

FOR AND AGAINST

ARE THE DAYS OF THE TVC WELL AND TRULY NUMBERED?

With President Obama's winning digitally-based election campaign being held up as proof the rule of the television commercial has come to an end, it's time to check on the debate in Australian media and marketing.

ARGUMENT FOR



Kate Richardson
General manager,
Stickywood



Damn, how did I end up on the unwinnable side of the debate? I'm sitting here snatching some time during the ad breaks and racking my brain for that elusive first argument. I'm watching *Mad Men* series two. I saw the first on DVD and my brother keeps promising to download the second for me so I can watch it all in one go but it never seems to materialise (hey, if you haven't checked out *Mad Men* on Twitter, you must, I'm following nearly all the characters).

Anyway, I just can't see TV commercials going anywhere fast. I mean ad breaks give me time to shuffle off to the kitchen, and trawl about on the net which I seem to be doing a lot more of lately. And I can flick around and watch a few things at once which, considering the amount of crap on, is useful.

So ... still thinking. This is hard.

I just put out a call on Twitter for some food for thought on the topic. People responded with comments about participatory culture, 'conversation', the amount of entertainment choices available and blah blah blah.

OK, sure, I agree our entertainment consumption is becoming more social with video sharing sites and gaming and stuff, but I'll often have a good chat in front of the TV ... especially when the ads are on. There's plenty of so called 'conversation' happening there so take that digital boffins.

Back to the task.

I guess there's the 'interruption' argument many people often tout.

You know, like a TVC is the equivalent of someone you don't know (or even like that much) yelling at you about something you have no interest in? Look, sometimes it takes a lot to get someone's attention and shouting loudly and waving can help.

So I don't think that's it.

And I mean, if I'm finding the ads to be an interruption I can always just switch off or jump online and go do something else. It's not like I HAVE to sit through them is it?

And if it's a brand or product that really interests me, I can find stuff for myself. Like a few of my friends have digital video recorders now and we've been chatting about them online and swapping ATR (appointment to record) tips. One of them even sent me a Nielsen stat from *The New York Times* recently noting over half the audiences for US prime time shows like *Greys Anatomy* are now watching via delayed viewing.

Show's back. Maybe an idea will come to me in the next break. ■

ARGUMENT AGAINST



Rhonda Brown
Marketing director,
Free TV



The television commercial is the most powerful method of communicating with consumers about a product or service in existence. This has been the case for decades and remains so, despite the proliferation of new media options each with their own, albeit different, strengths.

So what possesses pundits to suggest the days of the TVC are numbered? Is it that people don't want to be caught out behind a trend? Futurist George Gilder first predicted the death of television nearly 20 years ago and he's still waiting.

Television viewing has remained remarkably stable in Australia throughout the period of flux and fragmentation that has been the last decade. Australians, on average, still spend more than three hours a day with the medium. Each and every day across the nation, free-to-air TV reaches more than 13 million people. In fact, the past two years has seen an extraordinary surge in sales of televisions as people look to enhance the viewing experience in the home.

As the options to view away from the primary broadcast slot have increased with the take-up of the internet, DVDs and DVRs, some have become quite excited about the idea of people giving up on television. But it simply hasn't happened. Each week millions of people across a range of demographics tune in at the one time to view their favourite shows on TV. The complementary viewing options enable people to further engage with these programs at their leisure.

The concept, which on the surface is so appealing, of people being their own programmer – watching and consuming what they want, when they want – discounts the very real appeal of the communal aspect of television viewing; people like to talk about the shows they watched last night and they like to talk about the ads they saw too.

The TVC is the cornerstone of the most successful advertising campaigns because of its ability to influence perceptions and behaviour. Television advertising continues to outrank other media on recall by a wide margin. And it continues to add weight and substance to related messages that appear in other media. That's why TV works.

I'm not about to suggest television advertising is the be all and end all, but having other options for communicating with consumers does not diminish the strengths inherent in the medium. The power of television lies in its ability to convey ideas, emotion, humour; its ability to engage people, change attitudes and immerse people in a world they want to be a part of. No other advertising does this as successfully or to as many people as television. ■