

November 2016

Editorial Introduction: Advertising Past and Present: Research in the Irish Context

Neil O'Boyle

Dublin City University, neil.oboyle@dcu.ie

Eamon Maher

Institute of Technology, Tallaght, eamon.maher@tudublin.ie

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr>



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

O'Boyle, Neil and Maher, Eamon (2016) "Editorial Introduction: Advertising Past and Present: Research in the Irish Context," *Irish Communication Review*. Vol. 15: Iss. 1, Article 1.

doi:10.21427/D76P4G

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr/vol15/iss1/1>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Irish Communication Review by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-Noncommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)

Editorial Introduction

Advertising Past and Present: Research in the Irish Context

Neil O'Boyle (Dublin City University)

Eamon Maher (Institute of Technology, Tallaght)

The present collection of articles derives from a symposium on advertising research in the Irish context, which took place at Dublin City University (DCU) in January 2016 and was organised jointly by the School of Communications at DCU and the National Centre for Franco-Irish Studies at the Institute of Technology Tallaght. As organisers of the symposium and as editors of this special issue, our intention has not been to impose a uniform point of view on what aspects of advertising are worthy of investigation, but rather to represent a variety of approaches and viewpoints on the subject.

Advertising has proven popular with both the Academy and society at large, and yet outside of the field of marketing there has been comparatively little published research to date about advertising in Ireland. Likewise, although there are advertising sections and working groups in most of the largest communications research networks in the world – such as the European Communication Research and Education Association (ECREA) and the

International Association of Media and Communications Research (IAMCR) – to date, few Irish researchers have presented work at conferences attached to these networks. The principal aim of the symposium in January 2016, therefore, was to bring together Irish researchers with a view to establishing an Irish advertising research group that might in time provide a link or channel to these wider scholarly networks.

A second aim of the symposium relates to the humanities and social sciences specifically. In recent years, considerable attention worldwide has been given to digital advertising and marketing, and the growing number of conferences focusing on these areas attests to their perceived significance. In Ireland, too, there are now annual conferences on internet marketing, social media marketing, and mobile technologies in marketing, with the ‘DMX Dublin’ annual conference (organized by the Marketing Institute of Ireland) perhaps the largest of such gatherings. Yet conferences examining advertising and marketing – and digital innovations in these areas – in terms of the more traditional concerns of humanities and social sciences scholars (these being, for example, issues of access and representation, power, language, gender, race, social reproduction and so on) are exceedingly rare in the Irish context. Hence, another motivating concern for us as organisers of the symposium was to ensure that the advertising research space in Ireland is not colonised by

industry interests, or purely preoccupied with technological discussions, important as these undoubtedly are. For example, there is a dearth of research examining ownership consolidation amongst advertising and communications companies and the implications this has in respect of media diversity and changing work practices (for example, the growth of project work, and the need for 'flexible,' 'multi-tasking,' 'digital natives', and so on). These issues are profoundly important, especially given the increasing number of young people in Ireland wishing to pursue careers in such industries. Moreover, it is worth acknowledging that it has been humanities and social sciences scholars in the main who have theorised advertising not just as a commercial practice but as a social force of considerable power, which continues to influence and shape social norms, values and aspirations.

Though it was rather a small affair, the symposium was nevertheless well attended by academic staff and postgraduate students from a variety of higher education institutions across Ireland, and participants were introduced to an impressive array of advertising research. The resulting collection of articles presented here represents merely a preliminary step in a wider effort to get advertising firmly back on the agenda of humanities and social science research in Ireland. We hope, albeit in a small way, that this special issue goes some way towards achieving that goal.

The success of the HBO blockbuster TV series, *Mad Men*, which follows the activities within a progressive advertising company situated on Madison Avenue in New York during the 1960s and 70s, has focused people's attention on the psychological and emotional elements that go into producing ad campaigns that will spark desire in the hearts of consumers. The creative genius of the company, Don Draper, displays a sensitivity and understanding of consumers' needs that enable him to convey a message linked to the product he wants to sell that speaks to everyone's past, present and future, their hopes and aspirations, their nostalgia for, and receptiveness to, comforting stories. Basic human needs do not change much and advertising's role in stimulating such needs is even greater in the wake of the technological revolution and the almost unlimited access to private lives that has been made possible by social media. Therefore, living in a much-changed technological environment brings advertising right into people's homes via iPhones, tablets, laptops, along with the established media such as radio and television. Its importance is now more obvious than ever with the increase in disposable income in many developed and developing nations, rendering the need to get the message 'out there' all the more vital. The essays that follow provide examples of how this has been achieved in the past and is being accomplished today in relation to Ireland.

As noted above, because the symposium at DCU was organised primarily to reinvigorate advertising research in Ireland and to bring Irish researchers together, as organisers we decided against imposing a “symposium theme”. The resulting articles included here are multidisciplinary and cover a range of investigative techniques – though each in its own way also speaks to the specificities of the Irish cultural context. In a very ‘loose’ sense, the first three articles are more historical in their focus and the remaining four are more contemporary, but every contribution is relevant to the current conjuncture.¹

In the first essay, Colum Kenny examines how the emerging advertising sector in Ireland looked to the United States for ways in which to develop its business from the late nineteenth century onwards. Against the backdrop of greater literacy and technical innovations that made newspapers more profitable, what was ostensibly the first advertising agency in Ireland to start offering full services came into being. The author references the social rise of its founder, who left school aged thirteen but became a pillar of the Dublin business community by the 1920s. Kenny suggests that Irish agents had cultural, political and commercial reasons to look beyond Britain for inspiration, and

¹ Though he has not contributed an article to this special issue, we wish to note that Professor Sean Nixon of the University of Essex was the keynote speaker at the advertising symposium at DCU and he delivered a fascinating schematic genealogy of critical approaches to advertising and marketing within the human and social sciences, which he used as a way of setting up some of the key interpretative approaches researchers might take.

indicates that there remain many fruitful opportunities for research into the history of both Irish advertising and the role of Irish-Americans in American advertising.

In 1959, Guinness launched its first proper advertising campaign in Ireland, thirty years after the first Guinness ad appeared in the United Kingdom and 37 years after the Irish Free State was formed. Patricia Medcalf demonstrates how this ad marked the start of a busy decade in the brand's advertising history, a decade in which Ireland experienced significant economic, cultural, social and political change. Medcalf's paper explores how the 1960s in Ireland, a decade when the country began to look outwards, influenced Guinness's advertising themes. Like its country of origin, the brand was looking to build a new identity. For the purposes of this article, Medcalf conducted an analysis of the archive of print ads published by Guinness between 1959 and 1970 in conjunction with a review of literature documenting aspects of Ireland's economic, cultural and social history between 1958 and 1970. The objective was to explore whether or not the themes in the Guinness ads were influenced by the macro environment in Ireland at that time.

Concluding the historical overview, Joan O'Sullivan's essay discusses the changing 'voice' of radio advertising in Ireland. The second half of the 1990s

saw the beginning of a period of economic growth in Ireland, particularly in the capital, Dublin. As a result of this economic 'boom', in-migration to Dublin city increased, creating what Hickey (1999; 2005) describes as a classic setting for language change. In Dublin city, the desire for 'urban sophistication', linked to Ireland's increased prosperity and elevated international position, created a need among 'socially mobile' and 'weak-tie' speakers (Hickey 2004, p. 46) for a non-local but socially acceptable form of Dublin English. More recently, Hickey (2013) refers to this pronunciation form as advanced Dublin English and confirms his earlier speculation that this variety has become 'the new supraregional variety' given its influence on southern Irish English speech. O'Sullivan investigates the prevalence and functions of advanced Dublin English in advertising through a quantitative and qualitative analysis of a corpus of 160 radio advertisements from RTÉ Radio1 (comprising 4 subcorpora of ads from the years 1977, 1987, 1997 and 2007). Following Lee (1992), O'Sullivan examines the ads in terms of the presence of advanced Dublin English in the 'Action' (associated with dialogic interaction of actors) and 'Comment' (associated with slogan or authoritative voice) components of the ads. O'Sullivan's keen analysis illuminates how this new form of pronunciation operates in the Irish advertising environment and what it signifies more broadly.

Drawing on her PhD research, which follows closely the pioneering work of Sean Nixon in the UK, Aileen O'Driscoll examines the links between the educational and organisational cultures of advertising in Ireland. As a point of departure, O'Driscoll's paper takes an inter-disciplinary approach to bring together theoretical and empirical work on feminist critiques of postfeminist culture and the impact of postfeminism on gendered imagery in advertising texts. It also considers the cultural production processes that create advertisements, and delves into the under-explored and under-researched sphere of advertising education and gender awareness. In concluding her paper, O'Driscoll reflects on the potential need for greater academic engagement with gender issues at the level of advertising education and training in Ireland, which she suggests may help to bridge any possible gap between the gender-sensitised student and the 'realistic' professional.

Colm Kearns' paper examines the nexus between sport, national identity and advertising in Ireland. Focusing on Three Mobile's sponsorship of the Irish international rugby union and football (soccer) teams, Kearns studies recent advertising campaigns commissioned by the sponsor brand with a view to highlighting the fault lines and contradictions at the heart of the triangular relationship central to the commercialisation of national identity. This relationship is comprised of national identity's dependents (fans/consumers), its

mediators (the brand and the advertisers) and its signifiers (sports teams). Although it is commonplace for corporations to seek to capitalize on the sports-nation nexus in their marketing, much of the academic research in this area fails to explore the interrelationships of the various parties involved. By casting a wider net in taking into account the impact and autonomy of fans/consumers and sporting organisations, in addition to focussing on a curious case of a sponsor ‘stretching’ its national narrative over campaigns for two separate sports, Kearns’ paper identifies the limits of advertising’s co-opting of the sports-nation nexus.

Irish whiskey has had a turbulent time throughout much of the last one hundred years. At its height, the country was home to 88 licensed distilleries and was the world leader for whiskey production (Irish Whiskey Association, 2015). Due to a perfect storm of misfortune that occurred during the 20th century, the country ended up playing host to just two distilleries by the early 1980s. Recently the sector has shown signs of a phoenix-like recovery and Irish Whiskey is now the fastest growing premium spirit category in the world. As society becomes ever more gastro-aware, Brian Murphy’s paper seeks to explore how the uniquely Irish concept that is Single Pot Still Whiskey can be marketed to a well-informed and demanding consumer. As a product, Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey is heavily laden with place and story elements. Using a case study

approach, this paper discusses how modern distillers are using these strong place and story elements to market their premium ranges of Irish Single Pot Still Whiskey. Murphy draws on the experiences of other place-based products such as champagne and single malt whiskey that have successfully created unique terroir-based gastronomic identities in an increasingly competitive drinks market to illustrate just how important place and story can be in successful advertising.

In the concluding essay, Eugene O'Brien looks at two perfume advertisements, Chanel's *Coco Mademoiselle* and Calvin Klein's *Euphoria*, and reads them both as appealing to subconscious desires and fantasies. Taking the notion of the commodity fetish as a baseline, he examines the narrative structures, images and cultural contexts of the advertisements, and shows how they are focused on creating aspects of an ideal-I for the viewer, through their micro-narratives. Looking at how the women in the advertisements are constructed as objects of desire, O'Brien argues that these are depicted as strongly independent and in control, with the perfume being an agent of transformation of this empowerment. The essay makes use of the work of Jacques Lacan in order to understand the way in which the advertisements work, suggesting, after Lacan, that Descartes' *Cogito Ergo Sum* (I think therefore I am), as a defining tenant

of modern subjectivity, has been replaced by *Desidero Ergo Sum* (I desire therefore I am) in contemporary culture.

We hope that the readers of this special issue of *Irish Communications Review* will enjoy the essays in their entirety and will agree that they address a lacuna that badly needed to be filled. We would like to thank the contributors for their professionalism and willingness to take on board suggested changes we made to them. Hopefully they will feel that their final essays are stronger for looking at certain things in a slightly different and more focused way. We are also keen to thank Dr Brian O'Neill for allowing us to be guest editors of this issue of *Irish Communications Review* and to Yvonne Desmond and her dedicated staff for helping us get the essays up on the wonderful Arrow repository.

Bonne lecture!

Eamon Maher and Neil O'Boyle (editors).