Global Advertising, Attitudes and Audiences

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Acknowledgements and Co-Researchers

To the striving students of Sarawak
—we succeeded in making sense!—
and Siow Ai Wei (Jenny) who supported it all.

Introduction

"A brand is the sign of a slave."

<div align="right">(Husserl, 1985: 167)</div>

In the commercial spaces between television programs or on cyberspace Internet pages, marketing maps out branded landscapes for consumption. Whether metaphorical or more literal in their accounts, these visual stories perennially celebrate product use as a known aspect or moment of living. "We have shared some great moments, good food and fun times. You have been part of our many achievements. We have always been there together" (McDonald's Malaysia website).

We view these media narratives as people (embodied beings), as consenting or skeptical consumers who are also citizens with our established and remembered patterns of practice and perception forming our familiar everyday life-world. Like people everywhere else, McDonald's "guests" are interpretive: they implicitly classify their eating experiences as instantiating types of always already familiar phenomena ("fun times" or otherwise) and anticipate events accordingly.

Where appropriately addressed by advertisers, media marketing's model recipients become absorbed in these "storied" forms of life on screen for the (re)creative conjoining of people, places and products. Audiences perceive these narrative programs of purchasing meaning (wherein people buying become "life-loving") from informed horizons of expecting content. Knowledgeable about screen marketing, consumers implicitly anticipate a finalizing tag line: they are explicitly surprised should it be absent. Media users make intelligible these narratives reproducing previous patterns.

As audiences articulating sense from an often elliptically edited sequence of events, their game like goal is generating knowledge—to produce from their horizons of understanding these value-laden screen stories an intelligible space and time. Adding meaning to their lives or to the person they are, advertising's model consumers appropriate or gain a purchase in/on these places.

Such audio-visually branded spaces and times or "brandscapes" (Sherry, 1986)[1] are sketched out in narrative accounts on television and websites of comfortable consumption in which intended audiences immerse themselves.[2]

Fast food restaurant media brandscapes are thus digital agora[3] or gathering places, screened as familiar if special spaces and times, life-worlds of trusted support for consumer citizens—often shown therein as close companions in playful (ludic) accomplishment. These *McDonaldized* agora form "regular" sites for projected stories of self confirmation.[4]

The branding narratives which we consider in this volume can be more enigmatic and even contradictory. As extended stories, their ambiguous accounts or "ambi-branding" (Brown, 2006) of agora on screen show consumers thought-provoking events ranging from an implausible Chinese singing in Tamil to an impossibly soaring basketball player and an inverted sampan sinking. But audiences are supported in reconciling such antinomies on condition that they give credence to aspirational advertising for products which can render these worlds coherent and comfortable.

The idea that branding constructs agoric places on screen whose products enable them to be "comfortable for gathering purposes" was suggested by an Indian female student at the University of Science, Malaysia, where I conducted focus groups with a Chinese colleague. Marketed brandscapes (as represented by transnational coffee shop advertising) facilitate multiple forms of *gathering by people* for the intrinsic pleasure of being together or for more instrumental purposes (preparing for work). Screen images encourage enthusiastic product use which may or may not occur in practice.

But (as another student pointed out) consumers can also *gather their thoughts* together or articulate them in personal narratives of reflection over a coffee in a branded shopping landscape after a busy week. Branding's goal here and more widely is to convince potential customers of a certain product-oriented creative caring for their comfort in agreeable agora. Purchasers will enjoy recreative (immersive) reliable circumstances—in a marketed ludic life-world where product use is familiar (because regular), dependably supporting anticipated narratives in which identity is formed.

Branding builds on screen forms of life as space and time for bonding. Brandscapes are an elliptically edited assembling (Lury, 2009) of cultural practice sketched in stories which absorbed audiences articulate into narratives of aspirational activity—events to be emulated. Images of Coffee Bean comfortable consumption or Pizza Hut sensation on screen are thereby integrated into small familiar worlds. Immersed in these stories consumers identify with inhabitants already present in these media places—or respond with irritation. We line up together—or absent our alienated selves.

In parallel mode, across shopping malls and other precincts urging purchasing, branded agora take material shape, promising their acquisitive audiences pleasure after entry. People "discover" citizenship in reflecting upon the conditions of their consumption. From fast food restaurants to higher education "shops," travel agents to telecommunications providers, representation in media marketing is realized by audiences—or found depleted in substance. Consumer citizens commence and conclude personal narratives of delight or disillusionment we consider in this volume.

In consumer and cultural studies, the concept of a business-oriented branded landscape allows "theory of everything" to be constructed in which the political economy of producing places is integrated with accounts of their reception in the processes of audience perception and purchase. We can see how corporations shape space and time on marketing screens and plazas for profit. Studies of branded agora show buyers immersing themselves, consorting in consensus with existing consumers on enjoyable eating—or passing by, perhaps walking swiftly on from this spatiotemporal zoning for meals in anger. We drink at—or distance ourselves from—Starbucks.

Entering some of our many surrounding mall or media brandscapes, we both absorb and are absorbed by their agora. We have anticipated and articulate their life-worlds in narratives after entry to be familiar, regular "comfort zones." We substantiate their sense, appropriating or at other times becoming alienated from their constructed routine consumption. *Global Advertising, Attitudes and Audiences* explores these narrative screen representations, their material instantiation and reception.

We are guided by philosophical psychology or the philosophy of mind in studying marketing. Undertaking research with Asian consumers and writing about its results, we are distant from the Scottish philosopher Hume and his argument that constant conjunction (here of screen content and consumer attitude) is no less than causality. Critical of this far reaching illusion, instead we shall follow Husserl and the subsequent philosophical hermeneutics of Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas and Ricoeur. Their view that human existence is fundamentally interpretive informs our regarding audience consumers as drawing continually on their collective cultural memory (located on horizons of understanding) in producing meaning for media branding. Putting this point starkly, media advertising has no sense without an interpretive audience who aligns with or declares their distance from its prescriptive narratives. Consumers produce the meaning of marketing.

Global Advertising is *not* an argument against statistical methods in marketing. Rather, its focus is on the conceptual presuppositions of using those methods. Nor is the book dismissive of inductivism (or generalizing) as underwriting the employment of statistical sampling across wide populations, though we are aware that the logic of generalizing is never conclusive. *Global Advertising* sets out consumer centered theory of what we shall call interpretive inductivism.

Chapter One locates these thoughts on branding and responses in a wider context of audience and consumer studies. Three phases and thirty years of media user theory are integrated to produce a philosophical psychology of buyers responding to brandscapes, of audiences in agora:

i) Audiences as Passive Spectators—European Structuralist and US Effects Studies (despite their evident differences) assumed audience acquiescence in screen content.

ii) Audiences as Political Respondents—the work of the Birmingham (UK) Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies presented viewers as being capable of expressing ideological distance from media constructions of contemporary nationhood.

iii) Audiences as Projecting Meaning—drawing on European Reception Theory, audience studies (particularly in work on the consumer) attended to the question: how do we understand media narrative—not least in marketing? How do watching buyers make sense of brandscapes?

As in fast food marketing, these "product worlds" are places associated primarily with convenient predictability or comfortable creative play, regulated recreation. In recounting the process of gaining a purchase, such spaces and times of fun and familiarity are ludic life-worlds.

Brandscapes are multi-dimensional. On screen media (principally television and Internet advertising), they are two-dimensional, constructed by marketing narratives. In shopping malls they take three-dimensional shape. Whether engaging with mall or media agora, people's responses have the same structure. Immersing themselves in branded shopping or screen "territory" of which they always already have generic knowledge, consumers anticipate events: they articulate "storied" accounts of these occasions (e.g. in chatting or blogs)[5] and appropriate or derive reviving narratives informing lives. Or they distance themselves from agora in identity defining alienated criticism.

Chapter One discusses further the substantial use of hermeneutic and reception theory by advertising research when investigating how buyers interpret branding. Paradoxically, unlike English audience studies which in the 1980s reduced European philosophy to structuralism, American consumer theory mobilizes French and German phenomenology to understand the process of purchasing. Here, the *Journal of Consumer Research* is a first place of reference.

How do we negotiate our understanding of the world—and of media marketing in particular? Phenomenologists (Heidegger, Huizinga, Husserl) answer by pointing to a process of informed inference guided by our intrinsic interest in establishing intelligibility. Our absorption is equally our anticipating sense. Immersed in a continuing mental play of meaning formation, consumers articulate coherent screen content: their aim fundamentally is making sense of mediated marketing.

Albeit accused of being intellectually insular, Birmingham English audience theory (Morley, 1980) has become a paradigmatic perspective in analyzing our responses to screen content. We interpret programs actively and differently and do not passively receive a predetermined meaning as a caused consequence of viewing. Philosophically guided consumer research argues that re-reading this theory anew through the prism of hermeneutic phenomenology can provide us with a closely specified sense of the substantial cognitive element previously only implicitly characterizing this model of media use. In short, audience understanding is a time-taking goal-oriented process.

The structured activity of making sense of screen events has seven aspects or "moments" (from the simultaneous to the sequential) which we consider to be at the core of consumers' responses to branding. Interested in further internationalizing media studies, our discussion in these chapters reflects on inflections of this singular cognitive route wherein real audiences arrive at multi-cultural readings of screen marketing a shopping mall from its eateries to education.

Consumers challenge the "bulldozing homogenization effects of globalization" (Askegaard, 2006: 92).We focus on screen texts of transnational and S.E. Asian national marketing to explore the less-apparent "coming into being" of Chinese, Indian and Malay responses as consumers and citizens. Following Schroeder (2002: 115–40) one can say that if media marketing presents person and product identity, it is articulated and appropriated through individuating cultural difference. In reflecting on this process of reading screens we render global a psychology of gaining a purchase.

Chapter Two focuses on Western fast food brandscapes, relating moments in their corporate production to aspects of Asian responses in blogs and focus groups. Frying forms a fat issue. Through analyzing multiple multi-cultural reactions to five culinary agora represented in cyber-space and television, we see that these branded virtual landscapes and their material embodiment function as familiar *ludic life-worlds*, consumption spaces in which (participants said) people "hang out"—suspended paradoxically from life in an agoric safe place for gathering or swift "go-getting."

Branded ludic landscapes are regulated "regular" places which support consumers in an extended cognitively rich release from external daily demands, a play-like production of selves. Alongside such intrinsic enjoyment, fast food spaces and times are seen as used instrumentally (and intensively) in less game-like mode for convenience.

Global brandscapes circulate a certain celebrating "together" of familiarity. Their ludic landscapes are long term agora. "We have always been there together" during these "good times when we get together" (McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken Malaysian website "home pages"). "Our" egalitarian eating is focused on consuming internationally identical (Coffee Bean) or locally hybridized (Pizza Hut) products. Asian marketing and mall consumers in online blogs or our focus groups perceive such Western claims to cultural proximity in food and friendship with varying degrees of assent. Chinese and Malay females defined their difference in Kuala Lumpur: meals with Occidental origins will "never get better than home."

Chapters Three through to the Conclusion explore the idea of brandscapes as "ludic life-worlds," following the process of their reception by consumer citizens. In Chapter Four (Advertising Academia), for instance, higher education is seen to be marketed as international destination for personal discovery, multiple brandscaping for the brain. People are offered an immersive (friendly, supportive) experience of study (as creative mental play) and sport (physical play), the chance to construct campus-located narratives driven by the

development of self for subsequent employment and gain. We consider, in consumer focus groups and blogs, audience articulation and appropriation of—or alienation from—education branding of agora on Internet and in TV advertisement.

The Appendix: Constructing Marketed Meaning from Consumer Culture draws substantially on focus group data in the author's (co-researched with Tan Huey Pyng) "Television's Glocal Advertising in Veridical Product Narrative," *Consumption, Markets and Culture* 9(1): 45–62. He acknowledges permission from the Taylor and Francis journal (http://informaworld.com) to include sections of this article in the present publication.

Contents

1 Audiences Articulating Advertising

> "Modern marketing" could be "modern culture par excellence. Its success in becoming—for all institutions—the principal mode of relating with their constituents is a testimony to the centrality of marketing in contemporary culture."
>
> (Firat and Dholakia, 2006: 124)

If marketing is now culturally central how is it mediated through television and Internet screens which are equally perceptually pivotal in modern times? How does it address consumers leading them to buy brands? What is the communicative logic of this situation? How can we understand the process of media persuading us to purchase product? Why do audiences align with or become alienated from advertising on screen? Continuing this spatial metaphor, how does global branding become culturally close to local consumers? For they clearly have differing perspectives on the world (or occupy distant horizons of understanding its content). In seeking to respond to these geographically oriented questions we remember Fischer and Sherry's remark (2007) while presenting Consumer Culture Theory that the "geography of contemporary consumption, as it must, will be re-written and re-mapped continuously" (3).

As a book on media branding, this volume is about *understanding the reasons* why everyday audiences form attitudes rather than *explaining the causes* of those value judgments. Relationships between evaluative belief and eventual buying abstracted by theory elsewhere are placed back within cultural horizons (or an informing context) where people link product and person in a process of articulating identities for both screen and self. Recognizing and interpreting such phenomena needs to conceptually precede inductive (generalizing) statistical description. We shall attend to the time-taking process wherein *both* consumer and market researcher understand "data."

Consumers articulate (sometimes persuasive) narrative about media branded products, appropriating these branding stories to shape their horizons of self understanding for a *reason*. They are not *caused* to do so as an effect of screen content. Rather, drawing on their always already existing awareness of narrative and other cultural forms to assemble the meaning of a sometimes enigmatic branding story, they identify (or align) with people's product use

therein. Consumers thereby generate narratives of (would-be) guidance from generic information and find them appropriate. Or they distance (alienate) themselves from narrative content (and form) in distrust.

Global Advertising considers Asian consumer responses to global and local screen marketing and shopping malls which are argued to be analogous in their modes of immersing audiences. How shoppers understand and incorporate both mall and media marketing into their daily lives is immensely culturally varied but essentially identical. We focus on their interpreting and identifying (with) marketing brands on screen from banks and fast food to universities, nations to telecommunications. Our research participant discourse (or speech) displaying the prolonged cognitive process wherein consumers make sense of advertising and branding and integrate them with living is emphasized as fundamentally important in our analyzing marketing.

Often, the story of selling through screens is couched in terms of influencing consumer *attitudes* towards a brand or product. Like some communication studies (e.g. in cultivation theory), marketing research can consider this to be a causal chain, a narrative in which powerful advertising will have the effect of bringing about buying behavior. The success (or strength) of this connection, it is said, can be quantitatively measured. In this chapter we shall discuss some initial instances of consumer discourse (or talk) to conclude that such a linking of events between screen and purchase is a myth with caused or causal *attitudes* a core fiction at the heart of this methodological delusion.

Replacing such a narrative of passive purchasing, we shall argue instead, consumers actively *appropriate* media advertising. They both identify the meaning of content (i.e. recognize it) and identify (i.e. align) with characters on screen, with the latter's activity providing reasons for purchase. As a contributor to my early consumer research asserted, "they are doing that, why not us?" Or, resisting the rational momentum of advertising's sought for agreement, consumers are critical, becoming *alienated* (Brecht, 1978) or discovering their distance from marketing on screen.[1]

So how do audiences form attitudes? Can they be said to do so actively and rationally? Or are attitudes the passive caused consequences of much media watching? Do we cultivate screen content as meaningful narrative or do the media cultivate our perceptions as audiences? More specifically, in consumer responses to advertising are attitudes towards products produced by screen branding? Or are they arrived at through audiences articulating the meaning of media marketing? Do consumers construct their conceptions of products or are both built for them? And when we have answered these questions about the structure of consuming, how do we statistically evaluate our data? For the abstractions of hermeneutics precede but do not displace quantitative assessment.

In *Global Advertising*, we refer to researchers for whom audiences or consumers are passive recipients of perceptual content (of what used to be called "sense data") as *Inductive Causalists*. Constructing what could be called an "inductive statistical apparatus" (ISA) of measurement, these investigators

focus on generalizing or generating statistical accounts of data (such as events on screen and audience behavior). Highly correlated "data" are elevated to the status of being linked as cause and effect by a connecting "mechanism" about which speculation can take place. Inductivists of this persuasion are thus to be considered would-be *Causalists* seeking a more or less complex chain of cause and effect occurrence between "variables" like "media-use" and "audience attitudes":

> media-use variables, then, are endogenous—that is, subject to the influence of causally prior variables. Conversely (...) there is ample evidence for effects of media-use variables on beliefs, attitudes, and behavior—the components of personal and social identity.
>
> (Slater, 2007: 282).

The underlying issue here is: are the data discovered to be primarily conceptualized or described in terms belonging to the world view of researcher or researched? For studies pursued quantitatively nonetheless rest on a qualitative base as calculations concerning the world.

Interpretivists (as I shall call them) assume that audience consumers (actively) construct (narrative) sense for that which they see: research investigates this process of producing meaning as it occurs over time within responses to the screen. People draw on their cultural background to generate understanding of media events. Hence interpretivists can be referred to as *Culturalists*. Consumer interpreted branding narratives incorporate reasons for aligning or identifying with product use. Given their qualitatively subtle focus, the issue is mathematical measurement: how are such data quantified? Interpretivism needs a statistical package to "triangulate" its findings.

I paint this initial presentation of philosophy and research method with a broad brush. For distinguishing in practice between inductivists and interpretivists can be difficult. Researchers may be statistically inclined but equally seek to categorically accommodate as the foundation of their measurement an audience's articulating meaning for marketing on screen. Moreover, my distinction relates to a broader methodological struggle occurring between Positivists and Phenomenology over conceptualizing the nature of human and social inquiry. Considered as philosophers of science, the first group of theorists link causal judgment about observable events with universal natural law.

Media cultivation theory is a clear candidate for the inductivist would-be causalist category. Television's "images cultivate the dominant tendencies of our culture's beliefs, ideologies and world views": here "the 'size' of a (program's) 'effect' is far less critical than the direction of its steady contribution" (Gerbner et al., 1980: 14). Surprisingly, "despite four decades of (media) cultivation research demonstrating a reliable, albeit small, cultivation relationship, questions remain about the mechanisms that link exposure to perception" conclude Bilandzic and Busselle (2008: 508).

Nonetheless, these latter authors assert inductively that where "transportation" or "losing one's self in a (screen) narrative" occurs, "repeated highly transportive experiences contribute to the overall cultivation effect by adjusting the viewers' worldviews after each exposure": thus the "constant presence of stories with similar messages may be absorbed by audiences and alter their understanding of social reality" (ibid.: 508, 509). Such "adjusted," "absorbed" and "altered" audiences are surely passive recipients of the media's "worldviews" in their "understanding (of) social reality" as a caused consequence of continuing screen "exposure."[2]

Similarly, a "mechanism" is proposed in a discussion of the brand–consumer relationship. While in this instance the latter may not entirely involve an audience's conscious attention the "automatic processes" proposed would surely exclude the relationship being one of reason-giving. Here, frequently perceived coffee branding ("repeated exposures to a brand") is conceptualized as "driving (an) effect" on consumers "via automatic processes (...) (as an) underlying mechanism":

> On any given morning, one might pass several people with Starbucks coffee in hand. What are the effects of such repeated exposures to a brand? (...) (We) focus on situations during which these effects occur via automatic processes (whose) ease of processing (characterizes the) underlying mechanism driving this effect.
>
> (Ferraro et al., 2009: 729, 731)

In the inductivist causalist camp, more or less determinate *mechanisms* link screen (or shop front) content with the formation of audience and consumer evaluative beliefs or attitudes. Such a causalist model of attaching attitudes must be attractive to positivists. For conceptualizing attitude formation in its sequential and statistical terms can present the process as conforming to laws and hence the *deductive-nomological* model of explanation at the heart of positivism. Here, being able to predict on the basis of positive correlation (preferably the constant conjunction of observable events) leads inexorably to the capacity to explain: explanation is symmetrical with prediction.

In a definitive editorial recommendation establishing the "Primary of Theory" for the *European Journal of Marketing*, Lee and Greenley (2008) write with approval that:

> one of the truly great theorists in marketing, Shelby Hunt, described theory as "a systematically related set of statements, including some law-like generalizations, that is empirically testable (...) a systematized structure capable of both explaining and predicting phenomena."
>
> (Hunt, 1991: 4)

Inductivist causalist theory is implicitly engaged in "lawlike generalization." A propositional causal candidate for nomological (law) status would be that,

other circumstances being equal, when repeated consumer exposures to satis-
fied Brand X coffee drinkers ("with Brand X coffee in hand") take place a
favorable consumer attitude towards that brand of coffee will result.

From the perspective of the interpretive or culturalist model, however, the
perception of agents as passive inherent in this theory of attitude formation is
unacceptable. For consumers actively recognize, anticipate and articulate
advertising's prescriptive screen narrative from its elliptical or indeterminate
elements by drawing on a wider knowledge of generic textual type.

In the present volume, the causal formation of attitudes is replaced by a
cognitively active audience's alignment with (or distancing alienation from) a
text's prescriptive meaning. "We are like them." Such "borrowing" to attach
oneself to the significance of a global brand is premised upon viewer identifi-
cation or alignment with narrative agent made possible by local cultural
similarities to media content. Successful world marketing is particularly
glocal.

Connections between branding and buying are not the main focus of a book
on audiences forming attitudes. But the latter are considered in marketing as
the basis of predictable behavior:

> Why does the attitude concept maintain its unparalleled popularity? One
> possible answer is that the concept is central to the observer's dream: "If
> only I knew your attitude, I could predict your thoughts and behavior."
>
> (Schwarz, 2006: 20)

Again this nexus is of interest to positivists as potentially nomological since
they consider prediction of effects is allowed by knowledge of law-governed
causal events. However, attitudes are evaluative beliefs, not events: and in any
case predicting economic decision-making or buying has drawn on theory of
reasoned action rather than causal models implying participant passivity
(Lunt, 1995). The philosophical or conceptual assumptions of predicting need
certainly not be positivist.[3]

Global Advertising does not purport, then, to discuss the relationship
between consumer attitude and action (buying). However, the volume ven-
tures to consider how audiences relate their perception of marketing narrative
to themselves, connecting content to conception of the self. We will discuss,
that is, how encultured consumers articulate and appropriate meaning from
screen media and shopping malls (whose spaces, I shall argue, are structurally
similar). In this emphasis on cultural and narrative intricacy my perspective
clearly differs from (for instance) the economic theory of reasoned action and
preference in purchasing [as set out by Ajzen (1988)].

Within interpretive theory guided by philosophical insights from phenom-
enology, the audience of consumer citizens who view media marketing are
found always already located upon habitual "horizons" of concrete being and
cultural understanding upon which they rarely turn to focus. Shaping the
perceptual process, these generic frameworks of comprehension within which

we continually interpret new experience as instantiating an already known ("pre-cognitive") type are thus semi-effaced or half-hidden. Nonetheless, situated on these sites of sense-making, recognizing the world as exemplifying categories of which they are aware, people continually anticipate (or "project") events. Pursuing a "hermeneutic circle of understanding" they attempt to articulate occurrence into coherent narrative. Audiences shape into a story elliptical segments on screen.

In screen theory of the last century, contradictory texts constructed by the political avant-garde were considered to bring about an alienated revolutionary audience critical of capitalism (see Wilson, 1993). The passive workers were (re)produced as active instruments of historical change.

Now, incorporating political diversity, hermeneutic media marketing theory can show how consumers seek in the cognitive play of their responses to provide apparently conflicting elements (or antinomies) of advertising with coherent narrative meaning. Irresolvable contradiction and complexity may be read still as distancing. But products can be branded as the source of coherence.

In talking to them and learning during focus groups and interviews of their responses, we attempt to bring consumer consciousness a little closer to discern in more detail the structure of their understanding marketing on media. One Malaysian television branding narrative for Coca-Cola features a vigorously edited ball game occupying a city centre street. During our research on responses a Chinese male viewer was concerned to reconcile the apparent contradiction between the vigorous demands of outdoor basketball he sees on screen and constricting enclosure of the body by *baju kurung* Malay dress worn by one of the players:

> it's controversial [the scenes before the female are "outdoor" look—activism, while the Malay female looks like an "indoor" girl, walking slow and wearing *baju kurung*, which (means) she can't play basketball like the other female does. However, she can still play it] kind of breaking the rules.

The "Malay female" drinking Coca-Cola is seen by this Chinese viewer (as enabling him) to resolve the contradiction between basketball and *baju kurung*, the conflict between energetic creativity and encompassing constraint! Thereby freed by viewers from the tyranny of paradox, elliptical marketing stories offer audiences who align themselves with such action, powerful reasons to appropriate a drink or other mode of dynamism as an aspect of their life-worlds. Contradictions can be resolved by bringing advertised artifacts into the branding narrative—demonstrating their value (or foregrounding their potency) as problem resolving products. Going along with this outcome, in so identifying or consensually connecting with content, consumers transform a moment (aspect) of their living. They have produced and now purchase "refreshing" meaning.

"Don't you just love this country?" asks Malaysian oil company television branding of those consumers who gain a paradox resolving purchase of/on its narrative meaning celebrating cultural diversity rather than divergence. For they see multi-culturalism supporting Chinese singing Tamil!

In (actively) articulating the narrative meaning of media branding as (after all) coherent, consumers come to comprehend (their reading of) its evaluative message: they complete an appropriately prescriptive reading of the latter's (not too) indeterminate elements. Coke resolves conflict with innovation, rendering the impossible possible, "breaking the rules"! And Malaysia's national oil company can be integrated by the consumer into a branding narrative supporting its multi-cultural society, enabling a Chinese to express his happiness in Tamil song. "Don't you just love this country?" where opposites are reconciled in contradictions becoming a creative resource.

> The first time I see it I feel a bit surprised because I thought that the person who is singing is not a Chinese. But when I know the Chinese (is) singing a Tamil song it is not really a surprise because Malaysia is a multi-cultural country.
>
> (female Chinese)

Branding messages ("Don't you just love this country?") can thus address a consumer who has already constructed a persuasive narrative from the more or less fragmented content (edited and elliptical elements) of media marketing (or the sights and sounds of a mall). For always already having positioned themselves as readers on a cultural horizon of comprehension from which screened stories are identified as instantiating types (or generic), audiences absorb themselves in such advertising and anticipate its selling (or project a prescriptive narrative).

Reading "to and fro" across the text in the playlike construction of sense, moving through this hermeneutic circle of understanding, viewers articulate from its apparent contradictions a coherent story. In such a consumer constructed narrative, for instance, family members far away from each other can gain nonetheless greater intimacy as purchasers of a cellphone product—in using which, indeed, "distance should bring you closer."

The story of resolution a consumer has shaped out of the text's edited elements, then, constitutes not a *cause* of, but a *reason* for her or his aligning (identifying) with the marketing maxim ("purchase the product because distance should bring you closer"). Thus appropriating prescriptive narrative and product the audience emerges to understand themselves as telco users.

Shaping sense from screen media and making sense of shopping malls, I argue in the penultimate chapter, are analogous. Both involve immersion and menu assisted inference. While television has program guides, most malls have purchasing directories (maps): both support audience consumers in anticipating, articulating and appropriating narratives of involvement.