

The Growth of Hype

Here are estimates from Advertising Age of total U.S. expenditures on advertising over the past 200 years:

1776	\$ 0.2 million	1930	\$ 2,450 million
1780	\$ 0.2 million	1935	\$ 1,720 million
1790	\$ 0.4 million	1940	\$ 2,110 million
1800	\$ 1 million	1945	\$ 2,840 million
1830	\$ 5 million	1950	\$ 5,700 million
1840	\$ 7 million	1955	\$ 9,150 million
1850	\$ 12 million	1960	\$11,960 million
1860	\$ 22 million	1965	\$15,250 million
1867	\$ 40 million	1970	\$19,550 million
1876	\$ 150 million	1971	\$20,740 million
1880	\$ 175 million	1972	\$23,300 million
1890	\$ 300 million	1973	\$25,120 million
1900	\$ 450 million	1974	\$26,820 million
1904	\$ 750 million	1975	\$28,160 million
1909	\$1,000 million	1976	\$33,690 million
1914	\$1,100 million	1977	\$37,920 million
1920	\$2,480 million	1978	\$43,840 million
1925	\$2,600 million	1979	\$49,690 million
		1980	\$56,800 million

The Gospel of Instant Gratification

George Gerbner, professor of communications at the University of Pennsylvania, writes that advertising is an essential part of our culture:

On Advertising

Professor Heilbroner's comment goes far enough but not deep enough. Humans are story-telling animals. We live in a world made up of the stories we tell, and there are essentially three kinds of stories.

(1) Stories about how things work: They illuminate the hidden relationships and invisible dynamics of life. Inventing the characters and facts of a narrative permits the development of a culture's truest conceptions about how things really work. This is called mythology, fiction, and drama.

(2) Stories about what things are: These are stories made of facts, meaningless in themselves, but significant when fitted into a symbolic context made up of stories about how things work. These are the legends of yesterday and the news of today.

(3) Stories of choice and action: They present a desirable goal or style of life and suggest a way to attain it. They are instructions, sermons, and in current times mostly ads and commercials. They cultivate and confirm values as they urge on us their choices. They are the action arm of our society.

Advertising is thus one of the three principal socializing forces of our species. Ads mobilize publics on behalf of the institutions using them. Ads may tell the truth but seldom the full truth that includes an objective assessment of alternatives.

Ads preach the gospel of instant gratification. "Try it; you'll like it." One's own satisfaction, momentary though it may be, is their ultimate test of value. Long-range results, consequences for others, or "the common good" are irrelevant to this gospel.

The "church" preaching this gospel has become so essential that it is supported by a form of taxation without representation. Thus, advertising is a tax-deductible business expense, added to the price of every product. Public moneys thus channeled in private ways also subsidize the media that create our mass-produced symbolic environment.

The culture that advertising-supported mass media produces is a lively one. Its products are audiences, sold to advertisers. Nonadvertising content is the "free lunch" to lure the customer into the saloon.

Far from being a subversive force within capitalism, advertising is its cultural cutting edge. To critique it as merely superficial and sophomoric fails to do it justice in several respects. Advertising has the virtues and flaws of our society and it can be changed—for better or worse—only as we change the institutions that feed and depend on it.

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Demagogic Critic

Leonard S. Matthews, president of the American Association of Advertising Agencies, comments:

I hesitate to comment on Mr. Heilbroner's most recent attack on advertising. I am always willing to answer responsible critics, but baseless, demagogic, irresponsible criticism by Mr. Heilbroner