

CROSS-MEDIA PROMOTION

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Foreword

Viewers of the February 3, 2009, US broadcast of the NBC television program *30 Rock* were treated to an ‘exclusive preview’ of the Universal film *Land of the Lost*, not due in theaters for another 3 months. Immediately following the opening credits of that week’s episode, the 90-second segment was sandwiched (so to speak) between two sponsorship tags (‘Brought to you by . . .’) from Subway, the fast-food chain that also was product-placed in the movie. The beginning of the ‘preview’ presents Will Ferrell’s character from *Land of the Lost* interviewed by the real-life NBC morning-talk-show-host Matt Lauer on *The Today Show* set, with textual authenticity established by the use of the actual announcer, musical riff and graphics that introduce *The Today Show*. (A longer version of this scene also appeared in the movie.) Viewers are told at the end of the segment that ‘Subway brings you more *Land of the Lost*, at nbc.com/subway’. Perhaps serendipitously, but weirdly revealing, Lauer also appeared as himself later in this particular episode of *30 Rock*, complaining when having to compromise his newscast at the insistence of the faux-GE executive on the program, Jack Donaghy, played by Alec Baldwin. And the final indignity? As summer reviews indicated, *Land of the Lost* as a movie stank. Lauer, however, received good reviews.

This example, one of literally dozens—if not hundreds—of large-scale media campaigns from that year, illustrates many of the trends and dangers that are the focus of Jonathan Hardy’s important and comprehensive examination of media promotion. The above-described promotional segment exemplifies the commercialization of entertainment via a fast-food company’s sponsorship and product placement in a major Hollywood film; the use of the Internet to bring expanded promotions (illustrated by the web address’s combination of media company and advertiser); the involvement of corporate synergy, given that *30 Rock*, *The Today Show* and *Land of the Lost* are properties of NBC-Universal; the blurring of iconography and textual forms that are often bizarre hybrids of promotions, advertisements, news and other feature segments (in this case, an example of Sponsored Synergistic Fake-Journalism Promotainment?); and the cooptation of news personnel and resources to promote entertainment properties—a Fourth-Estate involvement that Hardy labels as generating ‘the most disquiet of all forms of cross-promotion’.

Hardy discusses all of these issues of cross-media promotion, and more, in this book. Critics of media commercialism (and the steroid version, hyper-

commercialism) often use as exemplars of such trends the influence of advertisers who are outside of the media industries: soft-drink, beer, automobile, soap, and retail outlets brands, among others. But, as Hardy points out, corporations such as Time Warner, Disney and News Corp are not just media companies that accept money to advertise such non-media brands. They also, increasingly, have their own brands to sell. They are major spenders of advertising dollars while also simultaneously being major receivers of advertising dollars. And because they own media outlets, they can promote their products in their other media products without spending money on advertising *per se*.

Media promotions are at the 'forefront' of the breaking of traditional advertising taboos that serve as barriers to the invasion of large-scale corporate promotion in our lives. *The Los Angeles Times* attracted criticism in April 2009, for example, not just because it accepted a front-page ad for the LA-based TV program *Southland*, but because that ad was designed to look like a newspaper article about the program, albeit with a small 'Advertisement' disclaimer (Clifford, 2009a). Despite the criticism, it accepted a similar tactic by covering its front page in June 2009 with a giant ad for the HBO program *True Blood* (Associated Press, 2009). In another print medium, the covers of magazines have featured ads for media brands, such as 'pull-out' inserts in the cover of *Entertainment Weekly* for the ABC program *The Unusuals*, and *US Weekly*'s faux cover for HBO's *Grey Gardens* (Clifford, 2009b). Fan fiction and video mash-ups of beloved movies and programs, around for many years and gladly exploited for promotional purposes by media companies, foreshadowed the use of 'prosumer' user-generated commercials that have been cultivated by brands such as Doritos.

Cross-media promotion is one of the most salient characteristics in our modern media systems, arising out of a context that involves virtually every level of media studies: media ownership, advertising and funding, technological trends, and regulatory issues—the last a specialty of the author of this book. These factors often work together, and Hardy is masterful in interweaving in an insightful but accessible way the complexity of media promotion. So, for example, media are not just looking to "monetize," and thus promote, television programs because new technologies such as DVDs and other digital versions allow these programs to be more easily sold directly to the public than in the past. These changes are also occurring as new promotional outlets such as websites are exploited; as advertising revenues shift from traditional media such as newspapers (perhaps a fatal shift in this case) to digital media; as changes in regulation facilitate corporate maneuvering; as media companies attempt to reach global markets; and as shifts in ownership facilitate partnerships among producers, distributors and advertisers.

Serving as our guide through a complex landscape, Hardy is careful to highlight the most important landmarks and the changing nature of media topography. In addition to in-depth discussions of the different elements that influence media promotion (financing, ownership, regulation, technology, textual characteristics and genres), he also walks us through different theoretical perspectives on these changes, from the functional to the radical. He works hard at not essentializing media promotions as all the same, careful to make distinctions between different historical moments, different media, different funding systems, different genres (news vs. fictional entertainment, for example), different geographic/cultural contexts, and different regulatory environments. He also negotiates exploring general trends with in-depth specific case studies to give us both the broad picture as well as how this picture is made visible in our everyday media lives.

Perhaps most important, this book engages head-on with the ‘so-what’ issues that are crucial in media studies. Why should we care about cross-media promotion? How can we understand changes in media promotion historically, and are even such changes unique to our times? What do such trends mean for our democratic and aesthetic lives? What roles may the state play? And how might we understand our own options in intervening in such trends when we understand them to be destructive?

Jonathan Hardy’s *Cross-Media Promotion* provides a framework and analysis that allows us to work through these questions. These questions will only become more crucial as traditional assumptions about how media operate—assumptions that media studies scholars, regulators, advocates and citizens took for granted—are increasingly complicated.

Matthew P. McAllister

Preface

Cross-media promotion is the promotion of one media service or product through another. The phenomenon of media firms cross-promoting their allied media interests has increased dramatically in recent decades. This is linked to broader changes including digitalisation and the technological expansion of multimedia, corporate consolidation and integration, increased commercialism and competition in media markets, changes in regulation, professional media practices and consumption. Convergence and concentration in media and communications industries have generated ever increasing varieties and forms of cross-media promotion. Since the 1980s there has been a marked growth of synergistic practices whereby media firms have sought to maximise profits through the co-ordinated promotion, diffusion, sale and consumption of media products, services and related merchandise. Cross-media promotion (CMP) has thus become a defining feature of media conglomeration and contemporary media. It has been integral to the marketing and diffusion of new media forms and become more widespread and strategically important across all mass media.

This book examines the various forms cross-media promotion takes but also critically explores the ‘problems’ of CMP from a variety of standpoints. Forms of cross-promotion, this book argues, erode and transgress regulatory and normative boundaries between editorial and advertising, ‘independent’ and commercially bought or interested speech. Consequently, cross-media promotion constitutes an important element of the challenges for communications regulation in the 21st century.

We are now so far from that world where media companies tended to own discrete media with few having a significant cross-media portfolio. Today almost all national newspapers have online editions; radio stations have a multimedia presence, and branded media content is repurposed across a variety of media formats and merchandising forms. There has been enormous change. But there is value in combining an examination of contemporary practices with an archaeological investigation that examines how CMP was conceived, addressed and problematised by those who engaged with it—policy-makers and regulators, those working in industries affected, scholars and researchers, commentators and journalists, civil society groups and publics. In particular, this book traces cross-media promotion from the late 1980s when

policy makers and regulators grappled with multimedia expansion and intensifying cross-media ownership.

The trends examined here are evident, albeit unevenly, across almost all media systems. However, this book focuses mainly on two media systems, the United States and the United Kingdom. America is chosen as the best place to observe the dynamics of cross-media promotion in an advanced, market-driven, commercialised media system. The United Kingdom is a media system in transition, from one that has been highly regulated, and with a strong public service tradition, towards a more liberalised and marketised one. The UK is thus also a good place to look at policy responses. Examining both the US and UK provides a valuable comparative dimension in which to address key topics which this book explores: the conditions in which CMP has developed; the dynamics of industry practice; the changing role and influence of regulation as well as considerations for media reform. The book integrates three areas of study: media practices, media policy and media theory.

This book is organised in four parts. Part one introduces cross-promotion and the main arguments of the book. This first chapter considers how cross-promotion has developed across converging media industries in the United States and describes the conditions that have given rise to synergistic cross-media promotion. Chapter two establishes the nature of the 'problem' of cross-promotion according to key paradigmatic perspectives on media power (neoliberal, liberal, consumer, postmodernist, libertarian and critical political economic).

Part two examines cross-promotion in different genres: in entertainment media and news media. Chapter three examines synergistic promotion and commercial intertextuality for such megabrands as Harry Potter. It also reviews approaches to intertextuality and transmedia storytelling and considers both critical differences and grounds for synthesis between culturalist and critical political economic perspectives. Chapter four explores cross-promotion in news media. The focus of this chapter on US media is complemented by a study of CMP in UK newspapers. Chapter five investigates how papers owned by News International (NI), a wholly owned subsidiary of News Corporation, cross-promoted SkyDigital in which News Corporation had a 40 per cent controlling share.

Part three examines the regulation of cross-promotion through various case studies and in the broader context of changes in media markets and communications policies from the late 1980s to the present. Chapter six examines how cross-media promotion has been addressed in the regulation of broadcasting, print publishing, advertising, new media, and in competition and consumer law. The chapter focuses on media policy and regulation in the United

Kingdom, including relevant European regulation, and compares the UK with the United States. The chapter traces the ways in which cross-media promotion has been constituted as an object of policy. It shows that each of the various regulatory tools and each main institutional approach, developed historically for discrete media sectors, has largely neglected cross-media promotion as a problem for regulation to tackle. This chapter also assesses the significance of the first attempt to establish rules governing cross-promotion in the *Enquiry into Standards of Cross-Media Promotion* (Sadler 1991).

Chapter seven examines the industry dynamics of cross-media promotion in fiercely competitive digital television markets in the UK. It then addresses regulatory responses towards cross-promotion in digital television and related audiovisual services from the 1990s to the present. Chapter eight focuses on product placement and product integration in broadcasting. The integration of commercial references in programme content has been strictly regulated in the UK. UK and European television regulation has upheld the principle of separation of editorial and advertising, but in 2008, under pressure from a powerful coalition of commercial media and advertising interests, European rules were changed to allow product placement. This chapter compares industry practice, regulatory responses and wider policy debates in the United States and the UK.

Part four develops critical arguments and policy proposals. The concluding chapter examines a variety of policy proposals and alternative responses to cross-media promotion associated with the key traditions introduced in part one.

This book argues that cross-promotion is one of the key practices that are eroding and transgressing regulatory and normative boundaries between editorial content and advertising. Aggressive corporate CMP, it argues, threatens the foundations for culturally diverse and democratic media systems. Cross-promotion is an important aspect of the broader controversies generated by media commercialism and marketisation, conglomeration and synergy. The policy challenges arising from cross-promotion also highlight more deep-seated problems and contradictions within current systems of converging media regulation.