

Media Issues and Impact: From Positivism to Phenomenology, Audience Attitudes and Concerns – Social Media and Shopping Malls as 'Ready-To-Hand'

Abstract

Consumers engage with branded space, time, and products therein, responding immersively to digital marketing or downtown malls. What media (in)formed or materially shaped mode of audience address is appropriate to these perceptive participants? In turn, are their responses therein reasonably rendered merely as affirming or negative attitudes to media promoted product or people, subsequently to be quantified as conjoined with variables by which they are argued inductively to be (normally) caused? We argue rather for replacing the reductionist concept of *attitude*.

Authoring audiences construct mall and media narratives in a 'ready-to-hand' (Heidegger) or tacit practice of assembling stories. Discussion with media users unpacks that process by reflecting upon people's core activity of intending or projecting meaning from their horizons of understanding narrative as generic. Explicitly or implicitly, audiences anticipate realizing intelligibility on screen.

Drawing upon responses to *YouTube* marketing narratives, our paper presents 'present-at-hand' (Heidegger) projections in focus groups. In a hermeneutic circle of understanding stories, participants can constitute a coherent synthesis of projection and subsequent event on screen. We discuss the discourse in which they reflect upon unsuccessful syntheses. Marketing narratives are considered to be prescriptive: we examine audience alignment or alienation from evaluation.

Key Words: Audiences, Branding, Hermeneutic, Malaysia, Malls, Media, Phenomenology.

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Understanding 'is grounded in *something we grasp in advance - in a fore-conception.*'

(Heidegger, 1962: 191) (emphasis in the original).

Perceptual experience is essentially a process of understanding within familiar frameworks. In doing so we are *a priori* (always already) anticipating activity, an emerging identity, whether of person or product, 'something we grasp in advance'. We 'read' the visible culturally and temporally.

Audiences are perspectival in viewing events, conceptualizing the subject matter on which they focus in ways which (discursively) emphasize some aspects, with other 'moments' hidden or marginalized. To use the hermeneutic spatial metaphor for epistemological sight, we gaze at the world (thereby subject(ed) to consciousness) from 'horizons of understanding' (Gadamer, 1975). Looking as *critique* from alternative points of view becomes possible. In short, 'access to the facts is provided by the understanding of meaning' (Habermas, 1971 quoted in Murray and Evers, 1989).

Such philosophical assertion departs radically from Positivism. The latter separates seeing subject from seen object apparently allowing that entity to be perceived 'neutrally' or independently of the onlooker's culture (dualism). Instead, Phenomenology presents people as everywhere 'fore-understanding' objects in terms of their characteristic use or 'ready-to-hand' (Heidegger, 1962). We thereby project potential generic *practices* with products. In so being aware of 'entities' as types of phenomena (e.g. a hammer as equipment or iPad as a computer), human beings are not (merely) looking at objects 'present-at-hand' (ibid.). For our perspective is 'primordially' (ibid.) practical. The primary discourse of practice with which we engage with our world underwrites other talk, whether of beautiful artifacts, colors or shapes, and the abstract language of theoretical speculation.

In utilizing a conceptual cosmology which can be clearly articulated from the authorship of Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, phenomenology returns us from abstraction, offering us a theoretical

prism wherein we can think through our everyday 'concern' with using consumer media. Screen access involves a primordial or primarily practical orientation: here, authoring audiences employ participatory media as ready-to-hand tools in cultivating identity or 'potentiality-for-being' (ibid.).

This philosophical resource supports spatio-temporal metaphors or images of constructing meaning. Drawing upon such visual modeling of participatory culture, theory can accommodate our literacy: the latter 'dialectically' adds material detail (e.g. from blogging) to the phenomenology of networking. Authoring audiences can be considered as engaging with the ready-to-hand Internet; thus immersing online, they achieve a 'fusion of horizons' (familiar if not frequently focussed upon conceptual perspectives) interpreting text; 'projecting' meaning in/ on another's story, they pursue a 'circle of understanding' to articulate content and align or distance themselves (Heidegger, 1962).

Such philosophical thought reflecting on the 'ordering effect of cultural perspective' (De Burgh-Woodman and Bracc-Govan, 2010: 173) has been usefully appropriated in marketing and media studies to generate a conceptual purchase on screen users [e.g. their domestication of new technology (Helle-Valle and Slettemeas, 2008)]. We indeed need to 'rethink' (Das, 2010:140) our analytical frameworks initiated to study audiences of national mass media when we focus upon the situated 'complexities of consumer agency' positioned in participatory social media (Eckhardt and Mahi, 2004). The present paper engages with the phenomenology of perception to trace further the possibility of productively analyzing audience and consumer discourse as each comes to terms with similarly structured experience of screen media and shopping malls (Author, 2009 and 2011). In so doing, we discuss the development of a theoretical framework in understanding *understanding*.

From Whence Cometh Audience/Consumer Study?

Integrating Marketing and Media Theory

Philosophical assumptions about the ‘antecedents of behaviour’ inform the selection of research methodology seen to be appropriate in studying human activity (Bristor, 1985). Consumer behaviour can be regarded as (passively) caused by screen content considered by investigators to constitute sets of independently described external ‘variables’. Or it may be treated conceptually as the result of these audiences (actively) identifying or aligning with a persuasive media narrative, a story they themselves have productively come to a conclusion is presented on screen. These views draw upon a spatio-temporal model of screen response as effect *or* exploration of expectation.

This initial section outlines how much European media audience and marketing’s consumer studies converged philosophically subsequent to rejecting the structuralist assumption in the 1970’s that the subjectivity of spectators could be considered as predictable effect of powerful screen texts, thereby negating the need to ask (with attendant analyses) actual audiences about their responses. In subsequent sections, I reflect more pointedly upon this convergence in phenomenology.

To illustrate the application of such hermeneutic phenomenology to consumer or audience accounts of their analogous perceptions of screen media and shopping malls, the second part of this paper discusses how this developing framework guided three collaborative student research projects at xxxxxxxxxxx xxxxxxxx xxxxxx. In these latter research narratives, some Asian citizens of differing class, gender and ethnicity ‘story themselves’ (Newholm and Hopkinson, 2009: 457). They tell of their perceptual immersion in somewhat separate worlds. The thesis presented is that here consumer discourses, whether of being absorbed by media or mall, present *structurally similar* processes.

In such research, both philosophical viewpoints and people’s voices need to be integrated. We ‘wrap our work in theories’, yet ‘too much abstraction can mean that the worlds of informants are left behind, forgotten’ (Maclaran and Stevens, 2008: 346, 352). Phenomenology listens to the latter in positing a universal perceptual process - which can nonetheless accommodate discursive detail wherever audience consumers talk about their local lives of media use (Fullerton, 1987).

Hence, hermeneutics emphasises that media researchers as well as those of us undertaking investigations of markets and their consumers should not presume that their '(etic) way of viewing the world corresponds to the (emic) viewpoints' held by study participants (Thompson, 1998). In marking this distance between cultural horizons as a space for potential dissonance between screen branding and subsequent buyers, critical theory can engage with marketing practice - by thinking through consumers who align with (or become alienated from) such discourse (Tadajewski, 2010a).

Arguably, there were four stages in European audience and consumer theory drawing closer. I shall outline these in the following paragraphs but subsequently clarify and continue discussion of (C) *Hermeneutic Phenomenology* and (D) *Authoring Audiences*. They form a theoretical backdrop enabling engagement with audience response to absorbing artificial environment of media and mall:

(A) *Structuralism* - prior to 1980 in what is subsequently referred to as seventies' Screen Theory, spectator response is often considered an effect of the causally powerful pervasive cinema screen. (Analogous work perhaps continues in US Effects Studies). Audiences are said to be 'positioned' passively and politically by textual ideology. Seeking to activate or (even) rescue such a structurally determined spectator, radical work in this area produced modernist cinema, whose contradictions (e.g. between sound track and visual statement) required an audience striving for hermeneutically coherent understanding of a screen text, to distance themselves in analytical, even political, thought.

Important concepts for subsequent media consumer studies emerge during this early period of theorizing audience activity (or its absence). Viewers positioned or aligned by screen text are said to *identify* with its prescriptive narrative, or if distancing themselves, are thereby *alienated*:

(B) *Post-Structuralism* - after 1980, the phrase 'active audience' becomes central in media studies, referring to viewers' critical capacities in responding to television; a distinction is rendered between textual addressee (or implied viewer) and the actual audience, who can, again, *distance* themselves:

(C) *Hermeneutic Phenomenology* - from 1990 [e.g. in Author (1993) and Silverstone (1999)] an important focus is on the process of audiences interpreting television, increasingly inter-culturally.

Shaped by scholarly remembering of Gadamer's seminal *Truth and Method* (1975), there is evident construction of three axioms underwriting phenomenology's structured account of consumer-text awareness as (i) a productive *process* characterized by multiple play-like aspects (e.g. being goal-directed or immersive); (ii) audiences 'projecting' meaning on screen from cultural 'horizons' marked out by the viewer's wider knowledge or informed by generic expectation; (iii) aiming at integrating such anticipation with actual text in a coherent 'hermeneutic circle of understanding'.

Thompson's contribution (1991, 1997) is significant during this decade, incorporating (albeit with some amendment) a hermeneutic perspective in consumer studies: other work is guided by a wider marketing reference to reader reception theory originating in phenomenology (Kates, 2006): (D) *Authoring Audiences* - 2010: can the media user (audience-citizen) considered as *authoring* or writing digital content (e.g. in blogging/ messaging) be accommodated within hermeneutic theory? Our 'phenomenological gaze' here is on perception - on looking as ludic, whether immersively so, regarding screen media, or equally absorbed in seeing a shopping mall (Svensson, 2007).

'The positivistic tradition takes consumers to be passive entities responding to the push and pull of (...) situational stimuli' (O'Shaughnessy, 1985). External (or sufficient) causation excludes giving reasons for acting. But for those persuaded by 'postpositivist' hermeneutic phenomenology, screen responses are instead to be understood as 'mediated by meanings' produced by audiences (Thompson, 1993, 1994). Thus these paradigmatic accounts of consumer consciousness represent a fundamental 'diversity of conceptual orientations' (Churchill and Wertz, 1985) in research.

Marketing is 'dominated' by 'major storylines of quantification', 'notions of measurement, explanation and prediction'. In this prevailing narrative, 'who needs words like "ethnographic" and "epistemological" when you have the tangible metaphoric power of "positioning", "targeting" and "segmentation" at your discursive pedagogic disposal?' (Hackley, 2001: 68, 100) Resisting these 'atrophyed maxims' dependent on 'marketing's simplistic causative scheme', hermeneutics maps out an epistemology, an account of audiences interpreting selling on screen (ibid.: 153, 156).

A Hermeneutic Phenomenology of Authoring Audiences

Ready-to-Hand Producing Meaning

Hermeneutic phenomenology and associated research methods for engaging in structured analysis of audience and consumer response to screens and selling have, then, long been ushered on to the stage of studying media and marketing as appropriate to the 'rich multi-dimensionality of consumption meaning' (Ritson et al., 1996). Researcher formulated and numerically processed multiple-choice questionnaires are seen to necessarily constrain awareness of respondents' varying perspectives on (or modes of understanding) their own consumption practices. Quantitative method (albeit subsequently useful) closes down capacity for qualitative appreciation of cultural diversity.

Statistical correlations (sometimes celebrated as signifying causal connections) establishing a recurring sequence of screen and subsequent audience activity do not shed light on the latter's subjectively mediated motivation. Interpreting consumer consciousness is necessary (Firat, 1987).

To this end, the perceptual process obtaining between the (would-be) absorbing consumer environments of malls, mediated marketing and audience response is presented here as being both universally patterned and locally infused by cultural detail. Gazing or glancing at social media or shopping mall, our looking is located on cultural horizons of expectation from whence [with our understanding so (in)formed] we continually anticipate and articulate consumption practice. In so producing a narrative of our circumstance, we position ourselves in affirmation or distanced critical alienation. Thinking through consuming need not be problematic nor 'perilous' (Holbrook, 1989).

Hermeneutic theory provides a narrative account of how we make sense within seeing our surroundings as intelligible (Gadamer, 1975). Perceiving events, reading books, or responding to screens is from the outset an interpretive process, with our anticipation and articulating meaning (in)formed over time. Understanding marketing, media or mall follows a generic formula.

All seeing, then, is *seeing as*: we continually classify entities in our environment as instances of known types, constructing their likely future. In this time-taking process of looking, we reconcile our informed anticipation with actual occurrence, our recognition with reconnoitering. Articulating expectation with experience, reading 'to and fro', integrating detail with textual totality, we produce a genre shaped account of events in a 'hermeneutic circle of understanding' (Gadamer, 1975).

Media studies argued that screen reception involves generically informed integration of narrative elements or seeing a story's *sense* (Author, 1993). As noted, this hermeneutic model of audience response emerged concurrently in consumer theory (Thompson 1991,1997; with Pollio and Locander, 1994), and is now near being a 'marketing cognitive product' (Marion, 2010). An *Association for Consumer Research* website search yields seventy-two entries for 'hermeneutic'.

Here, some propositions on the processual nature of understanding are set out in summary to make explicit our position within the plural paradigms of media and marketing theory (Shankar and Patterson, 2001). They are pursued further as (re)formulated in audience and consumer study to enable their precise application to the participant prose in the empirical second half of this paper. Hermeneutic analyses (both quasi-historical and quite contemporary) which are easily accessible at the website established by the *Association for Consumer Research* (<http://acrwebsite.org/volumes/>) are frequently cited to establish the continuing context informing this particular S.E. Asian inquiry.

Drawing on the phenomenology of perception as the productive projection of meaning from a generic horizon enabling expectation, this 'hermeneutic map' of consumer understanding unpacks seven (simultaneous or successive) spatio-temporal stages (Ringberg and Christensen, 2003): audience (i) absorption with informed (ii) anticipation of meaning; (iii) their articulation of coherent narrative; (iv) alignment or agreement with consequent content and (v) appropriation to (in)form selves; *or* (vi) consumer alienation (resistance) and thus (vii) analysis of mall or media narrative. The discursive analyses of audience response to media marketing or mall are presented below to

exemplify these primary moments when consumers establish ready-to-hand meaning in phenomena. Subsequent accounts of their seeing (e.g. as aesthetic satisfaction or simply sensory) are secondary.

'Understanding' narrative is thus:

*our embodied perceiving from a horizon of generic expectation, projecting and (de)positing
meaning in a hermeneutic circle of producing an account.*

From a consumer perspective, playlike immersing in the audience address of participator inviting screen media or shopping mall with our subsequent construction of a narrative account can be intrinsically pleasurable - or enjoyable by virtue of the instrumental objectives thereby achieved. The cultural (and more concrete) horizon of understanding from which this epistemological travel commences constitutes a conceptual reference point or perspective for interpreting the perceived. The subjectively seen (concrete) is simultaneously intersubjectively (or interpersonally) regarded (conceptualized). In immersively testing such initial assumptions about screen media or shopping mall we *visit*. Phenomena have no 'inherent meanings' (Hudson and Murray, 1986): there are no 'indubitable' culturally invariant perceptions forming a foundation for knowing (Thompson, 1990).

Interpretation is always contextually shaped. Thus the construction of meaning follows an inclusive pattern, forming both investigator's and research participant's understanding of text in a hermeneutic circle of reading 'to and fro', relating elements of a perceived subject to its entirety, assembling an appropriate identity (Pennell, 1994). In this continual switch of focus from overview to constitutive element (the core activity in understanding), a fundamental moment is the audience's being absorbed in projecting (or intending) meaning implicit in sighting a *type* of subject (e.g. text), thereby anticipating likely content or event. Looking at a screen, locating its local narrative content as instantiating genre, immersed and inferring its future, we play perceptually (Stern et al., 2005). Actualizing or adjusting anticipated meaning when confronting contradiction between expectation and experiencing a text, the hermeneutic goal here is consistency without 'anomaly' (Costa, 1994).

In positivism, screen stimulus and consumer response are simply cause and effect (Lowe et al., 2005). For interpretive theory, responses to the screen (or 'reading') constitute an audience's initial projection of meaning with which they subsequently integrate narrative detail. The process of understanding 'covers all projection of meaning in a situation' (Ricoeur, 1981: 107). So the reading route can double back on itself, with expectations of narrative revised to accommodate textual event in the hermeneutic path of achieving an audience's integrated understanding (Shankar et al., 2001).

This hermeneutic circle of understanding (or coherently relating narrative 'part' to 'whole'), that is, involves a goal-oriented practice of informed anticipating and articulating particular content drawing upon a wider audience horizon of understanding or recollecting of the textual type which they believe they are viewing. In research method, establishing causality between screen content and consequence is inductive: following consumer understanding, however, involves interpreting.

Underwriting interpretive marketing and media theory is their axiomatic assumption that culture bounds but is also a basis of 'existing expectations' (Sherry, 1986). Seeing thus classifies or is generic, allocating the instance and 'novel' to known patterns, regarding it as exemplifying types. In the process of our perceiving, we recognize and seek fulfillment of instantiated regularities.

In *Being and Time* (1962), Heidegger asks, 'Does time itself manifest itself as the horizon of Being?' Does the experience of time fundamentally structure our existence as human beings making sense of the world in which we live? Heidegger answers in the affirmative. For hermeneutics, the temporal dimension of life emerges as the 'fore-structure' shaping our understanding. Perception is essentially informed and interpretive (we see 'something *as* something'); hence it is inferential or filled with expectations (future-oriented) which may sooner or later coincide with actual experience.

Identifying or recognizing texts generically as screen marketing narratives, we anticipate an eventual tag line or corporate logo. 'Man (sic) is oriented toward the future' (Mantzavinos, 2005: 29). 'Hermeneutics begins at home': but drawing on memory, the first moment of understanding is denoted as future-focussed 'inferential involvement' or 'involving inference' (Holbrook, 1987).

Our 'world also inseparably involves temporality, an immanent teleology in which, rooted in and retaining a determinate past, the present determines, acts into, and opens onto an ever uncertain future' (Churchill and Wertz, 1985). Understanding is structured by its temporal aspect or moment.

Human subjectivity is 'multi-dimensional', an informed looking forward from a physically located or embodied perspective on practice (Harindranath, 2009: 53). Working with perspectively shaped concepts such as the horizon of understanding from which an audience-consumer views media content and projects the meaning likely to emerge from a text, hermeneutics offers a set of spatio-temporal metaphors or models with which to conceptualize the frequency of communicating across cultures and such discursive negotiating as a 'fusion of horizons' (Gadamer, 1975).

Consumers visiting social media or shopping mall articulate or construct narrative accounts. People align or identify with other participants. But audiences can become alienated, conceptually/culturally placing at a dissenting distance their consuming selves to exhibit otherwise effaced more critical citizens. They may even engage in a discourse of depth hermeneutics analytical of perceived illegitimate power. 'Critique rests on the moment of *distanciation*' (Ricoeur, 1981: 110) (emphasis in the original). Indeed the act of consuming itself may be regarded as 'banal', displacing being a citizen with legal rights and ethical responsibilities (Clarke et al., 2007: 138). In thereby speaking of audience alienation, phenomenology subverts a conservative positioning (Tadajewski, 2010b: 786).

Focus Groups Interpreting 'Present-at-Hand' Semantic Intention

Generically Fore-Structured Consumer Concerns

'It is the researcher's task, then, to understand the various interpretive strategies people use (e.g. drawing upon their knowledge of the media marketing genre) and to show the extent and ideological foundation of these strategies (such as their positioning of self at a class or ethnic distance from branding) within our society.' (Ringberg, 1999)

To illustrate how a discursive psychology of perception informed by the ready-to-hand can guide interview research practice, we turn now to three xxxxxxxxx research projects as exemplars: two considered audience responses to Malaysian telecommunications branding video while a third focussed on immersive experiential accounts of Malaysian malls. The corporate authors of these videos are Maxis (a national provider) and Digi (being the local presence of transnational Telenor). Project authors agreed to this deployment of their findings and to using their first names (Boey, Doris, Mazrin) in referring to their writing about (anonymous) research participant responses.

Analyzing research contributor narratives below yields an interpretive perceptual process structured by realizing or rejecting informed projection of story lines. Consumers' own generically shaped articulation of meaning is found to be shared, with their accounts underwriting alignment or alienating of self from narrative agents when these audiences watch screen media marketing and walk in suburban mall. Supporting audience identification, point-of-view sequences enable looking between a subject on screen (e.g. 'smiling in joy') and implied spectator to converge. Exploring empathetic 'deeper meanings' (Grant, 2005: 609), we find audience experience is represented as embodied, responses signaled as significantly corporeal (e.g. 'the video gives me a warm feeling').

Consuming You Tube Media I

Boey's media dissertation on the Malaysian national telecommunications provider Maxis considers twelve responses to the marketing video *Maxis Friends and Family* (YouTube: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cgK2-k2zUy4>). Six are discussed by her in detail. This Chinese student summarizes the three stories which in sequence (as a series of tales each teleologically driving towards its own happy conclusion in handphone use) constitute the marketing narrative:

'The video showed the importance of connection between families which (exemplified) the theme of "Because family is everything". The husband shared the happiness of

having a new car with his wife through SMS, which was the theme of “Because you can’t wait to share”. The father who needed to work at night but still kept his promise, which was telling (a) bedtime story to his son through the video call (...) was the theme of “Because you want to keep your promise”. The daughter in the city contacted her mother in the village through voice call although they were far apart (exemplified) the theme of “Because distance should get you closer”.’

The four statements of narrative theme underwriting their associated video sequence take the form of answers (‘Because family is everything’, etc) assuming a meaning constructing audience of potential purchasers constituted by familial role-occupying, moral albeit materialistic, questioning consumers. People watching this video are further positioned by a series of point-of-view shots, by a narrative camera which aligns audience members with happy husband and faithful father. The emotional ‘warmth’ claimed by some viewers to be their experience in engaging with the stories on screen suggests a high level of involvement enabled by transparent or unnoticed video editing.

Boey’s telco consumers are Chinese (4), Indian (4) and Malay (4): they work in private (5) and public sectors (3) and include four students. Located in both Kuala Lumpur, Penang and Kota Samarahan (the site of the xxx campus), they are equally divided in terms of gender: approximately half were below the age of 30 and half above. Most had completed secondary school education. After they had seen the video, research interviews were loosely structured by questions about their involvement and identification with content as well as the relationship between expectation and events they see. Subsequent discussion occurred around (dis)satisfaction with Maxis service.

Considering this audience discourse from a theoretical perspective recognizing the multiple moments of perceptual processing indicated above by phenomenology is productive. We are thus enabled to interpret people’s particular perceptual processes in responding to the video on *YouTube*. Such abstract analysis is, in turn, enriched by that which participants have to tell us as researchers.

Audience Anticipatory Absorption in Narrative

Celebrating enthusiastic absorption and alignment with this media marketing's persuasive narrative, a female Chinese respondent announced: 'The video gives me a warm feeling and makes me appreciate the people around me.' Likewise, a Malay male consumer concluded on a specifically familial note: 'It gave me a feeling of warm, family caring and love'. But for a more dispassionate male Malay contributor, the video was ordinary, a set of stories merely substantiating his projection of likely marketing content: 'The video meets my expectation but nothing is surprising (to) me because it (is) just introducing the family plans.' Expectation satisfied and emotion can be separate.

Absorption in content is informed or shaped by anticipation of storied developments. We view from a knowledgeable (often genre-informed) horizon of expectation, which may be limited by the information with which we are provided at the outset or which we subsequently reshape in the light of unfolding events on screen. A female Indian participant experiences the first:

'Normally the handphone telecommunication service video will have many logos or icons such as the Yellow Man in Digi video, but I can't find any Maxis logo or icon during the video except the last part so at first I can't expect that it is a Maxis video.'

On the other hand, watching a 'middle-aged man showing his car key to his wife (it's like flaunting his new car to his wife)', a male Chinese contributor formed an initial anticipatory vision of probable 'car-sale' marketing on screen. Hence, watching the video's subsequent stories about 'people conversing through mobile phones', he found this services narrative 'really surprising'. Turning back in a hermeneutic circle of understanding, with the goal of articulating a coherent content, he retraced his epistemic path of making sense to see (real-ise) telco media marketing.

Genres can be described or identified by referring to their iconic signifiers (US Western films characteristically feature gun-toting cowboys). A male Indian participant, noting this media

narrative's meaning-bearing icons (prolific phones), accurately allocated its constituent tales to their generic marketing type: they substantiated his semantic projection of likely story lines.

'Well, there are many handphones in the video so I had already expected that it is a video about handphone telecommunications service. It does meet my expectation.'

Articulation and Alignment: Cultural Proximity of Content to Consumers

Unlike some focus group participants viewing the Digi telecommunications branding video which we consider below, respondents in these Maxis interviews were able to articulate its media marketing as a narrative or series of stories without difficulty. 'I can understand what the video wanted to express, it's about family.' (male Malay) 'For what I can recall, I remembered the chef who was smiling in joy when he was having (a) video call with his son; mother and daughter conversing through mobile phones.' (male Chinese)

Digi is a transnational provider of telecommunications owned by the Norwegian company Telenor, while Maxis is Malaysian. Consequently, it was not surprising that Boey's local viewers found the latter's familial focus in marketing to be culturally close. Characterized by verisimilitude to the extended life-world with which she daily engaged, 'it look(s) like what we see and what we do everyday' (female Indian). Her identification with events on screen is shared both across genders and by interviewees belonging to other Malaysian ethnic groups. 'The video manages to reflect the real life relationships among families' (male Chinese). 'I also always contact my family' (male Malay). 'I also always call my mum who stays at the hometown to share my daily experiences with her.' 'I think the video is "culturally close" especially the daughter call(s) her mother and father communicate(s) with his son, it (is) just the same with what I did.' (female Malays)

Aligned Appropriation and Alienated Analysis

The Maxis video celebrated the Malaysian family in diverse locations of domesticity, dutiful work, and dispersed in *kampung* (countryside) and city: 'family is everything'. Easily aligning himself (identifying) with Maxis prescriptive narrative, appropriating its 'message' to guide and enhance his life, a male Indian concludes: 'this video tells me the importance of family. So, we must appreciate our family and always keep contact with them no matter where we are.'

A male Chinese interviewee emphasises this media marketing's successful connecting of family and phoning. For had he not been already a Maxis subscriber, it 'would convince me to sign up for (the) mobile package due to its successful emphasis of (the) importance of (the) relationship among families'. But being absorbed in another telecommunication company's family and friends connections can distance interviewees from acceding to Maxis narratives, appropriating branding.

So a male Malay Digi telco user who 'can also contact my family through Digi services' 'refuse(s) to change because I (am too) lazy to tell all my family and friends'. Likewise, a male Indian Celcom (national Malaysian telco) user notes the similarity of Maxis services on offer and he concludes: 'all my family and friends (know) my number', 'I'm (too) lazy to change (to) a new number'. Encouraging consumers to remember their relationships with family and friends is clearly of ambiguous value in marketing the purchase of telecommunications packages.

Nonetheless, another male Indian marks an ethnic distance from content. He departs from his counterpart's positioning the media marketing narrative as characterized by cultural proximity: 'I don't think the video is "culturally close" as all the characters are Malay'.

Consuming You Tube Media II

Doris' dissertation (a second Chinese project) on the global Norwegian telecommunications company Telenor operating internationally in Malaysia as Digi considers the responses of three student focus groups (each with four persons) to a video presenting its marketing to youth: 'We were ONE with our Customers.' *Digi Campus* is an elliptical narrative showing the selling of

cellphone connections to students (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JjUhLcQQDOY&NR=1>).

However, its authorship and hence generic status is ambiguous. Is this visual text a promotional branding narrative originating from the company's marketing services or is it simply a personal blogging video about a promotional event assembled by energetic, but individual entrepreneur(s)? Hence, fore-structured anticipating and articulating of meaning become an issue in discussion.

I don't 'understand what the message the video wants to convey (is) *lah*, because it just show(s) some road show and they also just show some service counter and how they sell the ... Digi Campus to campus students' (female Chinese).

In Doris' consumer study, the majority of her xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx respondents are Chinese (8): the others are Malay (3) and there is one Indian contributor. Participants include more females (7) than males. All of her research respondents are in their mid to late twenties.

After people had seen the video, as in the Maxis research, discussion took place around the topic of viewer absorption in content and anticipation of events on screen, together with whether generic expectations eventuated. These focus groups also considered whether members aligned or identified with the Digi Campus view of life or were alienated and wished to distance themselves. Such topics seemed easily debated, prompting rich discursive responses among participants.

Issues in Generating Audience Immersion and Identifying (Recognizing) Generic Membership

While for one female Chinese viewer the video was immensely immersive ('I think I immerse with the video because I feel like I want to dance'), a male Chinese participant saw it as 'quite boring and I cannot understand it.' The issue of how to classify and hence comprehend this elliptical narrative became central. How could it be 'framed' as a familiar type of story? What was an appropriate generic horizon of understanding from which to view this screen selling?

For some participants, *Digi Campus* could not be easily accommodated in the genre of marketing narrative: it did not conform to the anticipated advertising curve of cultivating potential consumers. A female Chinese student spoke of her uncertainty about identifying its type: ‘just now, the ad(vertisement) you show (was) more like a slide show than commercial ad(vertising)’. In a similar vein, for a male Malay, ‘that is more like ... like slide shows’. Drawing authorially upon music as well as ‘elements from the pictures, in term(s) of the information’, it ‘mix(es) the idea’ (male Indian) of campus telecommunications company promotion as a video compilation.

Digi Campus ‘clearly shows’ on screen who are the ‘target customers’ (male Indian). But when considered as characteristic marketing, the ‘element’ of persuasion was noted as being absent from this narrative. For it ‘lack(s)’ the ‘element of the commercial advertisement. It didn’t state the benefits’ (male Chinese). The ‘video is just showing the activities that they are doing. (...) but not trying to persuade people to buy’ (female Chinese). Nonetheless, ‘although it’s not a commercial advertisement’ it was possible for her to identify or align with events as culturally close, as ‘just like our university life’ (female Chinese): it ‘shows our culture’, ‘Digi is like (...) close to the people.’ The campus telco promotion ‘sells around with cultures’ (male Indian).

Consuming ‘You!’ Shaped Malls

Mazrin’s Eurasian marketing project focusses on consumers shopping and strolling through suburban Sarawak in the state’s capital city of Kuching. Their perceptions reference an expected ‘embodied experience’ (Lai et al., 2008: 381): they are ‘body-dependent’ in anticipating shopping malls to be ‘clean environments’ (Joy and Sherry, 2003: 278). Here, embodiment is constructed as a locus of consuming’s habituated expectation: ‘when I go to *The Spring* (mall), I just want to relax’.

People’s immersive perceiving while in a mall, Mazrin shows, is structurally analogous to their being (while clearly corporeally absent) constructively absorbed in screen media. Both these mall and media modes of dallying or deliberately searching activity (of seeking intrinsic meaning or securing instrumental goals) are shaped by expectation: both enable people to form narratives (of

perception or purchase). Immersion can be accompanied by identifying (with characters or crowd) yet may also prompt alienation (a critical distancing from persons in media or people in malls).

As in the other two projects, there were twelve research participants, here interviewed individually about 'mall-ing': ten were female and all were under twenty years old. Chinese and Malay were equally represented (3), with four Bidayuh and two Iban contributors. Following the earlier format, discussion took place around the topic of visitor absorption in malls and informed anticipation of their content, together with whether expectations were rewarded. Participants also considered their concern with other persons in the mall. Did they align and identify or were they alienated, wishing to distance themselves from these diurnal strollers and shoppers?

Absorption and Anticipation in 'Malling' Activity

Immersion in video images can be focussed on a story's content (of intrinsic interest) or more instrumental (finding an extrinsic use for information gleaned from within the narrative). A similar distinction is made by a female Malay in respect of malls: 'When I go to *The Spring* (mall), I just want to relax actually, not for shopping, only for window shopping.' Involvement in the experience of shopping as in stories may be intensely absorbing, passively gripping: 'I was like crazy, you know the price is very low and there were a lot of people buying' (female Bidayuh).

We see malls, like media, from a horizon of generically informed expectation. A Bidayuh expressed her perspective on a shopping place: 'I expected that I can buy many thing(s) because I think mall(s) have all (sorts) of stuff (including) groceries, clothes, books, stationeries, movies, and more.' An Iban told of her (habituated but disappointed) anticipation of plurality: 'I expected many people and many product(s) (to) sell there because it is a shopping mall (...) and maybe have discount there. The mall didn't meet my expectation.' A Chinese contributor mentioned her own secondary expectations of mall shopping, that it would feature a 'clean environment, the parking available and all that'. Anticipation - always already present - either eventuates or is not realized.

Alignment and Alienation in Shopping Experience

Walking through a mall, as in watching marketing, we align or identify with people seen in shopping or on screen. Mall identification is complex and varied: our purposive perspective can be shared with differing groups of people [or the cases of alienation (below) quite separate]. A female Bidayuh visualizes her shopping subjectivity with other consumers as goal-directed: 'I think I can see that they have the same mind with me, to get what they want and need.' 'All of them are the same.' (female Malay). Likewise, 'most people go there with one intention', with material purpose, thus creating a shared or 'similar thing between me and the shoppers' (female Chinese).

Immersing herself in local recognition, another Bidayuh does 'identify with the people, meet people of the same college.' Collective identification or cultural solidarity with shoppers was wider for a Malay female: I am 'in the same culture, I am part of them'. People also identify with goods, appropriating them in purchase as they 'fit' the self: thus the 'branded product I choose is because (of) the attributes that fit me' (female Chinese). Stylish product output can celebrate an outlook.

Is there alienation, subjective distance, between 'mallers'? As was disclosed in the discourse of alignment, distancing is likewise complex, operating with a varied focus. Shoppers can feel separate, excluded, if they conspicuously cannot consume: 'People look at me different(ly) when I look like (I) can't afford to buy something.' (female Bidayuh) Some bring a sense of distance upon themselves, defining separate subjective goals from the stream of other shoppers in the mall: 'I have my own purposes to go there.' (female Chinese) Individualism subverts identification.

Being alienated can be a shopper's perception of class or ethnic distance from others, an (uneasy) acknowledging that there is an underlying gap in their relative power to make a purchase:

'Yes, I feel alienated because sometimes people in the mall, you know the mall is big and of course many people from (a) high class and (using) high branded product will come to the mall and it makes me feel alienated.' (female Iban)

'Sometimes I feel alienated because when I saw the Chinese people, they look weird when they buy high branded product, maybe it is their style.' (female Iban)

A distressing sense of distance from others can be overcome, it appears, through a talking cure, traveling with friends or simply by denying the presence of others in one's surroundings:

'I didn't feel alienated because I talked. I talked to them. I asked question(s) about their stuff that they (are) selling. For example, if I look for a shampoo, I will ask around so that I will not feel isolated or alienated in that way.' (female Bidayuh)

'I (do) not feel alienated because when I go shop(ping), I always go with my friends.' (female Chinese) 'I don't feel alienated because when I buy things, I will ignore people around me.' (female Bidayuh) 'I don't think I will feel alienated because just think like yourself, don't think like others.' (female Chinese)

Celebrating his perceiving a crowded consensus amidst the concrete, enabling him to define cultural solidarity as national unity, a Malay male teenager can be allowed to conclude: 'I didn't feel alienated because all the culture is just the same, no difference at all. One Malaysia, right?'

Concluding Discussion

Consumer Agency: Processing Perceptions of Digital Media and Downtown Malls

Consumers make their diurnal way through brandscaped space-time from digital marketing to downtown malls. What perceptual processes are involved? What media (in)formed or materially shaped mode of audience address is appropriate to these sometimes striving shoppers? Potential

purchasers immerse in marketing's would-be convincing texts and a mall's walled and crowded thoroughfares. Yet audience misperceptions occur with wider structural significance.

Is the time-taking process of these consumers' value-laden perceptions reasonably rendered as their arriving without fore-thought at affirming or negative attitudes to product or people? If not, can a research narrative recruiting their fore-conceptions be represented? After ourselves becoming 'immersed' (Lai et al., 2007: 565) in listening to consumers who participated in these materially focussed perceptual processes, we arrived at a phenomenological psychology of their seeing.

After hearing groups of media and individual mall consumers, we elaborated a structured analysis of their seeing as embodied perception underwritten by accounts of their saying (speech). Supporting this proposed re-conceptualizing of consumers' culturally detailed rich response is phenomenology's narrative of positioned perception as *intentional*, as teleological process.

Within this proposed horizon of understanding (a more appropriate spatio-temporal concept for interpreting consumer reaction across distance), audience response is represented not passively/reductively as attitude change but as actively aligning with - or becoming alienated from - accounts of product consequences or people's concerns. Consumers themselves produce the latter narratives. We reflect on immersing in media marketing and mall where mediated meaning making is at odds with positivism's account of immediate response to 'fact' - with material implications.

Philosophical thought is established in communication theory as a source for ideas shaped to generate a model of media consumers or their visual literacy. We resisted positivism's presumption of instant audience responses [invariably considered to be altered attitudes, effects resulting from advertising administered 'visual stimuli, as if pushing levers' (Scott, 1994: 271)]. Instead, we here presented consumer perception as structured process, perspectival gazing and glancing, as being an embodied generating (projection) of extended narrative meaning whether on media or in mall. An audience *looking* is a site of implicit or immanent intentionality or understanding but not always expressed: the latter can emerge during interviews as the propositional construction of meaning.

Returning to the philosophical core of hermeneutic phenomenology (instantly definable as ‘understanding “understanding”’) we developed a processual account of our perception as formed spatio-temporally - from our glancing at screen media to gazing at shopping malls. A consumer’s looking (or consuming look) is *intentional*: perception is purposive, aiming at meaning. With the goal of generating sense in surroundings, we are absorbed by anticipating, attempting to arrive at a coherent account. Interviews can foreground a structured implicit intentionality in understanding.

Immersed in branded media or mall, consumers interpret: they infer, iterate and identify narrative accounts of their circumstances. Audiences, we argued above, project narrative meaning (Heidegger, 1962) from their well (in)formed ‘horizon of expectations’, seeking to instantiate generic holistic readings of their circumstances (Jauss, 1982). Multi-ethnic responses to persons on *You Tube* advertising media as well as to purchasers in ‘You!’ affirming malls were argued to be parallel cases of audience sense-making. The latter’s interactive authorship enables a fusion of cultural horizons: familiar framing or generic general knowledge (e.g. of branding itself) guides consumer perceptual practice, shaping audience anticipation and articulation of particular narrative meaning they construct from already culturally formed malls and aesthetically ordered media.

Here we can locate an appropriately spatio-temporal metaphor of audiences aligning (or identifying) with on-screen content or other shoppers’ concerns. Considered consumer alienation would replace the concept of negative attitude. Underwriting such a suggested shift in thinking about audiences is phenomenology’s theorizing of our positioned perceiving as intentional, as a teleological interpretive process rather than positivism’s instant sight. Illustrating this narrative of differing paradigms, we considered a diversity of immersing in screen marketing or shopping mall.

Audience consumers speak from their horizons of understanding, even in diagnosing the incomprehensible, always already perceptually oriented between being (in)formed by the past and anticipating futures. When aligned in our looking, sharing perspectives, we see similarly.

The hermeneutic phenomenology of embodied perception (or perception from a place and hence perspectival) emphasizes located *seeing* as an informed sequential process of anticipating and actualizing meaning. This storied account of looking underwrote reader reception theory.

Hermeneutics suggests anew how audience-consumers see screen media and shopping malls. Here, we have sought to integrate a processual account of perception with both focus group and 'field' data, and so illuminate philosophical theory, employing the latter to interpret diverse cultural responses to media and mall as embodying a unifying subjective structure.

Consumers do not respond (passively?) in a quantifiable scale of negative or positive attitudes to a shared world of neutral sense-data, whether on pervasive screen or shopping precinct. Instead, they articulate meaningful narrative and accordingly align or become alienated. Like Western respondents in 'Creating Citizen-Consumers', our consumer citizens in the East 'reason about different sorts of identifications', with a local Malaysian sense of their 'inclusion/exclusion' sometimes operating through a 'nationalist or racialised register' ((Clarke et al., 2007: 142, 141).

Drawing upon its fundamental assumption of perception as the perspectival projection and narrative positioning of understanding, phenomenology needs to further emic accounts of how digitally intervening persons place themselves beyond the corridors of the metaphorical glocal material mall, in private/ public 'virtual geographies' (Papacharissi, 2009) on the world wide web. Active readers also write online. Cued by the formats of fairly new (social) media they continually network architecturally appropriate identities, tracing out daily their hermeneutic circle of coherent 'friending', presenting personality to the active audience of multiple media (Lewis and West, 2009: 1213). Discursive responses *to* the screen may be inscribed *on* screens, collectively or individually authored, as activities guided by generic anticipation, articulating storying selves. Participatory consumers of screen inscribed discourse will be much considered by future scholarly students.

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