

Advertising & Promotion

Communicating Brands

Chris Hackley



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 **SAGE Publications**
London • Thousand Oaks • New Delhi

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First published 2005

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SAGE Publications
1 Oliver's Yard
55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP

SAGE Publications Inc
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, California 91320

SAGE Publications India Pvt Ltd
B-42, Panchsheel Enclave
Post Box 4109
New Delhi 110 017

Library of Congress Control Number: 2004114267

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN 0 7619 4153 3

ISBN 0 7619 4154 1 (pbk)

Typeset by Selective Minds Infotech Pvt Ltd, Mohali, India
Printed and bound in Great Britain by Athenaeum Press, Gateshead

This book is dedicated to
Suzanne, Michael, James and Nicholas.

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Acknowledgements

I am grateful to the advertising agencies in the UK, USA and Thailand which have kindly answered my calls and taken the time to talk to me. I have referred to many UK Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) award-winning cases which have been published in full by WARC in the IPA's series of books *Advertising Works*.

This book has evolved from my teaching and benefits from countless conversations with colleagues, postgraduate and undergraduate students from many countries at the Universities of Birmingham, Aston and Oxford Brookes. Several students whose research dissertations I have supervised are cited in the text. They include PhD student Rungpaka (Amy) Tiwsakul who contributed to the sections on product placement and Thai advertising in Chapters 6 and 7. Professor Arthur Kover, former editor of the *Journal of Advertising Research*, and David Brent, former Unilever researcher and pioneer of the account planning discipline in Australia, kindly contributed case vignettes. My thanks also to Delia Martinez Alfonso of SAGE Publications and Chris Blackburn of Oxford Brookes University.

I also offer my thanks to the following for kind permission to use or adapt copyright material: the IPA, Roderick White at *Admap*, Mary Hilton at the the American Advertising Federation (AAF), Publicis Thailand and St Luke's, Dentsu Thailand for generously providing material that I have adapted in the case of their successful campaign for the Tourism Authority of Thailand, many people at DDB London (formerly BMP DDB) for kindly granting me interviews and access to case material over some eight years, and Harrison Troughton Wunderman of London for permission to adapt their award-winning M&G case material. I have also referred to numerous practical examples drawn from websites and print sources which I have cited in the text. Where reproducing or adapting copyright material I have made every effort to obtain permission from the appropriate source. However, if any copyright owners have not been located and contacted at the time of publication, the publishers will be pleased to make the necessary arrangements at the first opportunity.

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

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

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.

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

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.

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

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

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