

## Added and Subtracted Value: Rethinking Connected Viewing Services

Framing what appear to be common sense calculations of value in a rhetoric of technological progress, *added value* has proven a useful label for the home entertainment divisions of media conglomerates, as they seek to encourage uptake of new digital video formats among consumers. Introduced into consumer parlance in the late 1990s by marketing departments and trade journalists, the term originally functioned as a label to designate DVD bonus content. *Added value*, in this context, meant only *added content*, and was thus a feature offered by specific discs themselves, not the DVD platform (whose other selling points—namely, higher-definition images, digital sound, and chapter indexing—were promoted under different marketing campaigns).

In the last decade, the term has undergone a slight expansion (or dilution) of meaning as it has been used to push BluRay discs—both for their DVD-style special features and for new BluRay-only interactive options, such as BD Live—other kinds of digital media (such as sound recordings), and—most recently—connected viewing services. Indeed, the term seems particularly well-suited for connected viewing features such as cloud storage and second screen functionality, which have proven difficult to characterize to consumers as anything other than “extra” or “add-on” options through which greater value, pleasure, or convenience might be had from what is otherwise traditional media content.

Though scholars have been more careful with the term, *added value* has since the 1990s gradually crept into academic parlance as well, most often as a synonym for bonus content during discussions of DVDs and BluRays. The term, however, has not been the subject of much critical analysis, partly, I think, because the kind of extra content pioneered by the Criterion Collection has truly felt like a source of additional value to us. Even when the term is *not used*, however—and scholars do not appear to be using it much in work on connected viewing—the approach to value it represents has nevertheless found its way into our work on connected viewing services and technology. Part of this may be the legacy of early scholarship on DVDs, which—while recognizing the changes the new technology wrought on the concept of film itself—largely hailed the DVDs as a positive technological development. Though scholars have been hesitant to celebrate connected viewing in a similar fashion, such hesitancy comes (usually) not from a critical interrogation of “value” itself, but from the failure of connected viewing features to work properly or (especially in cases where the features require secondary purchases) interestingly supplement the content. We thus often find ourselves exhibiting a kind of technological utopianism, imagining and in some cases even arguing for how these services should work and how consumers might use them (this seems especially the case with social networking features, largely I think because of the potential they offer *us* for Communications- and anthropology-based research).

What then would a critical analysis of *added value* look like and what would it offer us? It would help, I think, if we took a step outside of our own discipline and turned to marketing science, where the term originated. For marketing scholars, the term has traditionally been employed to highlight the variable and often immaterial sources of value accruing to different companies’ goods in competitive markets. Within such a framework, *brand* usually functions as the quintessential example of added value, for it cannot be identified as an input during the

production of the good but nevertheless is capable of raising a good's market price significantly higher than the cost of production and distribution. As the concept of *brand* also suggests in this context—especially when we think of brands being tarnished—sources of added value function as dynamic processes, constantly being negotiated by consumers, rather than as context-independent qualities of the good itself. What is a source of added value to consumers (or a particular subset of consumers) at one time may be a source of subtracted value at another time due to changes in consumers' needs, preferences, perceptions, and constraints.

*Added value*, as a critical concept, should thus entail an *ecological* rather than quantitative approach to the study of value. What are the cultural practices that have developed to provide and secure certain kinds of value for certain groups of consumers (regardless of whether or not consumers could articulate these values)? How does the introduction of “extra content” or an “added feature” alter these cultural ecologies? Do these extras map onto already existing practices? Can they be absorbed without replacing or foreclosing other practices? Or are they so foreign that they must create or produce their own demand, their own ecology? Orienting our research into connected viewing around such questions should allow us to better understand the “bottom-up” processes through which assignments of value are inscribed into cultural practices. It should also help us to develop greater critical insight into the costs potentially imposed by these services—both at the level of utility (interoperability, increased switching costs, etc.) and cultural practice themselves (the disappearance of communal viewing, impediments to collecting, the inability to share, etc.).