is recorded by audio-video equipment. For this reason it is seen as a data collecting method that captures richly contextualised and high quality audio-visual data about naturalistic advertising audience behaviour not always possible to capture through other ethnographic methods. Such audience behaviour may include the physical and verbal actions of viewing that are often incomprehensible for a single researcher to describe through traditional ethnographic means of observation and participation alone, especially when television viewing behaviours in naturalistic settings are multimodal and unfold simultaneously in real time (experiencing television programming through concurrently performed visual and aural attentions, bodily gestures and verbal behaviour, for example) (Loizos, 2001).

However, through this technique, researcher observations of participants’ advertising viewing are limited to the visual field captured by the video camera and the audio range of the microphone in a viewing setting such as the family living room (Brodin, 2007). The technique also allows researchers, nonetheless, to analyse a number of practice-based aspects of viewer behaviour not often detailed in conventional ethnographic interview data in consumer or advertising research. These aspects include: an appreciation of the time-based nature of actual response and viewing events; identifying socially and culturally significant moments in the family home that encourage or discourage advertising viewing, such as examining the backstage events that orchestrate and script precise moments of advertising response and viewing behaviour; interpreting the embodied nature of social interaction in the living room that often gives rise to emotionally-charged experiences with television advertising; and documenting human-object relations, such as the ways that media multitasking occurs in the living room, which together cannot be fully accounted for by simply relying on interview-based verbal description (Arnould and Wallendorf, 1994; Couldry, 2000; Couldry and McCarthy, 2003; Epp and Price, 2008; Lull, 1980; Woermann and Rokka, 2015).

Importantly, video ethnography completely overhauls the traditional markers that define ethnographic immersion in a naturalistic field setting, such as a family home. That is, video ethnography is itself a form of immersed mediation for the researcher, and it holds

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