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The Audience Commodity in a Digital Age
Revisiting a Critical Theory of Commercial Media

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Book synopsis

This edited collection comprises foundational texts and new contributions that revisit the theory of the «audience commodity» as first articulated by Dallas Smythe. Contributors focus on the historical and theoretical importance of this theory to critical studies of media/communication, culture, society, economics, and technology – a theory that has underpinned critical media studies for more than three decades, but has yet to be compiled in a single edited collection.

The primary objective is to appraise its relevance in relation to changes in media and communication since the time of Smythe’s writing, principally addressing the rise of digital, online, and mobile media. In addition to updating this perspective, contributors confront the topic critically in order to test its limits. Contextualizing theories of the audience commodity within an intellectual history, they consider their enduring relationship to the field of media/communication studies as well as the important legacy of Dallas Smythe.

Contents


About the author(s)/editor(s)

Lee McGuigan is a PhD student in the Annenberg School for Communication at the University of Pennsylvania. His research has been published in the Journal of Communication Inquiry and Television & New Media. Vincent Manzerolle (PhD, University of Western Ontario, Canada) is a lecturer in the Faculty of Information and Media Studies at the University of Western Ontario, Canada. He has published articles in Ephemera, Surveillance and Society, and Triple C: Communication, Capitalism, and Critique.

Reviews

«A timely and comprehensive collection that supplies readers with a thought-provoking juxtaposition of seminal works and cutting-edge communications research. This book confirms the continued relevance of Dallas Smythe’s theories and the need for ongoing debate, discussion, and scholarly work on the shifting roles of the audience-user in our increasingly global, increasingly digitized information society.» (Sara M. Grimes, Assistant Professor, Faculty of Information, University of Toronto)
Lee McGuigan and Vincent Manzerolle have assembled an invaluable collection of essays that reaffirm the lasting importance of Dallas Smythe’s foundational work on the complex relationships between commercial interests and the audiences they seek to exploit. Ranging from retrospectives to forward-looking analyses, this timely volume is essential reading for anyone wishing to understand how power operates in our digital age." (Victor Pickard, Assistant Professor, Annenberg School for Communication, University of Pennsylvania)