

The Online Media Marketing Association recently sent me an invitation to their February 2011 conference. The opening and first paragraph were:

THE GREAT DISRUPTION - The consumer strikes back.

For decades new technologies and media consolidation overwhelmed viewers and readers with new platform options, countless channels, confusing dials, settings and features no one asked to get. Now, the 'disrupted' consumer is the one disrupting old media and ad institutions. The agency is scrambling to remain relevant in a world where consumers ignore ads and work their social networks to make decisions. They are fleeing the desktop for mobile media faster than content and marketers can keep up. Their love of time-shifting and multi-screen multi-tasking has attracted a mob of tech, media and digital companies all skirmishing for their attention as all platforms seem to converge in the living room. Technologies are no longer the great disruptors; the consumer is.

Here's a line-by-line discussion of where this statement mis-leads us.

"It's a new world where consumers ignore ads." Sounds dramatic. But it's the oldest problem in advertising. If your agency comes to you suggesting this is a new problem, fire the agency. They should have been designing your campaigns with this in mind for decades.

The "consumer is the one disrupting old media and ad institutions." Clever phrase with a revolutionary zeal about it. And, absolute bunk. Disruption is financed - it's no groundswell consumer movement. There's huge money to be made by investors & VC's in promises of disruption. (Ironic, huh, that big money has the anarchists thinking it's about consumer power.)

"The agency is scrambling to remain relevant..." I happen to think agencies *are* scrambling to remain relevant. But it's their own fault - not the consumer's. Over the past 20 years, it's become rare for an ad to say anything that is significant to consumers with the result that agencies have become little more than pop art factories. I'm convinced that it's an agency problem and not a consumer change, though, because when my team finds what's relevant to consumers and says it, the sales results show consumers pay close attention.

"...work their social networks to make decisions." Not according to the research. While consumers love social networks, product shopping's a tiny part of social.

In reality, you might be able to reach 3% to 5% of your consumers through social with a commercial message.

"They are fleeing the desktop for mobile media faster than content and marketers can keep up" Wrong again. Research shows people use mobility to consume media at new times and in new locations. Desktop and living room consumption of media remains as high as ever.

"Their love of time-shifting and multi-screen multi-tasking has attracted a mob of tech, media and digital companies all skirmishing for their attention as all platforms seem to converge in the living room." Okay. I'll give them the skirmishes. But didn't the opening lines complain about technology that "overwhelmed viewers and readers with new platform options, countless channels, confusing dials, settings and features no one asked to get". Does OMMA really fantasize that the recent plague of connected TV options is anything but "overwhelming"?

"Technologies are no longer the great disruptors; the consumer is." Consumer reality is the great disruptor - and it very quickly disrupts neat little theories like this one. Everyone should go out into red or blue America, find a typical household that watches the average of 30 TV hours per week and see how they act. Whether new media enthusiast or curmudgeon, consumer reality will poke holes in your neat & clean theories. Because the real world is messy - very, very messy.

I'm not attacking new media - there is important value in all these new medias. But I am attacking the silliness and outrageous exaggerations foisted on us in statements like this. Twitter reaches about 4% of the US and its commercial value lies primarily in coupons, Facebook commercial messages probably only reach about 5% of the US right now, and in a recent article Forrester predicts that online retail sales will reach no higher than 8% of total retail sales by 2014. What we're talking about are **significant minority** medias.

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