

Introducing Advertising and Promotion

Chapter Outline

Few topics in management or social studies attract such fascinated attention, or elicit such wide disagreement, as advertising and promotion. This opening chapter sets a course through this complex area. It explains the book's intended audiences, aims and main assumptions. The subtitle 'Communicating brands' is explained in terms of the book's pre-eminent, though not exclusive, emphasis on the role of advertising and promotion in the marketing of branded goods and services. The chapter draws on many practical illustrations as the foundation of a theoretically informed study of contemporary advertising and promotion practice.

BOX 1.0 Communicating Brands: Advertising, Communication and The Social Power of Brands

The meaning of a brand is not necessarily limited to the functionality of the product or service it represents. Advertising is central to the creation and maintenance of the wider meaning. Brands such as Marlboro, Mercedes-Benz, Gucci, Prada and Rolls-Royce have powerful significance for non-consumers as well as for consumers. For many consumers branded items carry a promise of quality and value. But the symbolic meaning the brand may have for friends, acquaintances and strangers cannot be discounted as a factor in its appeal. For example, a simple item of clothing such as a shirt will sell in far greater numbers if it is bedecked with a logo that confers a symbolic meaning on that item. Wearing a Tommy Hilfiger branded shirt is said to confer

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prestige on the wearer because of the values of affluence and social privilege the brand represents (Schor, 1998: 47, cited in Szmigin, 2003: 139).

Anthropologists have long noted the importance of ownership and display of prized items for signifying social identity and status in non-consumer societies. In economically advanced societies brands take this role as a 'cultural resource' (Holt, 2002: 87; see also Belk, 1988; Elliott and Wattanasuwan, 1998; McCracken, 1988) that enables and extends social communication. The influence of brands is such that even resistance to brands has become a defining social position. The 'social power' of brands (Feldwick, 2002: 11) refers to the meaning that goes beyond functionality and is a symbolic reference point among consumers and non-consumers alike. This symbolic meaning is powerfully framed by advertising and sustained through other forms of communication such as word-of-mouth, public relations, product and brand placement in entertainment media, sponsorship and package design.

Aims of the Book

Advertising and promotion: Communicating brands is written primarily for those studying advertising, promotion and related topics, such as brand marketing, as part of taught academic programmes at advanced undergraduate and postgraduate level. The book introduces intellectual perspectives on advertising and promotion from cultural and social studies within a detailed account of how and why contemporary advertising is created. Many cultural studies of advertising focus on the textual analysis of ads: in other words, they look at the consumption of advertising while giving less attention to the material conditions that give rise to its production. But many managerial texts offer accounts of the marketing context for advertising and promotional campaigns while giving only arm's-length treatment to the ways in which these campaigns are understood and consumed. This book offers a basis for an intellectually informed treatment of advertising and promotion that builds on an inside view of the management practices in the field.

Advertising and promotion: Communicating brands will also be of interest to the general reader. Prior knowledge of advertising and marketing is not assumed but some acquaintance with marketing basics will be useful for readers who are interested in the management perspective. Those readers not acquainted with the field should, in any case, soon grasp the concepts of **positioning**, **targeting** and **segmentation** that are central to understanding the way advertising is used to accomplish brand

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marketing ends. To aid study important concepts are highlighted (in bold type) in each chapter and explained in a glossary at its end. Review exercises, questions and short cases are provided as material for reinforcement and reflection. There are also explanatory notes and references for those wishing to acquire deeper knowledge of particular topics through more specific reading. The book uses many international examples to illustrate particular aspects of practice. Underlying its practical perspective is a strong sense of how advertising can be understood in intellectually viable ways that connect management practice, consumer experience and other fields of social study.

Outline of the Book

Chapter 1 sets the scene for the academic study of advertising and promotion and explains the major assumptions the book makes. For convenience, the practical descriptions of how the promotional communication industry does its work usually adopt the perspective of the full-service advertising agency. Full-service agencies, as the phrase suggests, provide any marketing communications service a client requires. They are pretty self-sufficient in all communications and related disciplines (research, strategic planning, media, art production). The self-sufficiency of such agencies can, however, be illusory because of the extent of sub-contracting that goes on,¹ especially on big accounts. However, the major advertising agencies remain hugely influential as umbrella organizations operating at the centre of marketing, corporate and brand communications practice. As the book explains, the dominance of the traditional advertising agency over the marketing communications industry is being challenged by media agencies, and direct and other below-the-line marketing agencies, as integrated communications solutions are increasingly required by clients. Chapter 2 introduces the theoretical themes that are drawn on throughout to understand the engagement between advertising and its audiences. The book begins its detailed consideration of the advertising and promotion business in Chapter 3, which explains the management context for marketing communication by describing its influential role in brand marketing. Chapter 4 describes the personalities, roles and processes of a typical agency. Chapter 5 describes the media planning task and reflects on the rapid changes that have taken place in the media infrastructure. Chapter 6 develops some of the implications these changes have had for media strategy in advertising and promotion and discusses the evolution of hybrid forms of promotion such as sponsorship and brand placement in entertainment communications.

Many of the practical illustrations in the book are international in scope but the cultural and commercial importance of international promotion in brand marketing justifies the dedicated examination of the topic in Chapter 7.

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Chapter 8 explores some of the many contrasting arguments in the contentious and complex topic of advertising ethics. While the ethics of advertising is a major concern for many consumers and other groups, within the advertising industry the role of research creates far more heated argument. Chapter 9 describes the main kinds of research and indicates why advertising professionals feel so strongly about what kinds of research are deployed and how research findings are used. Chapter 10 draws the book's theoretical themes together and synthesizes the various levels of theory.

Advertising and promotion: Communicating brands seeks to promote a greater understanding of the subject area both as a managerial discipline and as (arguably) one of the most far-reaching cultural forces of our time. To this end the book offers a thorough descriptive account of how advertising and promotional campaigns are devised and executed and the role they play for international brand marketing and other forms of organization such as charities and government agencies.² This managerial perspective is used as a point of departure from which to better understand how advertising comes to have its persuasive effect on individuals and its pervasive influence on individual and collective cultural lives. The managerial perspective on advertising is framed within a conceptual account of the nature of the engagement between consumers and advertising.

BOX 1.1 Advertising and Cultural Change: Gender Representations in UK Alcohol Advertising

In many cultures, cigarette smoking by females was once considered to be unacceptable and outrageous behaviour. From the 1940s advertising popularized cigarette smoking and, in particular, made smoking acceptable for females in images that implied female smoking was a progressive move for gender relations. Similarly, more recent portrayals of alcohol consumption in advertising have encouraged and reflected a profound change in the culture of alcohol consumption in the UK. In the 1970s, UK advertisements for Courage beer brands such as John Smith's portrayed drinkers as exclusively male, fond only of the company of other males and continually devising strategies to escape domestic imprisonment (and the nagging wife) for the liberation and companionship of the (male-dominated) 'pub'. In the 1980s advertising campaigns for beer brands such as Hofmeister and Castlemaine XXXX portrayed the male drinker in a radically different light, as a streetwise 'jack the lad', much more image-conscious and flirtatious than the bluff, blazer-wearing rugby hearty of the 1970s.

Why Study Advertising and Promotion as an Academic Field?

Advertising and Consumption

Advertising has, perhaps, lagged somewhat behind the broader field of consumption as a focus for social research. Advertising is, though, an 'integral part of twentieth-century consumption' and an 'important form of representation in the contemporary world' (Nava et al., 1997: 3–4). As a form of representation, advertising takes signs and meanings extant in non-advertising culture and transforms them, creating new representations in juxtaposition with marketed brands. Advertisements can be seen as 'dynamic and sensuous representations of cultural values' (Lears, 1994, in Richards et al., 2000: 1). The ways in which we consumers interpret advertisements can reflect our own culturally-derived values and our culturally-learned fantasies and aspirations.

In expressing opinions about advertising we can indicate 'our personality, or our social and ideological position' (Cook, 2001: 1). Our attitudes to advertising can express values that connect us to a desired peer group, especially if we are young (Ritson and Elliott, 1999). Life in economically advanced societies is saturated with marketing communication. Advertising in all its forms offers a vast and dynamic vocabulary of cultural meanings from which we can select a personally tailored ensemble of brands that reflects and communicates our sense of social positioning. There is no need to conflate consumption, advertising and marketing to exaggerate the importance of either field for social study. While marketing, in important respects, is communication (Schultz et al., 1993; Wells, 1975: 197), there are clear areas that demarcate each field from the other. What we can say is that advertising, as the super-ordinate category embracing all forms of marketing communication, carries great importance both reflecting and informing marketing and consumption. Advertising has been cited as a force for cultural change of many kinds. Changes in the portrayals of brand consumption in advertisements both reflect and legitimize changes in the social world beyond advertising.

Today's alcohol culture in the UK seems far removed from these dated advertising representations. Box 1.1 shows that there has been a proliferation of alcohol brands (especially 'alco-pops') mixed with fruit flavours and targeted at younger consumers. Along with the reduction in the age profile of targeted consumers there has been a reversal of gender roles in advertising, with the female now often portrayed as smarter and more inclined to risk-taking than the male in TV ads for alcohol brands such as Archer's and Bacardi. This kind of advertising has raised concern among pressure groups because of rises in alcohol-related illness among young British women.

The space between the portrayals of social life in advertising, and social life as it is acted out in non-advertising social settings, reveals tensions and contradictions that are of direct concern for health, social and economic

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policy. Recent alcohol ads have been overtly sexualized, causing public concern³ that alcohol brand advertising is promoting high-risk behaviour. The public concern is matched by official concern at the influence of alcohol advertising: the World Health Organization made alcohol advertising a key priority in their anti-alcohol campaigns (WHO, 1988, in Nelson and Young, 2001). The fact that people now make the connection between advertising and social behaviour so readily reflects the cultural influence that advertising is seen to have.

Advertising and Management Studies

Alongside its importance as a field of cultural and consumer studies, advertising is a major field of management studies. It has assumed particular significance as the major element of brand marketing. Marketing communications in general and advertising in particular are now seen as a major, and possibly *the* major source of competitive advantage in consumer markets (Shimp, 1997). As the brand image has come to represent a dynamic and enduring source of consumer interest (and company revenue), the ways in which brands can be portrayed and their image controlled have become central to the concerns of brand management. Advertising alone does not make the brand but the successful consumer brand is, nevertheless, inseparable from its portrayal in advertising and other marketing communications media. The multiplication of media channels through new technology and regulatory change has meant that most aspects of brand marketing management have become tinged with a concern for the potential impact on brand communications and the integrity of the brand personality. Decisions on pricing, design, packaging, distribution outlet and even raw materials are taken with one eye on the brand's core values and how these might be perceived in the light of media coverage of the brand. It is mistaken to argue that communication is all there is to brand marketing (but see Schultz et al., 1993; Wells, 1975), and it is a truism that advertising and marketing communications have assumed a key importance in the destiny of brands and their producing organizations. Advertising, and the work of advertising agencies, lie at the centre of this rapidly evolving integrated marketing communications field.

Marketing communications do not simply portray brands: they constitute those brands in the sense that the meaning of the brand cannot be properly understood in separation from its brand name, logo, advertising and other communications associated with it. Whether brand *a* is better designed, more attractive, easier to use, or more useful than brand *b* is rarely something that can be decided finally and objectively. It is usually to some degree a matter of opinion. This is where advertising acquires its suggestive power. It occupies a realm in which consumers are actively seeking suggestions to layer consumption with new social significance.

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Advertisers offer us material to engage our imagination and open up new possibilities for consumption experiences. Consumers are not passive dupes being sold on exaggerated claims. Advertising is so powerful because, as consumers, we are actively complicit in our own exploitation.

To put this another way, in a decidedly non-trivial sense, advertising gives us what we want. Both damning advertising as lies and puffery and defending it as an essential economic function oversimplify the complexities of understanding advertising. Advertising communication frames the way consumers engage with and understand marketed brands. It is the advertising, rather than the more tangible aspects of marketing management, that symbolically realize the marketing ideal of giving the consumers what we (think we) want.

Another important reason why advertising is a useful subject of study is because it lends itself to examination from many differing disciplinary perspectives and therefore offers means of linking those perspectives through multidisciplinary studies. The boom in the quantity of advertising to which we are exposed on a daily basis and the intriguing sophistication of many creative executions have generated lively popular interest. In its most high-profile manifestations advertising has almost become a branch of showbiz, with ostentatious televised award shows for the best ads, lavish conferences in Cannes and, for the most innovative film producers, frequent career movement between the advertising and movie businesses. Through this profile and exposure advertising intrudes frequently on typical personal experience, which offers a point of departure for the wider study of the topic both as a management discipline and as a subject of consumer and cultural studies.

The edgy tone of many advertisements, the popular attention advertising attracts in national press and TV media and the massive budgets allocated to it by brand marketing organizations make it a topic of intense interest among many commentators. In fact, advertising is typically treated as a subject of controversy. In the following section we will try to elaborate on the theatre of advertising by outlining some of the many contradictory views that are held about this modern enigma.

What is Advertising and How Can We Understand It?

Defining Advertising

In marketing management texts advertising is conventionally regarded as one element of the **promotional mix**, a management tool defined by its explicitly promotional, mediated and paid-for character, and differentiated from other marketing communications disciplines such as public relations, personal selling, corporate communications, sales promotion and so on. In turn, promotion is regarded as one sub-category of the marketing

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management mix of price, product (design) and distribution. The advertising industry often pays little regard to such hierarchical sub-divisions, preferring to see all marketing elements as interacting parts of a whole. This view cuts across communications disciplines and acknowledges the interlocking and symbiotic relation of the elements of marketing. Advertising man Bill Bernbach's reputed comment that 'Nothing kills a bad product faster than good advertising' illustrates well the pitfalls of taking a compartmentalized view of marketing activities. Marketing operations and marketing communication are interdependent in important respects.

The ingenuity of advertisers and the flexibility of advertising as a communication form often render attempts to define it in one sentence trite or tautologous. Advertising often sells something, but often does not, as with much political, public-service or charities advertising. Advertising is often an impersonal communication, distinguishing it from personal selling, but there are many ads that are eye-to-eye sales pitches delivered by actors or celebrity endorsers in a mediated imitation of a personal sales encounter. Advertising often comprises stereotypical elements that set it apart from other forms of mediated communication. Overheated sales pitches from improbably coiffed spokespersons, happy housewives singing irritatingly catchy jingles at the kitchen sink, unfeasibly attractive models unreasonably excited by chocolate confections all spring to mind as advertising clichés. But then again, many advertisements contradict advertising stereotypes. The use of hybrid forms of promotions such as product placement, sponsorship and public relations make categorization still more problematic.

Industry professionals tend to regard advertising as a powerful marketing tool, a means of persuasively communicating with millions of customers. Advertising's ability to sell tends to be overplayed: its ability to persuade consumers to think in terms of brands is the source of its economic power. A narrow definition of what advertising is obscures consideration of what advertising does. We might categorize a given piece of communication as an advertisement in terms of its parallels with a vague and fuzzy mental prototype of what an ad should look or sound like, perhaps in line with the stereotypes mentioned above (Rosch, 1977, cited in Cook, 2001: 13), but the marketing industry itself has a vested interest in challenging its own norms. Advertising may be a communication that at some level has a promotional motive, but this hardly prepares us for all the kinds of promotional messages we are likely to encounter. Neither can it prepare us for the subtlety of motive that underlies many hybrid promotional forms. A post-match interview with a logo-wearing sporting star, a free movie character toy in a fast-food meal, a 'courtesy' phone call from your bank can each be regarded as promotional forms at some level. They stretch beyond the conventional definitions of advertising but, nevertheless, typify the integrated and multi-channel trends of much contemporary promotional activity. A realistic study of advertising and promotion cannot hope

to put the parts neatly in a labelled box. Advertising takes the enquirer on a journey that is all the more fascinating because it defies boundaries.

The Experience of Advertising

Take a moment to think about the advertisements you have seen or heard this week. At whom were they aimed? What, exactly, were they trying to communicate? How did they make you feel? Did you rush to buy the brand? Which medium conveyed the ads? Did you see them on a passing vehicle, on outdoor poster sites, on the television, hear them on the radio, read them in the press? Did you see other forms of promotion on your clothing, smell them in a promotionally enhanced shopping environment, see them on packaging, on an air balloon in the sky or on the back of a bus ticket? It is difficult to remember more than a few of all the hundreds of promotions you see every week. Advertising has become such a feature of daily life in developed market economies that sometimes it seems as if we hardly notice it. Advertising pervades our cultural landscape, especially in urban settings, and we carry on our lives taking it for granted, as if it were as natural as grass or trees.⁴

We are struck, then, when particular ads become topics of general conversation or objects of public disapproval. It is then that we realize how taken for granted much advertising is and we wonder how this paradox occurs. Advertising is, of course, so powerful precisely because it is taken for granted. There are frequent press features that reflect our puzzled fascination with the latest iconic or controversial ad. The TV show dedicated to the funniest or most outlandish ads has become a mainstay of popular TV programming in many countries. Advertising's crossing over into mainstream entertainment and the uses mainstream entertainment media make of advertising styles and techniques reflect another aspect of advertising's dynamic character. It is evolving into forms that are increasingly difficult to categorize. The hard-sell ads remain but there are also new narrative forms of ever greater subtlety.

Contrasting Views of Advertising

The Management Perspective

Among professional managers there is a wide diversity of opinion on the uses of advertising. Some feel that it is a necessary part of getting a brand noticed, remembered and bought. Others are more sceptical about the claims made for advertising and resent allocating large budgets to advertising agencies to squander (as they see it) on unaccountable creativity. Many in the marketing business feel that they do not know how advertising works

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BOX 1.2 New Narrative Forms of Advertising: Adidas and Celebrity Sportsmen

In the UK in late 2003 a series of TV ads for the Adidas sportswear brand featured the soccer star David Beckham with the England rugby football star Johnny Wilkinson. The ads are edited vignettes of a contrived kick-about session in which each tests the other's skill at their respective sports. There is no backing-track or voice-over. There is nothing to indicate that it is an ad, apart from the appearance of the Adidas name in small type at the end of each ad. There is no need for Adidas to labour the point: these superstars of sport represent all the values the brand would wish to be associated with. The campaign has merged the marketing communications genres of sponsorship, celebrity endorsement and advertising by producing a hybrid form that does not easily fit into any of these categories. The ads are presented simply as entertainments. They attracted press coverage in the UK even before they were aired and generated widespread interest and attention from sports fans. Adidas adopted a similar approach in New Zealand to try to contrive a sense of sporting authenticity for the brand: TV ads featured the New Zealand All Blacks rugby football team, revered as sporting heroes in their homeland.

but cannot take the risk of not advertising their product or service in case they suffer a disadvantage compared with their competitors. Even amid this scepticism and doubt, there is an acknowledgement that the world's major brands would be inconceivable without it. Neither can it be doubted that the commercial fortunes of some brands, and in some cases the shape of entire markets, have been transformed through powerful and creatively compelling advertising campaigns. For example, the famous 'Laundrette' ad that John Hegarty of the agency Bartle Bogle Hegarty created in the 1982 campaign for Levi's 501s used American provenance to revolutionize the denim jeans market in general and sales of Levi's in particular for the following decade. It has been said that the ads increased sales of denim jeans by some 600 per cent.

More recently, popular ads for Budweiser beer increased market share for the brand and earned valuable free publicity simply because they added a word ('Whassup') to the vernacular of American English (and even earned a listing in Longman's *Dictionary*).⁵ Campaigns for Gold Blend coffee and for the Renault Clio in the 1990s earned similar fame in the UK and provided valuable PR benefits for those brands. A survey of senior executives in US corporations revealed the view that a powerful ad campaign for a brand can have significant effects on the share price,

profitability and long-term financial stability of the entire corporation (see the section on the *American Advertising Federation* survey in Chapter 2). Even so, many of the same executives are chary of increasing their advertising budget and suspicious of advertising agencies.

The Consumer/Citizen Perspective

Advertising tends to be blamed for many social evils, from eating disorders to the decline in public manners. Yet, paradoxically, advertising is also widely regarded as trivial. It occupies a lowly status in our cultural hierarchy. Popular art, literature, movies, even stand-up comedy performers are discussed, critiqued and analysed in the Sunday supplements as aspects of aesthetic culture. But advertising is typically criticized. Yet its lowly cultural status is belied by our fascination with it. We enjoy TV shows about the funniest ads and we often talk about the latest ads in our daily conversations. Cook (2001) notes this duality about advertising's cultural status. It is regarded as both trivial and powerful, banal and sinister, amusing and degrading. Advertising is historically a relatively recent development in communication and we still struggle to come to terms with its apparent force.

Although the level of popular interest in advertising is great, there is little consensus about its role in society. Some argue that it corrupts cultural life with its insistent, hectoring presence cajoling us to buy ever greater quantities of goods and services. Organized consumer resistance to advertising has taken the form of vandalism, such as a French anti-advertising group spray-painting 'le pub tue' or 'le pub pue' on all the advertising posters in the Paris metro, the RATP.⁶ Advertising intrudes into ever more social spaces. Many schools, especially in the USA, now accept fees to give exclusive rights to commercial organisations to advertise and sell their goods on campus. It was reported that one student was suspended for wearing a Pepsi T-shirt on his school's 'Coke Day'.⁷ Even religious observance is not immune from advertising's influence. Advertising-style slogans in brash colours promoting religious observance can be seen outside many places of worship. Evidently, advertising discourse influences the very culture from which it draws.

But while some have a political objection to advertising in all its forms, many people are irritated not by advertising in general but by what they see as its excesses. Even acknowledging advertising's unique ideological force promoting consumerism, legitimizing capitalism and framing everyday experience (Elliott and Ritson, 1997) does not necessarily imply an anti-advertising stance. Few can deny that advertising is intrinsic to the creation of wealth and many would argue that it has a role in the free and untrammelled expression of ideas, a socially progressive exchange of 'ideas for living', to adapt John Stuart Mill's phrase.⁸

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For many who accept the economic inevitability of advertising, its forms and styles provide particular sources of irritation. Pop-up ads and email spam are a continuing irritation for many internet users; unwanted junk direct advertising mail annoys millions of householders daily. Our favourite TV shows are frequently interrupted by lengthy commercial breaks. Some TV shows even break the narrative to make space for contrived brand references within the plot. Roadside poster sites are sometimes accused of polluting the urban environment or even of distracting drivers and causing road accidents. Organizations are often accused of using advertising unethically for commercial advantage. The national press in the UK has recently run features criticizing aspects of advertising,⁹ particularly its alleged influence over health and children's development. The rise of 'pester power' as a marketing technique and the distortion of childhood values into those of adults¹⁰ are two of the trends that ad agencies have been accused of initiating, or at least exploiting. All these issues reflect concern with the social responsibility, ethics and regulation of advertising (discussed in detail in Chapter 8).

The Organizational Perspective

Organizations survive by returning value to shareholders and other stakeholders. They do what they must within regulatory frameworks and laws governing advertising standards that seem, to them, to be excessively restrictive. Manufacturers and advertisers will argue that, given the competitive pressures under which they operate, the level of integrity in advertising and marketing is remarkably high. In advanced economies there are industry regulations and legal strictures that give consumers considerable redress if they can show that an advertiser's promise was literally untrue or that their product was dangerous. For advertisers, finding a creative execution that is within the bounds of regulations and gets their brand noticed at all is a major challenge. From an advertiser's point of view, the brand is responsible for the livelihoods of many people: a successful brand creates jobs and generates wealth for employees, shareholders and suppliers. Successful brands are a mainstay of economic growth. In advanced economies, poverty of the scale and severity of the previous century is no longer known. Advertising has played its part in this wealth creation as an engine of economic growth, maintaining competition by communicating offers, and by collectively promoting an ethos of consumption.

Advertising's persuasiveness is not only used in profit generation. Social advertising is a genre that has informed the public on social issues and in some cases even changed behaviour. Many public services or charities use advertising campaigns to try to promote their causes or to change social behaviour with respect to, for example, alcohol consumption, safer driving, sexual practice, domestic violence or social prejudice towards

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disability or ethnicity. Social advertising has developed such that it even shouts louder than brand advertising. As we will see in Chapter 8, many social campaigns are allowed by regulatory authorities to push the boundaries of tasteful depiction further than brand advertisers because of their ostensibly virtuous motives.

Advertising is regarded by many as inherently deceitful. Yet considering the tenaciousness with which corporations pursue profits, remarkably few ads tell literal untruths. Of course, some do, but most advertising satisfies typical social conventions of truthfulness. The interaction of consumers with communications which have a marketing subtext is usually too complex and subtle to be thought of as, simply, a matter of either fact or fiction. If an ad implies that a man's sexual attractiveness and social status will be enhanced by using a Gillette razor, surely this is merely preposterous rather than untrue? To be sure, consumer perceptions and beliefs about brands are self-sustaining to some degree: we believe what we want to believe, sometimes in the face of contradictory evidence. Do smokers really cough less using low-tar cigarettes? Are we slimmer because we put calorie-free sugar substitute in our coffee? It can hardly be denied that there is an important element of wish fulfilment in what we choose to believe in advertising.

A peculiarity of advertising is that we are expected to be able to distinguish between untruth and humorous hyperbole, but the advertisers make very little effort to blur this distinction. This is just one reason why this sophisticated communication form is rightfully a part of academic study: advertising performs an essential economic function in capitalist economies but for it to perform its economic function well it demands a sophisticated level of discernment from consumers. Advertising, strangely, is rarely a significant part of the school curriculum even though negotiating a way through the advertising landscape is essential to the economic and social competence of citizens.

Advertising and Promotional Culture

The diversity of views advertising attracts reflects its role at the centre of what Wernick (1991) called 'promotional culture'. In developed market economies we are experiencing a revolution in public communication. Broadcasting deregulation, vertical and lateral mergers in the media industry and technological advances in communication are creating a promotional environment that has no precedent in modern history. The ethos, language and aesthetic forms of promotion have become parts of everyday experience that are taken for granted. As we have seen, even churches advertise heaven in a world that has become a heaven for advertisers.

Within promotional culture we grow accustomed to spending significant sums of money on items that are not essential for survival. We associate

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happiness with consumption, indeed, in many ways we define our existence in terms of consumption. As advertising and communication make continuous consumption of branded items a culturally normal practice, other competing cultural values that encourage abstention from consumption are relatively reduced in status. Today in the Western developed economies over-indulgence is the norm and waste is everywhere. Changes in cultural norms and practices of consumption (such as the move towards eating fast food and away from the family-based social ritual of the home-cooked meal) to some extent reflect the influence of promotional culture. Deeply held values and practices are undermined and finally overthrown under the influence of advertising. Advertising's apparent triviality as a sub-category of popular art should not distract us from this powerful cultural influence in framing and changing, as well as reflecting, the way we live.

In linking the study of advertising's cultural influence with its study as a management discipline this book takes a new broad and inclusive approach to its subject. The remainder of Chapter 1 sets the terms of engagement with its topic by explaining how such a broad scope reflects contemporary practice in the field.

Advertising Management and This Book

Strategy, Integration and Research

This book's standpoint on advertising practice reflects a concern with three main concepts: strategy, integration and research. The strategic

BOX 1.3 Advertising and Truthfulness: 'Lynx' Ads Make Fun of Themselves

'Lynx'-branded male grooming products are marketed with expensively produced TV ads that show male users becoming unexpectedly irresistible to beautiful women. The ads assume that the viewer will understand that it is all just a joke: the plots are clearly intended to be funny. Lynx is pointing at the narrative conventions of male grooming brands and laughing at them with the viewer. But the high production standards of the ads show viewers that in fact the marketing campaign is deadly serious. Viewers agree – Lynx is the leading brand in several male grooming product segments. Could it be that knowing the ads are not serious strengthens rather than weakens the message, that using Lynx deodorant might just make the user more sexually alluring to the woman of his dreams?

perspective on advertising and promotion implies a purposive, pragmatic, medium-to-long-term approach to communication, driven by marketing imperatives and commanding significant resources. An important part of the strategic perspective for brand communications is the need for an underlying purpose to inform and guide management action. This marketing rationality is intended to bring coherence and unity of purpose to the various marketing communications activities. The integration of creative themes and media channels is often considered to have an important role in sustaining this coherence.

Integrated Marketing Communications

The phrase '**Integrated Marketing Communications**' (Schultz et al., 1993) reflects managerial interest in co-ordinating different media channels to optimize the effectiveness of marketing communications programmes. If brand communications reflect implied values and imagery that are consistent throughout differing media channels, then clearly these channels act in a mutually reinforcing way with each successive consumer engagement. Interest in IMC has developed because of the view that marketing communication offers the 'only sustainable competitive advantage of marketing organizations' (Schultz et al., 1993: 47). Consequently, all points of contact between an organization and its audience can be utilized as possible communications channels through which all forms of communication may be used. The end goal is to influence the behaviour of targeted audiences (Shimp, 1997: 13).

Although advertising agencies consider traditional advertising to be their core activity, the larger, full-service agencies are increasingly finding that clients expect them to offer expertise across the marketing communication disciplines. Consumers, moreover, do not make a strong distinction between the differing media that carry advertising. As Percy et al. point out, 'people generally look at all marketing communications as "advertising"' (2001: v). The rise of brand marketing makes the advertising medium secondary to the brand personality, an entity that can be expressed through many differing forms of creative execution and communicated through different media. Indeed, it is recognized that an explicit, paid-for advertisement placed in a mass medium may have no greater impact for a brand than a carefully integrated product placement in a movie or a high-profile sports sponsorship deal. It is no longer unusual for public relations or direct mail to be used as the main, strategic arm of marketing communications effort. Integrated advertising campaigns utilize the qualities of different media in a communications onslaught designed to project consistent brand values regardless of whatever communication source the consumer encounters.

This blurring of the lines between marketing communications disciplines is part of a radical change in the media infrastructure coming from

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developments in electronic communications technology and the rise of global business. Global brands now cross borders and resonate with the consumers of many countries. Mass media, above-the-line advertising is often regarded as the strategic element of marketing communications, the one communication technique that can transform the fortunes of corporations, create brands and change entire markets. Although there are still good reasons for holding this view, there is also a strong case for managers to consider advertising from a strategic and integrated perspective which acknowledges that the rationale for brand communications drives the pragmatic development of integrated creative executions and media strategies.

Research

Research is another key theme reflecting this book's practical perspective. In order to create consistently successful advertising, advertisers have to understand the business of their clients, the markets in which they operate and the consumers with whom they wish to communicate. Research for advertising can take many forms which will be explained in Chapter 9. At this point the role and importance of research need to be emphasized because of a common misconception, which is that research, with its connotations of statistics and mass questionnaire surveys, has no role in the creative world of advertising. In fact research conceived broadly to include qualitative and informal insights into consumers is central to the advertising communication task.

The advertising legend David Ogilvy (1983) pointed out that research has played a central role in successful advertising for decades, although the type of research conducted and the way it is integrated into the creative development of advertising may differ from case to case. Research can inspire and direct creative work by offering an insight into the market or the consumer that provides a hook of reality on which to hang the fantasy of advertising. It can also help to prejudge the way a given creative execution might be received by consumers or to measure the changes in attitude as a result of a given campaign. As we see in Chapter 9, the rightful role of research in advertising and also the question of who should be responsible for it are subject to strong disagreement in the advertising industry. In some agencies research is the responsibility of a specialist labelled 'the account planner', as it was in the Edgell Potato Whip case described below. The account planning ethos or philosophy, though, is not adopted throughout the industry and is subject to a degree of controversy puzzling to those outside the relatively closed circle of ad agencies (Hackley, 2003a).

The tension, often a fruitful one, surrounding the role of research in advertising practice is also reflected in a similar tension in academic research into advertising. The assumption of this book is that the academic and practitioner perspectives need not be mutually exclusive, although we

**BOX 1.4 Integrating Research, Advertising and Marketing Strategy:
Smashing the Instant Potato Market in Australia**

TV ads for Cadbury's Smash instant dried mashed potato created a mass appeal for the product and occupy a legendary status (the Smash laughing 'Martians') in the UK advertising industry. In Australia the Edgell Canned Foods company used carefully conceived consumer research to market a successful rival that significantly outsold the Cadbury's brand even though the two products were almost identical in taste and composition. Former Unilever researcher David Brent carried out qualitative focus groups with Australian consumers on preparing and eating both real and instant mashed potato. They also tested consumer preferences on a ring-pull can. Both Cadbury's Smash and the market leader, Unilever's Deb brand, used a sachet. Further research used in-home and in-store sampling. Finally, other brand names were tested against the soon-to-be-launched Smash and other competitors. Smash came a poor last in the ratings, indicating that the Cadbury's product might run into consumer resistance in Australia because of its brand name.

Edgell Potato Whip (a name deriving from qualitative research in which housewives' used the analogy of whipping the product into a light mash) was launched with a TV ad that used the authority of an Irish family as experts in potato-eating. After 18 months the Edgell brand had taken almost 50 per cent of the market from market leader Deb. Cadbury's Smash, launched around the same time using the theme that had been a runaway success in the UK, failed in Australia and was delisted.

The success of Edgell's Potato Whip in Australia was attributed to the agency's account planning approach that integrated research findings into advertising strategy and creative development. In addition, the company allowed the agency to influence their overall marketing strategy.¹¹

acknowledge below that C.P. Snow's 'two cultures', art and science, find powerfully opposing expressions among advertising managers (Hackley, 2003b).

Brands and Marketing Signification

One final point needs to be made to underline the broad perspective this book takes on promotional and marketing communications. We have

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already suggested that marketing and communication cannot be easily separated. We now need to draw out the implications of this point of view and to explain exactly what is meant by it. **Signification** is a concept that will be useful in this task. The term is used here in a broad sense to refer to signs that communicate a message that carries meaning (or, as we shall see, meanings). More will be mentioned about different kinds of signification in Chapter 2; for the present we wish simply to highlight the communicative dimension of marketing activity as a whole.

Brands signify in the sense that they are signs or combinations of signs (words, music, colours, logos, packaging design, and so on) that communicate values or ideas to various **consumer communities**. We have noted above that consumers often regard all marketing and promotion, colloquially, as advertising. For consumers, the world of marketing is a kaleidoscope of communication, the component parts of which are impossible to disentangle. There are many dimensions to communication in relation to brand marketing. Marketing management cannot be reduced to advertising and communication, since it is a complex set of substantive activities in its own right. Nonetheless, when commentators say that marketing and communications are inseparable (Leiss et al., 1997; Shimp, 1997: 4; Schultz et al., 1994: 46), they are making an important point. Every aspect of marketing management (price, distribution, product design) can carry powerfully suggestive signification.

Marketing is replete with signification in many forms. Marketing activities of all kinds can be seen to combine signs that resonate with cultural meanings (Barthes, 1972; Umiker-Sebeok, 1997; Williamson, 1978). The futuristic design of a Dyson vacuum cleaner or the clean, sweeping lines of a Mazda MX5 sports car have the powerful appeal of implied values that are very important to the consumer. A Rolex watch might be a well-made jewellery item with time-keeping utility but the Rolex brand is best known as a symbol of ostentatious, perhaps extravagant, wealth. Rodeo Drive in Beverly Hills, California, Madison Avenue, New York, and Knightsbridge, London are home to many designer stores because these locations have become culturally identified with prestige retail outlets. The location, as well as the price, carries a powerful message about the products.

Many other aspects of organizational activity not usually categorized as communication can carry powerful signification: that is, they can be interpreted in terms of particular meanings. Perhaps the most visible aspects of organizational communication for consumers are advertisements placed in above-the-line media such as TV, outdoors, the press or commercial radio. But organizations know that consumers' experience of brands is integrated in a powerful sense: consumers will not normally distinguish between different communication channels when they think of a brand or an organization. So organizations need to be conscious of the way that their various communications can be interpreted and of how

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consistent these interpretations may be with those from other communication sources.

When the UK airline corporation British Airways redesigned the livery on its airplanes at great expense the aim was to offer a stronger and more contemporary corporate image to support other communications and marketing activities. As consumers encounter corporate communications through vehicle liveries, and also through letterhead design, corporate advertising, staff uniforms, telephone conversations with organizational staff and press coverage of the organization's activities, they will assimilate these experiences into their overall understanding of the brand. Corporate identity is a distinct field of research and practice (Melewar and Wooldridge, 2001) but much of its importance lies in the connection consumers make between corporations and their brands in an integrated marketing communications landscape. More broadly still, in advanced economies marketing activity can be responsible for a huge majority of the images we see and the ways in which we interpret, understand and use them are central to our experience of marketing and consumption (Schroeder, 2004).

There are yet more subtle dimensions of communication to consider. In the Veblen effect (Veblen, [1899] 1970), demand for a product reacts inversely with price changes. Price signifies the quality positioning of the brand and this can be an important influence on demand for very expensive, prestige items. Although it is anti-competitive for manufacturers to enforce prices on retailers, nonetheless many brand owners do not like to have their product discounted because of the potential threat to consumers' perceptions of quality. The high price of prestige brands is an essential part of their brand positioning. Such brands are seldom discounted because of the fear that such an action will dilute the brand appeal and damage its market positioning.

As we have already noted, the location of the retail outlet (for example, in a prestige development) signifies that the brand is acceptable together with an ensemble of similarly positioned brands. The architecture and floor design of retail stores can also carry heavy signification. In the early 1900s US department store retailers were well aware of the power of impressive architecture in creating environments that inspired consumers to consume (Marchand, 1998). The interior design of retail outlets is also a powerful signifier in the marketing process. Retail organizations often commission detailed research into in-store consumer behaviour in order to help the design to cohere with the brand image of the store and to enhance sales per square foot of floorspace.

Consumers, then, understand brands holistically by assimilating messages about that brand from many diverse channels of communication. Media editorial, direct mail shots, customer service encounters, television and press advertising and retail store displays, brand logos, product design and price relative to competition all converge to form the consumer's

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understanding of a given brand. Include word-of-mouth and personal experience of brand usage, and it becomes clear that consumers cannot normally remember which particular communication or experience was significant in forming their enduring impression of a brand. Furthermore, many consumers do not distinguish the elements of marketing at all when they think of a specific brand.

Brands, then, subsist symbolically as a nebulous and mutable, yet enduring, memory of many kinds of consumer experience. Brands have a tangible, concrete reality, of course; they are created through human and production processes, they require resources and usually (though not always, as in the case of virtual corporations) occupy office or factory space. But, most importantly, a brand also has a secret life as an abstraction. This abstraction, the brand image or personality, acts in concert with its more tangible dimensions to frame and support the consumer's overall idea of that brand. Many brand marketing organizations try to integrate the various communications channels they use so that they act in harmony and, together, carry coherent and consistent messages about the brand. Doing this makes possible synergy effects by which each medium can leverage the influence of the others, enhancing marketing effectiveness by projecting the brand values and personality more powerfully.

The integrated perspective of this book does not conflate disciplines or media channels that are, rightly, considered by managers to be separate and distinct. Rather, it acknowledges the blurring and convergence of communications media sources in consumers' outlook. It also acknowledges that communications act interdependently: there are synergies that, in the new global media infrastructure, can be exploited by marketing organizations. The assimilation of brand advertising and marketing into mainstream entertainment media, discussed in detail in Chapter 6, is perhaps the most powerful indication of this integrative synergy (Hackley, 2003c).

This book describes the context for the production of contemporary advertising and promotion and frames it within a theoretical consideration of advertising consumption, introduced in Chapter 2.

Review Exercises

1. Make a list of all the forms of advertising and promotion that you have encountered or heard of in the last month. Does the list surprise you? Can you think of any social spaces or media that have not yet been exploited by advertisers?
2. After reading this chapter, has your view of advertising's social role changed? Make a list of arguments in favour of advertising and contrast it with a list of arguments against advertising. Convene a study group to discuss their implications: can the opposing viewpoints be reconciled?

3. List all the communication sources you can think of that might potentially influence your perception of a brand. Can you think of ways in which your perception of three brands has been so influenced? In your view, which communications channel was most influential in forming your impression of the brand? Why was this?
4. What is the role of signification in marketing? Gather all the promotional material you can for two brands. What meanings do you feel are implied by the imagery, the typography and the other features of these promotions? Could the meanings be interpreted differently by different people?
5. Think of two advertising campaigns that generated public debate. Can you say what their strategic marketing purpose was? Can you say why they generated public debate?

CASE Tourism Authority of Thailand

For many years Thailand has been one of the most popular tourist destinations in South-east Asia, attracting visitors from all over the world. It is famed for the natural beauty of its beaches and countryside, the luxury of its hotels, the friendliness of its people and its world-class food. This attraction is enhanced by the low cost of living in Thailand. All categories of tourists, from student back-packers to well-heeled travellers, seek luxury and comfort in Thailand's exotic setting. The SARS outbreak and the Iraq war had a very adverse effect on tourism across Asia. Many destinations reacted by discounting to win back tourist confidence and branding to try to differentiate their country's appeal from others.

The TAT (Tourism Authority of Thailand) engaged Dentsu Thailand as their agency. Their marketing objectives were to:

1. increase the number of tourist arrivals;
2. increase average daily spending rates of tourists;
3. raise the profile of Thailand by targeting prestige market segments.

Dentsu's approach to strategic campaign planning entails a focus on consumer orientation, perception change and integration, all linked under the overarching concept of the brand. Their four-phase approach begins with analysis, in which they consider the branding and marketing issues and generate communications strategies and ideas. The second phase entails strategic planning of integrated media solutions. In the third phase the campaign is executed, and the fourth phase involves monitoring the brand health and marketing objectives in the context of the campaign's execution.

Thailand is a rapidly growing economy, reflected in having the largest domestic advertising expenditure in the region. Total

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advertising spend grew some 15.5 per cent overall between 2001 and 2002 in spite of adverse economic conditions, according to AC Nielsen Adquest. Urban Thailand has growing and highly brand-conscious consumer markets that attract major promotional investment from global manufacturers such as Unilever, P&G, Toyota and Sony, to name just a few.

Dentsu Global Research found that Thailand's image abroad did not always reflect the reality of an economically sophisticated and culturally complex country. Very positive perceptions were recorded of Thailand's warmth, friendliness, value-for-money and exotic and beautiful natural resources. Of its regional competitors, Singapore was regarded as a place for excellent shopping, commerce and entertainment, and Hong Kong was rated highly for educational opportunities, business and investment. Thailand's exotic appeal was rated more highly than India, China and Egypt, and its hospitality to visitors was rated more highly than that of the USA, Australia and Mexico. Thailand's image problem seemed to be that tourists' perceptions of its prostitution and poverty were sometimes pre-eminent, overshadowing those regarding food, natural resources, culture and other virtues.

Dentsu agreed a set of communication objectives to 'reveal the richness that is Thailand' and to 'appeal to up-market tourists'. In achieving these objectives a related aim was to 'create even more differentiation from competitive countries'.

The communication message was: 'Thailand: It's not just what you see ... It's how it makes you feel'. The creative concept developed the theme that Thailand talks to you (the tourist) in many different ways, for example in the way that Thais greet you, in the gentle beauty of the Buddhist way of life, in the food, the natural beauty and the reverence for flowers. Print and TV executions were linked by the focus on language and the ways in which Thailand speaks to you.

Case Exercises

1. In a study group, explore the group members' perceptions of Thailand. Contrast these perceptions with three other countries. Develop a **perception matrix** with the four countries contrasted along two suitable axes. Discuss what has formed or influenced these perceptions. What kinds of promotional or communication activity might be powerful in changing these perceptions?
2. Consider Thailand's tourism situation. What do you think of Dentsu's creative solution? Can you think of other creative themes that you feel would be effective?

3. Take a country of your choice and construct a scenario similar to that described above. Present your promotional plan and explain its rationale.

Further Reading

General managerial texts on advertising and promotion

Pickton, D. and Broderick, A. (2003) *Integrated Marketing Communications*. London: Pitman Publishing.

Shimp, T.A. (1997) *Advertising, Promotion and Integrated Aspects of Marketing Communications*. Florida and Texas: Dryden Press.

Managerial introductions to advertising

Jones, J.P. (1999) *The Advertising Business*. New York: Sage.

Wilmshurst, J. and Mackay, A. (1999) *The Fundamentals of Advertising*. Oxford: Butterworth Heinemann, ISBA.

Cultural and historical studies on advertising

McFall, L. (2004) *Advertising: A Cultural Economy*. London: Sage.

Nava, M., Blake, A., MacRury, I. and Richards, B. (eds) *Buy This Book*. London: Routledge.

Studies of consumption

McCracken, G. (1990) *Culture and Consumption: New Approaches to the Symbolic Character of Consumer Goods and Activities*. Bloomington, IN; Indiana University Press.

Szmigin, I. (2003) *Understanding The Consumer*. London: Sage.

Studies of marketing and signification

Barthes, R. (2000) *Mythologies* (Translation Jonathan Cape, 1972). London: Vintage.

Umiker-Sebeok, J. (ed.) (1997) *Marketing and Semiotics*. Amsterdam: Mouton de Gruyter.

Useful Web Resources

Duke University US advertising history site: www.scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/ea

Advertising Age magazine: www.adage.com

UK Advertising Association: www.adassoc.org.uk

Campaign magazine website: www.brandrepublic.com

University of Texas teaching resource: <http://advertising.utexas.edu>

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Notes

1 In this context sub-contracting refers to advertising agencies' buying in specialist expertise (such as creative hot shops, media specialists, production houses or research specialists) to assist on larger accounts while acting as the single strategic co-ordinator and point of contact for the client.

2 Although this book is mainly concerned with consumer brand marketing communication it draws examples from all sectors of practice including non-profit and government campaigns and therefore the word 'organization' is used throughout in preference to 'company' or 'firm'.

3 See UK *Sunday Times*, 17 August, 2003: 'Alcohol lads' ads to be sexed down'.

4 It maybe a mistake to suggest that grass is somehow more natural than advertising. The rolling lawns of golf course fairways or hotel grounds are often featured in advertisements and have been designed partly for their visual appeal: fans of televised sports are used to the pristine green swathes of the sporting field being turned into advertising by the technique of superimposing a giant sponsor's logo or club crest on the field during coverage.

5 'Whassup' interj. American slang word meaning "Hello", from "What's up?" used especially as a greeting to someone you know well', in Longman's *Dictionary of Contemporary English*, 2001, cited in (2003) *DDB London Works*, p. 23; published in Oxfordshire by World Advertising Research Centre.

6 '*Le pub tue*' ('ads kill') and '*Le pub pue*' ('ads stink'): see report in UK newspaper *The Independent*, Thursday, 11 March 2004: 23, 'French charge 62 activists over war on "brainless ads"'.

7 Described in Michael Moore's book, *Stupid White Men*, Penguin Books, 2002: 111.

8 John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, Penguin Books, 1982.

9 UK *Sunday Times*, 6 July 2003, "Unhealthy" food ads for young face ban'. UK *Sunday Times*, 31 August, 2003, 'Junk food ads face children's TV ban'.

10 Described on a UK BBC2 TV show, 'Little Women', broadcast on 29 March 2001.

11 With thanks to David Brent, Brand Plan Pty Ltd, Sydney, Australia for this vignette.

12 My thanks to Marc Davies of Dentsu, Thailand, for discussions on this case.