

Political economy and critical studies of advertising and media industries

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There is a rich literature from those working in and around critical political economy (CPE) of communications that critically examines advertising and its relationship to the media industries. This body of work has been reviewed by various authors discussed in this chapter, although much, including a more international mapping, remains to be achieved. What if we review this body of work with a focus on research methods and resources for data analysis? Does such a focus help us to re-examine this literature and consider its continuities, discontinuities, scope, and developments in new ways? I hope you will agree it can. This chapter identifies some common methods and data sources used throughout the periods I describe as precursory, 20th century CPE (late 1960s-1990s), and 21st Century CPE, but suggests that specific methods come to the fore in different periods, usually connected with explicit efforts to address neglected matters in earlier research. Examining CPE methods also contributes to the important, ongoing work of tracing connections across historical critical scholarship that can inform and inspire contemporary efforts.

First, this chapter defines critical political economy (CPE), it outlines CPE's analysis and critique of advertising-media relations, and the research methods and resources employed. It then organizes critical advertising studies historically, beginning with the Frankfurt School and various economic and cultural (para)Marxist approaches from the 1960s-1970s. It discusses how, especially from the 1980s, critical scholars began to examine the advertising industry in greater detail including global corporate restructuring, institutional practices and practitioners, lobbying and influence on governance and (de)regulation, as well as advertising finance and influence on media. The chapter concludes by discussing how the critical analysis of governance can integrate important dimensions of the study of communication industries and practices *and* the processes of rule-making and rule-shaping that contribute to structuring them.

Critical political economy and the critique of advertising

In media and communication studies, critical political economy (CPE) approaches are characterized by a central claim: that different ways of organizing and financing communications have implications for the range and qualities of media content, and the ways in which these are consumed and used (Murdock and Golding, 2005; Mosco, 2009; Hardy, 2014). The “critical” in CPE refers to this approach’s examination of unequal distributions of power and resources across societies. CPE is critical of arrangements whereby such inequalities are sustained and reproduced, including by, and within, media and marketing industries. This attends to the interplay between the symbolic and economic dimensions of the production of meaning. One direction considers how production arrangements shape meaning-making and consumption; another considers the relationship of media and communication systems to wider forces and processes in society.

In exploring these relationships, CPE approaches are not reliant on specific concepts or methods: rather, the ongoing justification for CPE rests on the quality and salience of its analysis of *problems* in communication and social systems. My own short definition is as follows: “Critical political economy of communications is a critical realist approach that investigates problems connected with the political and economic organization of communication resources” (Hardy, 2014, p. 14). I have argued for a CPE that is reflexive, revising, adaptive, and “porous”: open to the insights and methods of other approaches to strengthen both analysis and critique (Hardy, 2014, 2017).

A political economy of advertising explores advertising’s funding, production, distribution and regulation. This requires study of “economic” dimensions – how advertising and media sectors function in the production, circulation and consumption of goods and services – “political” dimensions – how marketing and communications are organised and regulated – and “symbolic” dimensions – how meaning is created and advertising influences the belief systems of societies. These can be distinguished analytically but are bound together in material processes of promotion (McFall, 2004). They are also powerfully linked, for instance in the environmental consequences arising

from both messages promoting consumption and the material impact of energy-intensive, waste-generating promotional industries (Meier, 2023).

Critical political economists have tended to critique advertising as the leading ideological agency for capitalism, for its role in promoting consumerism and possessive individualism, and for its regressive, stereotypical representations of gendered, racial and other identities. Advertising has been examined as part of a system of communications that “engineers consumption to match production and reproduces the ideological system that supports the prevailing status quo” (Faraone, 2011, p. 189).

The advertising industry may be understood as “an intricate and variable set of institutional relations between advertisers and the media, with advertising agencies as key intermediaries” (Sinclair, 2018, p. 217). While an “advertising industry” remains discernible today (in institutional arrangements, identities, discourses and practices), I situate advertising within broader formulations, such as the marketing communications and promotional industries. Doing so better addresses ongoing convergence and hybridisation across advertising, public relations, media and communications. These industries “involve two interconnected systems of activity that are crucial to Western society” – systems of ideology and of media support (Turow and McAllister, 2009, p. 2). Part of what Sinclair (2012, p. 1) calls the “manufacturing-marketing-media complex”, advertising “underwrites media communication systems and forms a cultural as well as economic nexus between production and consumption”.

Critical political economists have analysed the full range of industry arrangements and practices, yet a distinctive contribution has been to address how advertising finance influences media content, provision, and access to communication services. Key topics of investigation include:

- Corporate structures and activities, including ownership, joint-agreements, and control; corporate convergence/deconvergence; corporate “interlocking” (Bettig and Hall, 2012) across marketing, media, communications, technology and other sectors.
- Organisation of labour (employment conditions, remuneration, precarity; inequality and intersectionality; working cultures, identities and relationships).

- Creativity and content creation (control, monetisation; conditions and cultures of content production).
- Representations (how content decisions are made; what kinds of symbolic communication are produced and engaged with).
- Economic and cultural aspects of advertising finance and relationships between advertising and media/communications and other service/infrastructure providers and intermediaries.
- Governance (policy actors and networks; lobbying and influence on policymaking; law and formal regulations and processes, self-regulation and all forms of “rule”, including technological rule making/shaping and informal governance across professional/non-professional relations).
- Digitalisation, platformisation, surveillance capitalism, advertising technology (adtech) and automation.
- Consumer engagement, activism and resistance including subvertising, consumer boycotts, adblocking, and other market-based or civic activities.

Research Methods for CPE studies of advertising: An overview

Reviews of critical advertising studies tend to focus, understandably, on key issues in analysis and debate rather than on research methods (Richards et al. 2000; Wharton, 2015; Leiss et al. 2018). These aspects, though, converge in discussions about research design, including the overall approach, theoretical and conceptual considerations, choice and construction of objects of analysis, selection of topics, and formulation of research questions, as well as the data selection and analysis offered.

Surveying the CPE literature, the first and most striking observation is the relative lack of explicit discussion of research methods. This appears to confirm critiques that critical political economy approaches lack both methodological and theoretical rigour, as discussed by Hesmondhalgh (2019, p. 48-80). The record, as we will see, is far more varied and nuanced. Nevertheless, much CPE work from the 20th century does not generally elaborate on research methods. Why not? There are multiple possible explanations, multiplied further if we adopt a context-sensitive analysis.

One explanation for the limited explication of research methods is the relative paucity of the CPE literature overall. While there is a vast literature on advertising, only a relatively small sub-section develops a critical political economic analysis, and even less announces itself as doing so. Another explanation is that many CPE works aimed to reach wider readership and were not so focused on more academic methodological discussion. Additionally, the critical-historical narrative approach of many CPE works is not usually accompanied by experimental research or systematic data generation.

A deeper explanation lies in how critical scholarship positions itself in relation to more “mainstream” positivist research. One of the origins for critical-academic study of media-marketing industries is the Frankfurt School analysis of Adorno and Horkheimer (1997). Their “critical theory” critiqued the ways dominant forms of pragmatist and positivist research tended to frame inquiry within the prevailing values of the social system rather than to interrogate and challenge these, and in doing so supported the interests of powerful corporations and other power sources in societies (Hardt, 1992). Given this critique, it is perhaps unsurprising that some CPE scholars eschewed the sort of explicit methodological elaboration that is so common in mainstream research. However, a framing of “critical versus methodological” would be a disservice both to the historical record and to the needs of CPE scholars today.

The demands to provide a justification and explication of research methods has progressively intensified for those seeking a voice within academic publishing and scholarship. So, it is notable but unsurprising that there is greater attention to research methods in late 20th and 21st century CPE work. Corrigan (2018) notes the calls from CPE scholars such as Wasco and Nixon for greater attention to methods, as this volume also attests.

Historical research and document analysis

The most common approach in CPE is historical research, including “contemporary history” studies such as Wu (2017) and Turow (2021). This is also a key feature of the precursor period, where critiques of historical and contemporary conditions and practices predominate. Such historical investigation uses methods including archival

research and document analysis. Studies examine primary texts, such as advertisements, but also a range of other documentation that help to identify corporate arrangements, business activities, regulatory conditions and more. Typical archive sources include the records of marketers, marketing agencies, and regulators, or databases such as the World Advertising Research Centre (WARC). Yet, this is a field in which industry resources and even more contemporary web archives can be ephemeral, such as the media promotion materials Walden (2023) investigates, with archiving efforts such as the History of Advertising Trust, used by Chan et al. (2020), being important but isolated exceptions.

From CPE's earliest days, key sources for historical research have included corporate documents, such as annual reports, business and financial data, press releases, speeches and other corporate statements. A second category is market analysis reports and data produced by business information providers, such as Deloitte, McKinsey and Bloomberg, and digital marketing specialists such as Insider Intelligence. A third important source is trade media, which refers to publications written for workers and other key stakeholders in particular industries or industry segments (Corrigan, 2018). Leading marketing trade publications include *Advertising Age*, *AdWeek*, *Campaign*, *Brand Republic*, and *Martech*.

In his studies of the corporate reach and restructuring of the major "holding companies" that own marketing communications agencies, Sinclair (2018, 2020) uses Adbrands to identify data on agencies, as well as data from *Campaign*, *eMarketer*, internet world stats, Statista, *Jing Daily*, and corporate reports from PricewaterhouseCoopers, KPMG, and others. Hardy (2023) examines the top five global advertising holding companies' annual reports (WPP, Publicis, Omnicom, Interpublic, and Dentsu) and argues these provide insights into corporate convergence and restructuring across advertising, PR, data, customer relations management, and other services for clients. These annual reports are also a valuable source on issues from risk management to public affairs, lobbying and corporate attitudes to regulation, and sustainability, inclusion, and diversity policies.

A fourth key source is general public media: news brands, magazines, and other publishers and content providers, such as the *Guardian*, *New York Times* and *Financial Times* that carry articles relevant to business or more general readers on media and advertising, including commerce, entertainment, culture, technology, and regulation. For more contemporary research, these categories of trade and general media extend to professional-personal networking on social media apps such as LinkedIn.

The forms and adequacy of regulation is a major focus for CPE analysis. So, another key area for documentation is governance, including material relating to policy, law, regulation, and industry self-regulation. These sources generally provide public access to some of the information and opinion that is otherwise restricted, based on cost barriers, membership or policy network exclusions. We can include here the outputs of industry trade and professional bodies, such as the US Association of National Advertisers (ANA) or Promax, the global association for entertainment marketing professionals. While influencing policy and policymakers is undoubtedly a core activity for most trade bodies, they also provide information and services for members and, selectively, for stakeholders. For example, a longstanding UK trade body, the Advertising Association, provides public information on advertising expenditure across different media not readily accessible from other sources. Today, trade bodies such as the Interactive Advertising Bureau (US) provide industry data, reports, policy statements, and guidance, for instance setting standards for programmatic advertising.

Overall, there is a plethora of “free” information on the advertising and media sectors for those with internet access. Yet for researchers, much market reporting and analysis is proprietary, provided for corporate subscribers or purchasers at retail prices beyond most academic institutional budgets, let alone individual researchers. This makes business and trade press reporting on such otherwise inaccessible data, all the more important, for instance the market analysis and forecasts of Insider Intelligence, PQ Media and others. It is possible, and worthwhile, to obtain sample data, or try to negotiate discounted rates, but much existing CPE literature is based on combinations of publicly accessible sources or primary research data.

Levels of analysis and methods for studying advertising production and content

One way to map critical advertising studies and the research methods employed is based on this scholarship's "levels" of analysis, including macro, meso, and micro level studies. This can also serve as a guide across both 20th and 21st century critical scholarship.

Macro level - Arrangements and activities at the system level, including: political and economic arrangements and influences; analysis of advertising and media industries at transnational, national, and sub-national levels; economic, corporate and cultural relationships across advertising and media industries including marketer finance and influences on media; patterns in marketing communications business and institutional arrangements, including corporate ownership and market structures, employment trends, workforce profile; overall frameworks for policy and regulation.

Meso level – how all the above connect with arrangements, activities, and experiences at the level of institutions and institutional/networked relationships, including: institutional level analysis of the main actors, networks, and processes within advertising/promotional and media/communications industries/market sectors; and aggregated analyses of corporate strategic/allocative decisions, operational practices, discourses, and content, circulation, engagement , and use.

Micro level – how all the above connect with arrangements, activities, and experiences at the level of individuals and social relationships, including: practices, interrelationships, identities, and attitudes of those involved in advertising/promotional and media/communications processes; and specific instances of practices, discourses, outputs/content, and services.

The CPE tradition is certainly defined by its concern to understand and critique phenomena at a macro level. It is also valid to argue that some CPE work has neglected to examine phenomena at micro levels (Havens et al. 2009), a point many CPE scholars readily acknowledge. However, the arguments that micro levels are ignored, or that CPE approaches are incapable of addressing them, does not do justice to the research record (Hardy, 2017; Wasco and Meehan, 2013).

Indeed, while historical studies have been the predominant mode of critical marketing-media industry studies, this work has often been supplemented by primary research methods, such as interviews. For instance, for his book *The Advertising Man*, Jeremy Tunstall (1964) interviewed 45 “advertising people” to examine the pay and conditions of men and women in London advertising agencies (despite its archaic book title), as well as patterns of corporate ownership, mergers and acquisitions across agencies. In a note on methods, Tunstall (1964, p. 281-2) describes a period in which he applied and worked in an agency, not used in the research but for “acclimatization” (with a brief discussion of disapproval from academic researchers for his non-disclosure), a literature review phase, and interviews. Tunstall explains his failure to secure further planned participant observation, as agencies feared that confidential information would be divulged, and discusses the challenges of interviewing a “publicity-conscious” sector that is “sophisticated about social research interviewing” and “reticent about [divulging] detailed cases”. In the 1970s, several of the leading British writers who formulated critical political economic approaches incorporated interview research, including those who brought their own industry experience and connections into their work, such as Nicholas Garnham, James Curran and other members of the so-called “Westminster School” (Curran, 2003).

More recently, critical scholars such as Turow (2021) have incorporated interviews, although extended ethnographic and participant observation studies have been comparatively rare. Moreover, those conducting the latter have tended to do so from perspectives that seek to remedy what they see as deficiencies in CPE approaches that lack sufficient attention to more “micro” level production processes and cultures through which individuals and groups form and interact.

Connecting these “levels” of analysis is ever-challenging. However, CPE is concerned to do so, and that provides a strong basis on which to review existing work and to continue to develop an encompassing critical political economy of communications. As Wasco and Meehan (2013, p. 153) summarise:

Regardless of the particular technologies for distribution and access, media products are simultaneously artifacts and commodities that are both created by

artists and manufactured by workers, and present a vision for interpretation and an ideology for consumption to an active public of interpreters who may also be consumers targeted by advertisers or product placements and a commodity audience that can be measured and sold to advertisers. These complexities of the phenomena under study ensure that economic reductionism has no explanatory power for contextual researchers. Rather, they suggest lines for interdisciplinary thinking and collaborative research.

The CPE tradition engages in a rich, ongoing dialogue on key issues such as the articulation (to use Stuart Hall's term) of the relationship between macro political and economic dimensions and micro-level practices, informing para-Marxist debates on determination (base/superstructure) and radical sociological debates on structuration (structure and agency). I would suggest that the macro, meso, and micro level mapping can "accommodate" these debates and serve as a framework for productive engagement with them, provided we also problematize the conceptualisation of vertical, discrete "levels".

One of the most tangible ways in which these macro-meso-micro levels intersect is in the analysis of communications content. Against studies that regard content as a sufficient object of analysis, CPE approaches emphasise the study of "texts" in "contexts", ranging from the conditions and macro level arrangements for communications to take place in the social formation, to all the factors shaping communication production, distribution and circulation, access, co-creation, consumption and use. The critical study of advertising texts has a large and rich body of work anthologised and examined in works such as Wharton (2015), and more critically reviewed in Richards et al. (2000, pp. 47-100) and Leiss et al. (2018). This chapter only reviews selected works, but these illustrate the efforts to connect macro to micro levels in analysing advertising and media industries.

Precursors to CPE: Adorno and Horkheimer's Culture Industry analysis

Critiques of communications are as old as human sociality. That is most certainly the case for advertising, where humour and critique coexist with the earliest human

records of the promotion and exchange of goods and services. It is also important to identify influences and antecedents that preceded CPE's institutionalization as a distinctive field of inquiry (Winseck, 2016). Yet, I reaffirm the claim that the CPE tradition took institutional form in the late 1960s, when important organisational and ideational capacity-building developed. There is no space to map phases and variations of CPE in detail here (see Mosco, 2009; Hardy, 2014; Hesmondhalgh, 2019). Instead, I organise the discussion according to a broader temporal division: a precursory phase up to mid-1960s, 20th century CPE (late 1960s-1990s), and 21st century CPE (2000s to present). To summarise a richer account we can identify an "early" CPE phase of institutional formation dominated by para-Marxist analysis in the late 1960s and 1970s. This is followed by a more synthesising CPE in which the influence of critical cultural approaches is strengthened in the 1980s and early 1990s, continuing in a "later" phase of CPE, from the mid-1990s, that engages with digitalisation and digital communications internationally, marking a transition point arguably more pivotal than the turn of the century itself.

One of the most significant "precursors" to CPE is the "Culture Industry" analysis in Adorno and Horkheimer's (1997) *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. First published in 1944, this work impacted CPE most strongly in the 1970s, when it was translated from the original German. The piece is influential across radical criticism and cultural studies, where it often presented as elitist, politically pessimistic, and unappreciative of consumer or working class agency (Hesmondhalgh, 2019, pp. 284-288). For our purposes, though, it is Adorno and Horkheimer's efforts to examine advertising as a key driver of the commercialisation of culture that is most salient. The Culture Industry chapter addressed topics developed in later CPE work, including: advertising as a source of finance for cultural production that influences what is produced; the corporate interlinking across media, marketers and the economic sectors they serve; and the influence of commercial values and imperatives on cultural expression and on the ideological values promoted across the system. This intentionally provocative account, placing totalitarianism within its supposed Western democratic antithesis, was supported by analysis of "mass" entertainment developed in literary and cultural criticism. Rich in examples, described with sardonic humour (Peters 2002), its

explanations blend Marxism, Freudian psychoanalysis, and broader strains of both radical and conservative cultural thought.

20th Century CPE analyses and critiques of media and advertising

During the 1950s and 1960s various critiques of the advertising industry were developed within liberal economic and cultural theory (Galbraith, 1958; Packard, 1957). Those critiques influenced debates among radicals in the early CPE period (late 1960s-early 1990s) on what the proper relationship between the economic and the cultural should be within Marxist, or broader para-Marxist, analysis. One trajectory was the gradual abandonment of economist Marxist arguments that advertising promotes “false needs” and that the utility of goods could be communicated without the embellishments of persuasion and commodity fetishism generated by the “magic system” (Williams 1980). This gave way to a cultural anthropological perspective (Jhally, 1991). The latter argued goods are inextricably imbued with symbolic meaning in ways that rigid separations between use and exchange value, in works such as Williams (1980), underappreciated. Breaking with more totalistic rejection of advertising opened up space to integrate CPE attention to the organisation of the promotional industries and practices with critical cultural insights into the symbolic processes and affective work of promotion. Yet, such integration was delayed. Critical-cultural scholarship during the 1970s-early 1990s focused mainly on the imagery and textuality of advertising and contributed to shifting attention away from the industrial production of advertising towards the production, and reception, of meaning derived from advertising texts.

Another formative debate took place between Dallas Smythe, a founding figure in CPE's early institutional phase, and Marxist economists Baran and Sweezy over what a historical materialist analysis of advertising should comprise. Smythe sought to redress a perceived “blindspot” in Western Marxism by tracing the production of an audience commodity, an audience sold by (free-to-air) broadcast media to advertisers. Smythe developed the concept of audience labour, whereby audiences worked to produce the valued commodity, their watching time. This audience “work” was directly exploited for surplus value realised in the media-advertising market, and drew additional value for capital by replenishing energies, during people's leisure time, required for exploitation

in the rest of their working lives. The conceptualisation of audience labour and, in the digital era, the prosumer commodity audience (Fuchs, 2021), continues to generate debate. This includes the work of feminist political economists who challenged Smythe's naturalisation of a commodity audience that was produced through the class and gender framings of ratings agencies (Meehan, 2002).

Baran and Sweezy's (1964) *Theses on Advertising* illustrates strengths and limitations found in other work of the period. These authors make a series of assertions without support, including that the perceived common outlook and "conservatism" of media owners and advertisers is "adequately explained by the fact that the owners and executives controlling the media are in no respect different, as far as basic attitudes, mentality, and political orientation are concerned, from the owners and executives of the advertising concerns" (Baran and Sweezy, 1964, p. 26). Missing, for later scholars, is the need to examine and assess this broad assertion through more granular empirical analysis that considers the specificities, tensions and contradictions in such "conservatism" and the composition and interactions of different actors across media and other organisations. Yet, Baran and Sweezy (1964, p. 27) are careful to avoid claiming that advertising creates "envy, gluttony, avarice, and ruthlessness in the drive for self-advancement". Rather, they contend advertising reinforces and utilises these values. Reaching for connections across the macro, meso and micro levels, Baran and Sweezy (1964, p. 28) argue:

The causal nexus explaining the nature of values, prevailing standards of culture, and the quality of forthcoming artistic production cannot stop at advertising. It leads rather through advertising to the underlying structure of the market- and profit-determined economic and social order.

The early phase of CPE involved efforts to develop tools for theoretical and empirical analysis. For the British academics, such as Graham Murdock and Peter Golding, who mapped what they thought a political economy of communications should address, there was an effort, contra Smythe, to connect both material (economic) and symbolic (cultural) dimensions through detailed investigations that explored how the different cultural industries were organised and performed. Smythe's audience commodity concept, based on free-to-air television, had limited capacity to explain media where the

mix of advertising and consumer revenue varied in ways consequential for content or access, from cinema to publishing (Murdock, 1978). While “industry” was used largely for polemical effect by Adorno and Horkheimer to condemn standardisation and commodification of culture, CPE media scholars, such as Nicholas Garnham, influenced by the work of Bernard Miège, examined specificities across the cultural industries and the complex and contradictory dynamics of cultural production. These more nuanced, industry-specific analyses considered the role of advertising finance and provided resources for more granular studies of the advertising and promotional industries.

Media and Advertising Interdependencies

Significantly, many of those setting out the contours for CPE studies of communications had a keen interest and appreciation for the relationship between advertising and media. James Curran had been editor of *New Socialist* and experienced the acute challenge of securing advertising “subsidy” to publish. Curran examined how the economics and politics of advertising subsidy undermined the working class, radical press in Britain, led to press concentration and eroded plurality (Curran, 1978; Curran and Seaton, 2018). Graham Murdock edited and co-wrote a study for UNESCO (Murdock and Janus, 1985) which drew together research from selected countries to provide one of the first comparative studies of media and advertising interrelationships.

CPE scholars have made a major contribution to studies of the economic impact of advertising on media, but also crucially addressed the ways in which advertising has influenced non-advertising content. The implications of uneven distribution of advertising “subsidy” for media serving poorer, ethnic minority audiences in the US are explored by Gandy (2000, p. 48) who finds: “[t]o the extent that advertisers place a lower value on gaining access to particular minority audiences, those who would produce content for that segment will be punished by the market...”.

CPE scholars have examined the influence of advertising, from the distribution of subsidy and market censorship, to influences on editorial decisions (Baker 1994) through to both historical and contemporary forms of “embedded persuasion” (Murdock 1992). Many of the problems CPE analysts addressed in the latter half of the

twentieth century remain salient today, but critical scholars have updated theory and analysis to deal with transformations. Key features include the expansion of marketers' self-promotion ("owned" media), the "disaggregation" of media and advertising as marketers target consumers directly through online behavioral advertising, and the "integration" of media and advertising through product placement, native advertising, and various other forms of branded content (Turow, 2011; Einstein, 2016; Hardy, 2022; Amazeen, 2023).

To illustrate methods from earlier research, Curran (1978), with researcher assistance, conducted a content analysis of UK newspapers over a 30-year period. This examined the relationship between paid advertisements and the editorial content appearing on the same page. The aim was to examine evidence that advertising spending influenced non-advertising coverage. It is disquieting that such important investigation has been so rarely conducted since, but the study also presents some limitations. Specifically, Curran examined non-advertising coverage of the same broad topic areas as the advertising. However, we need to distinguish favourable editorial towards specific advertisers from shifts towards content (and sections, packages and promotions) serving brand sectors, examine the precise forms of media-marketer relations and transactions, and the broader consequences of orienting content to create a "buying mood" (Baker 1994; Herman and Chomsky, 2008).

Early to Later CPE: International, culturalist, and governance approaches

In the 1980s, especially, critical scholars began to examine the advertising industry in greater detail internationally and comparatively, including global corporate restructuring, institutional practices, corporate lobbying influence on governance and (de)regulation, as well as advertising finance and media influence. Fejes (1980) examined advertising agencies in Latin America. Sinclair, another critical scholar whose work builds from a critique of the insufficiencies of Adorno and Horkheimer (Sinclair, 1987: 35-43), examined the advertising industries in his native Australia and later globally, including studies of the BRICS (the then rapidly growing economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) (Sinclair, 2018).

Tracing the formation and influence of policymaking and regulation on communications arrangements and practices has been a distinguishing feature of CPE approaches. Examining how regulatory frameworks have been modified to facilitate phenomena such as the integration of media and advertising offers an important corrective to studies that ignore regulation and then read the changes as natural, inevitable or driven solely by factors such as technological innovation, creativity or entrepreneurialism. The integration of advertising and media has advanced through changes such as the liberalisation of product placement rules in Europe, which occurred following intensive and expensive lobbying by commercial interests, although countered by some trade union and civil society interests and by members of the European Parliament (Hardy, 2022, pp.71-79, 169-205). Such themes of lobbying power, deregulation and contestation have been a focus for radical scholars (Crain, 2021) .

Mattelart's (1989) *Advertising International* stands as a foundational text in critical advertising industry studies, offering a detailed examination of a phase of transnational corporate expansion and the deregulatory policy changes that supported it. In the same period, Mattelart and Palmer (1991) provide a study of advertising lobbying power in the European Union and EU member states. Indicating the range, and paucity, of sources for such ground-breaking work, their study has 10 references. Three are from trade body the European Advertising Tripartite, three from media/trade media, two from corporate (advertising agency) sources and only two from academic sources.

As it has developed, such critical policy analysis draws on work across the specialist sub-fields of communications law and policy studies, yet CPE is distinctive in positing, if not always realising, a holistic analysis that seeks to trace the interrelationships between the governance of communications and the structures and performance of communications, integrating political, economic, social and cultural domains.

From the 1980s, critical scholars also examined the lived working practices and cultures of creative practitioners. Such work focused on the meso-micro levels, and addressed issues neglected in more macro focused studies of corporate ownership and control, although the literature belies overdrawn divisions here. More significantly, this more culturalist work deployed ethnographic research methods and insights from

cultural anthropology and critical sociology, such as Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work on class, taste cultures and cultural intermediaries. Researchers attended to media work and workers in ways that had been relatively neglected hitherto, and they foregrounded the politics and concerns of the "new left" and social movements on gender, race, sexuality, disability and difference. Frank Mort's (1996) and Sean Nixon's (1996) work examined the changing constructions of masculinity in British advertising including ethnographic studies of creatives. The extensive critical literature on the representation of women and girls in advertising (Kilbourne, 1999) includes feminist critical political economists such as Robin Andersen (2002) connecting industry production and representation. These critical approaches also inform more contemporary analyses of femvertising, and the cause related marketing associated with "brand activism" (Sobande, 2019; Khamis, 2020).

The welcome influence and synthesising of critical cultural analysis with themes more traditionally associated with "political economy" is also evident in the overdue expansion of international, comparative, diasporic, postcolonial and transcultural studies. This includes Mazzarella's (2003) ethnographic study of advertising in India, Shankar's (2015) study of Asian American advertising agencies, and Li's (2016) study of advertising in China, all of which are exemplary, multi-method studies involving interviews, participant observation, content analysis and critical review of secondary data.

21st century CPE

21st century CPE work is harder to trace because those scholars who situate their work within a critical political economy tradition, such as Crain (2021) make up only one strand with others moving in opposite directions. There has been a resurgent, explicitly Marxist political economy of media, exemplified by Fuch's (2021) critical studies of corporate social media, commodification and the exploitation of users as the prosumer commodity audience. Yet, a contrary tendency has been work that does not announce itself as critical political economy but which nevertheless references or more broadly contributes to this approach. Such reticence reflects, in part, the attacks on "political economy" as an outdated, exhausted tradition from advocates of "new" media industry

studies approaches (Havens et al. 2009; see Meehan and Wasco, 2013; Hardy, 2017). Yet, it is also indicative of a multiplicity of positionings which all need careful delineation. This includes some scholars distancing from Marxism, as well as affiliations with approaches that appear relatively more engaged with intersectional cultural politics. In short, there has been a welcome shift towards greater integration and synthesis across critical culturalist and political economic scholarship. However, this has been accompanied by diminished explicit affiliation with CPE and with it some erosion of the ideational rivets in a chain of interconnections across the wider body of CPE research. This makes it all the more vital to reconnect the historical insights of radical CPE scholars, understand and evaluate the contexts of critique of their work, and assess its contemporary salience for critical research.

One of the foremost scholars pursuing CPE concerns, but largely through a critical sociology perspective, is Joseph Turow (2011, 2021). This work builds on a rich body of critical studies of marketing and commercial culture by writers including McAllister, Bogart, Strasser, Stole, Solomon, Andersen in the US and, more internationally, the authors in collected volumes such as West and McAllister (2023). Turow's work involves analysis of industry data sources such as those outlined above and interviews. His ability to secure senior practitioner interviews for research that is critical of marketing's social consequences is testament to the sustained effort, and resources, needed to establish trust through scholarship and fair dealing.

A very rich variety of topics are addressed in contemporary critical studies of advertising industries. Brooke Erin Duffy and Megan Sawey's (2022) analysis of gendered labor in digital promotional culture is an example of powerful studies that connect problems of representation and advertising content to the influences and constraints of marketers and agencies, as well as faltering progress on working conditions, diversity and inclusion. Major critical research foci include the role of advertising in platform economics and practices, advertizing in social media, branded content, including influencer marketing, advertising technology (adtech), automation and marketing, the use and exploitation of data and surveillance capitalism. Growing themes include the devastating ecological impact of the media-marketing system, from the production and distribution of goods and promotional communications to waste

and physical and psychic damage from (over)consumption (Meier 2023). Broader themes include the growth and hybridisation of promotional industries and cultures, convergence of marketing communications and the expansion from what Hardy (2023) describes as a triad (marketers-agencies-media) to a sextet that includes the former plus platforms, creators and adtech.

Regarding methods, there are trends towards mixed methodologies and digital research methods, including large-scale data collection. For example, Bilić and Primorac's (2018, pp 66-67) study of the "digital advertising gap" in Croatia's online news industry assesses the market shares of digital intermediaries using sources including "audited market reports for Google and Facebook..., Pricewaterhouse Coopers IAB ADEX benchmark reports...for the sizes of the internet advertising markets and internet advertising per capita, Internet Live Stats for the sizes of respective internet populations, and Statista for Facebook users per country". The researchers examine advertising spending on media through data from Croatia's industry association in the market communications sector as well as the commercial income for Croatian news media websites. Amazeen's work offers a contemporary version of Curran's (1978) analysis of advertiser influence on adjacent editorial. Using computational data analysis to examine native advertising in the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, and the *Wall Street Journal* over a five year period (2014-2019), Vargo and Amazeen (2021) find that "the presence of native advertising for a corporation tended to suppress ensuing news coverage of that corporation across the entire online US media landscape for approximately half of the corporations studied" (Amazeen 2023, p. 253).

Overall, this work illustrates the vitality and renewed interest in the economic and cultural influence of marketers' payment and control over communication environments. Connected to this is attention to the performance and capacity of governance to enable and constrain how the media-marketing ecology evolves.

Advertising and Governance

I described earlier the effort of CPE scholars to connect macro-meso and micro levels of analysis. My own efforts include developing a critical governance approach (Hardy 2022, p143-168) that informs my work as principal investigator for an international, collaborative research initiative: the Branded Content Governance Project, 2022-2025.

One attraction of governance as a concept is that it encompasses the range of informal as well as formal processes by which practices are ordered, enabled, and constrained. Such a mix of laws, regulatory agencies, industry, and professional self-regulation, evolving standards, and looser “rulemaking” is a general feature of contemporary media industries, situated within dynamic, adaptive, digital communications systems. Governance is also analytically encompassing, inviting attention to the multiple sites and processes of rulemaking and ordering across production, circulation, consumption, and use. A criticism made of some governance studies is that they attend to “micro” operations of power without an adequate account of the macro-level influences of state–capital relationships. To remedy this, a critical political economy governance analysis draws on efforts to theorize and examine the interacting relations of power across macro-meso-micro levels (Davies, 2011; Hardy, 2022).

The Branded Content Governance Project examines the emerging rules and practices for branded content across “similar” media systems principally in Europe and North America. It assesses how governance is practiced and understood by industry, policy and civil society actors and institutions actors, examining policy documentation and processes, and discourses within professional and public media. The main methods include ones discussed above, from documentation analysis to semi-structured interviews, surveys and ethnographic studies. One of the more innovative research methods this project uses is Computational Data analysis (CDA) to analyse both policy and public media texts. Popiel’s (2020) work analysing the policy discourse of the Federal Communication Commission illustrates the capability of this method for critical governance analysis.

Critical governance analysis can provide renewed resources to address key questions asked by CPE scholars: how is marketer power strengthened or countered across contemporary communications systems, and what are the consequences? This

governance analysis can contribute to theory and methods, but it remains just one of very many paths that can be pursued to advance critical studies of media and marketing relationships.

Conclusion

CPE's broad, historical trajectory outlined here has been from more generalised and totalistic accounts towards more granular analysis, accompanied by a broadening of theoretical references and more explicit engagement with multiple research methods and mixed methodologies. In addition, there has been an expansion of studies of advertising in national and regional contexts and of transnational institutional arrangements and flows, providing resources for a decolonial political economy (Chiumbu and Radebe, 2020). The influence of advertising across contemporary communications makes the contribution of critical political economy ever more vital. That contribution, past and present, is not as well-signposted as it could be. This chapter has discussed some of the literature, approaches and in particular methods employed. This selective review falls far short of providing a full mapping of the literature but has, I hope, indicated some of the range, vitality and value that can be built upon.

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