

Part 2 – Persuasion in Advertising—Introduction (p. 169)

We are currently in the throes of a digital revolution. Innovative digital technologies, capabilities made possible by those technologies, emerging business models, and globalization have quite literally impacted virtually every aspect of our world. This digital disruption has transformed the advertising industry's infrastructure, organizations, policies, and processes in dramatic ways. It has blurred our understanding of what advertising is and our visions of what it can and will become. (for more detail on digital transformation, see pp. 172-174)

Amid digital transformations...

Advertising continues to play a number of crucial roles in our society

I. Advertising is a strategic business tool: advertising's economic role.

- ❑ Advertising is essential to the function of a free market economy; that is, in the words of James Carey, advertising is "part of the very logic by which commerce is carried on."
- ❑ Advertising is a major player in the global economy
 - ❑ Estimated \$525 billion will be spent worldwide in 2022
 - ❑ Estimated \$263 billion will be spent in the U.S. in 2022

II. Advertising is a cultural teacher in media culture/media life

Media culture: media have become central to our understanding of the world and our role in it. Media are so much more than the companies that produce content for it, the technologies we use, and the way media fit into our everyday lives. In our largely unreflective way of living in media, **there is no outside to media**. ...today the uses and appropriations of media can be seen as fused with everything people do, everywhere people are, everyone people aspire to be. (Deuze, uses term **media life**; quoted p. 170)

- ❑ it is becoming increasingly difficult and perhaps impossible to separate media, advertising, and culture in any meaningful way. Contributing factors include:
 - ❑ emergence of countless advertising-supported media platforms
 - ❑ media culture is commercial, overburdened with advertising and promotional messages
- ❑ a more subtle aspect of commercialization is the commodification of everyday life

Without quite realizing it, without ever deciding do so, we drifted from *having* a market economy to *being* a market society. The reach of markets and market-oriented thinking into aspects of life traditionally governed by nonmarket norms is one of the most significant developments of our time. The logic of buying and selling increasingly governs the whole of life. (Sandel, quoted p. 170-171)

III. Advertising is a funding system for our commercial media ecosystem

- ❑ Media are commercial in two primary ways: (1) **advertising** is the primary source of revenue for most media; (2) the goal is **profit maximization**.
- ❑ Media are fundamental to democratic society

The **normative role of the press in a democracy** is likely to have been discussed in the first section of this text. The cases discussed in this section hinge upon that foundational knowledge as well as an understanding of capitalism as an economic system a system of social organization.

- ❑ The commercial imperatives underlying the media ecosystem often “clash” with the ideals of a democracy. Consequences of this relationship are many and complicated (see Chapter 6 for further discussion).

Advertising and the mirror/shaper debate

The debate over the power of advertising relative to that of individuals and society is an age-old one. It has frequently been identified in terms of an overly simplistic dichotomy: the **mirror/shaper debate**. (see also Chapter 7)

- ❑ Advertisers and proponents view advertising as a **passive social force**. That is, advertising benignly **mirrors** society.
 - ❑ Paraphrasing Stephen Fox in *The Mirror Makers* (1997): “The people who create modern advertising . . .are just producing an especially visible manifestation, good and bad, of the American way of life.”
 - ❑ In the words of advertising icon David Ogilvy: “Advertising follows mores but never leads them.”
- ❑ Those on the opposite side of the debate—critics, critical scholars, and a significant number of consumers—suggest advertising plays a far less benign role that of **shaper**: manipulating, changing, and defining society’s trends, moral, and values.
 - ❑ This perspective is the basis of in many of the common criticisms of advertising, among them: nurturing damaging stereotypes, encouraging materialism, etc.

Complicating the mirror/shaper debate

- ❑ **Advertising is both a mirror and a shaper:** (selectively reinforces)

“The pictures of life that ads parade before consumers are familiar, scenes of life as in some sense we know it or would like to know it. Advertisements pick up and represent values already in the culture. But these values, however deep or widespread, are not the only ones people have or aspire to, and the

pervasiveness of advertising makes us forget this. Advertising picks up some of the things that people hold dear and re-presents them to people as *all* of what we value.” (Michael Schudson, *Advertising the Uneasy Persuasion*)

- ❑ Similarly, historian Roland Marchand, in *Advertising the American Dream* writes: “Advertising’s mirror not only distorted, it also selected. Some social realities hardly appeared at all.”

Advertising, professional culture, ethics.

The professional stature of advertising remains a point of debate. A complete discussion of what it means to be a profession, advertising’s efforts to achieve professional stature, and the concept of professional culture is more fully discussed in Chapter 9. Here, it will suffice to think of **advertising’s professional culture** as “a shared understanding of what it means to be an advertising professional.” That is, what we think we are doing when we do advertising work.

- ❑ Professional stature is a societally granted privilege, premised on [the profession’s] willingness and ability to contribute to social well-being and to conduct their affairs in a manner consistent with broader social values
- ❑ As an **advocacy** profession, advertising has a professional responsibility to act on the client’s behalf, to work in the best interest of the client
- ❑ Profession/industry has maintained a very circumscribed, almost singular focus on its role as a business tool, frequently dismissing other concerns as being outside the boundaries of the profession.
- ❑ Advertising has not fared well in the court of public opinion. “Advertising ethics” is perceived to be an oxymoron at worst, tenuous at best.

AN ADDENDUM

Complicating/enriching our understanding of advertising in society

Our understanding of advertising in society is enriched by moving beyond thinking of advertising solely as a strategic business tool in a business/commercial context. Instead it is useful to view advertising processes, practices, practitioners, creations, and audiences functioning in a complex web of ideologies¹ among them:

¹ Ideology is a complex concept which is understood differently in various disciplines. Here, the ideological web might be viewed as a system of *interconnected* ideas, values, beliefs through which we make sense of the world and our place in that world.

- ❑ We live in a **democratic political system** emphasizing freedom, fairness, individualism and choice.
- ❑ We live in a **capitalist economic system** in which individuals and firms decide what to do based on their own best interests.
- ❑ We live in **media culture** in which it is becoming increasingly difficult and perhaps impossible to separate media and culture in any meaningful way.
- ❑ Our media culture is **image-based**: Images allow persuasive, and sometimes preposterous, messages to circumvent the audience's critical thinking skills.
- ❑ We have a **commercial media system**: profit-motivated, advertising-supported and highly consolidated.
- ❑ We live in a **consumer culture** preoccupied with things and with the idea of acquiring things to signal our **identities** to others as well as ourselves
- ❑ We possess a seeming boundless **optimism and preoccupation with technology and technological innovations.**
- ❑ **and more....**

Many other ideologies comprise the web (think patriarchy, lookism, racism, ageism, ableism religious and spiritual grounding, etc.). Because ideologies are interconnected, changes in one will likely lead to changes—sometimes subtle at other times transformative—throughout the web.

Considering advertising's role in society in this manner enriches our understanding of advertising's institutional power: advertising is neither an all-powerful instrument of manipulation nor something to be dismissed as trivial. Considering advertising as an institution working not so much by *acting on* business and culture but *as acting amid* business, culture, and a web of underlying ideologies can provide more realistic insight into the relative power wielded by advertising, and the nature and dimensions of that power.