

# Education in Newspaper Advertisements

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ATTENTION often has been focused on the press as a medium through which the public learns about its educational enterprise. Yet, no one has asked how much of that image comes from news and how much from that other major feature of the American newspaper—advertising.

How much and what kind of advertising material relating to schools, students, teachers, or education in any way appears in leading American daily papers at the height of the “school news” and “back to school shopping” seasons? That was the question this pilot study attempted to answer.\*

We selected seven metropolitan newspapers, six of which were both on the list of “15 superior papers” picked by newspaper editors (*Editor & Publisher*, April 12, 1960, p. 14) and on the list of “the leading 15 dailies” chosen by a poll of professors of journalism (*Saturday Review*, May 13, 1961, p. 60). The *New York Herald Tribune*, also included in our study, was on the *Saturday Review* list only. The time period selected for the analysis was Sept. 1-7, 1961.

All news, editorial, sports, and advertising items (excluding classified advertisements) dealing with or making reference to schools, students, teachers, or education in general were tabulated. The newspapers studied and the percentage of different types of items can be seen in the following table. While pre-season school and college sports accounted for only 10% of the items, ad-

vertising items, however, ranged from 15.8% in the *New York Times* to 16.7% in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*.

Our sample of 591 advertising items was subjected to further analysis. Some 39% of the sample came from the *New York Times*, 20% from the *Kansas City Star*, 15% and 13% from the *New York Herald Tribune* and *Chicago Tribune*, respectively, and the rest from the remaining three papers.

Most advertisements were placed by schools offering educational services. Only 70 (12%) promoted the sale of products or related but non-educational services. Half of these were school supplies, one-fourth were school clothes, and the rest ranged from banks announcing student savings accounts to airlines featuring student rates.

A large illustrated bookstore advertisement described “a home training program” in book form “to improve your child’s I.Q. showing” in taking intelligence tests “from elementary schools to college boards.” The *Saturday Evening Post* announced that parents could “Learn how ‘progressive’ education can hold back your children. And how a gentle heiress is waging a crusade against leading educators.”

In another advertisement, a brokerage firm called attention to the investment implications of “the impact of increased emphasis on education.” Under the title, “Smart Money in Educational Texts?” the copy explained:

A result of the exceptionally high post-World War II birth rates is currently making educational issues an extremely interesting growth area to investors. The first of this bumper crop of babies is now inundating the nation’s high schools, giving the textbook field an ever-increasing momentum.

The 521 educational-service advertisements placed by schools offered instruction on the primary level (17%), on the secondary level (19%), and on the level of higher, specialized, and adult instruction (76%).

The majority of subjects advertised were non-academic, and most of the copy was straightforward and informative. Nearly half of all schools (49%) offered instruction in clerical,

All Relevant Items Published in Seven U. S. Metropolitan Daily Papers

Newspapers	Number and Percentage of Types of Items					
	Totals (100%)	News, Feature, Other		Sports		Adver-tising
	N	N	%	N	%	N %
ALL PAPERS	1336	609	45.6	136	10.2	591 44.2
New York Times	391	147	37.5	15	3.8	229 58.5
Chicago Tribune	228	110	48.2	38	16.7	80 35.1
Washington Post	124	80	64.5	17	13.7	27 21.8
Kansas City Star	205	78	38.0	6	2.9	119 58.6
St. Louis Post-Dispatch	120	78	65.0	22	18.3	20 16.7
New York Herald Tribune	165	69	41.8	10	6.1	86 52.1
Los Angeles Times	105	47	44.8	28	26.7	30 28.6

vertising and news-editorial matter contributed about the same number of items to the image of education presented in all seven papers. The percentage of advertising items out of the total

\* This was part of a larger comparative investigation, now nearing completion, of images of education presented in the mass media. The assistance of Mrs. Marjorie Collins is gratefully acknowledged.

business, commercial, industrial, technological, and semi-professional skills. Most of them used the direct technique of simple announcement or of stress on quick results and employment opportunities. "An extraordinary 5 month course in piano tuning" vied with an offer of "Short-hand in 6 weeks" and even "A new career opportunity after only a few weeks" in "1401 Computer Programming." "Trained Men Get the Best Jobs" declared a school of automobile mechanics. "Make Big Money in Pleasant Real Estate Career" suggested a real estate school.

A chiropractic college advertisement showed a young male practitioner applying therapy to the back of a reclining half-nude female figure, but the copy stressed the business motive: "This is the age of the Specialist. Be in business for yourself. Enjoy the Prestige Hours and Remuneration of Your Own Professional Office. . . . Get Education That Will Bring You Dividends on Graduation."

"Accountants Rise to Presidencies" declared the headline over copy giving names and dates to document the case of a school of accounting as "the best possible schooling for managerial positions."

Appeals in a more personal vein included such statements as "The Independence School of Hairdressing Is Interested in You!" and "Be a Nancy Taylor Secretary." The latter offered "Executive Secretarial Training Including the Nationally Famous Nancy Taylor Charm Course."

The lure of the "finishing school look," training in modeling, fashions, dancing, public speaking, "charm," and the arts came close to matching the commercial attention devoted to business and technological training. About 40% of all schools offered courses in personality improvement and the social graces. Largest and most colorful of these were the Arthur Murray- and Dale (or Dorothy) Carnegie-type advertisements. One of the former, for example, was directed at teen-agers. "We have consulted with well-known Teen celebrities," the headline declared, "who have told us exactly what you need and want to learn. . . ." Typical of the latter (placed by a "Dorothy Carnegie Course in Personal Development for Women") was copy advertising a course "that deals not with charm, but with living at your best . . . a course that gives women direction for a more fulfilled, purposeful life."

Some 16% of the schools advertising in the seven papers offered courses in the liberal arts, sciences, and humanities in an academic setting. One-third of these included evening and correspondence courses.

Boarding schools, including military academ-

ies, accounted for about half of the "academic" offerings. The majority of these advertised in the newspapers of the East Coast, although some of the schools were located as far as Florida and Arizona. Of the 36 boarding schools running display ads on one page of the *New York Times Magazine* (Sunday), only two were in New York City. Twelve were located in New York State; six in New Jersey; four in Massachusetts; three each in Maine, Connecticut, and Florida; and one each in Rhode Island, Vermont, and Arizona. The special appeal of some of the more distant locations was stressed in such copy as "healthful, warm, dry climate," "on Beautiful Biscayne Bay," "study this year in the land of the Sun," and "strategically located near Cape Canaveral. . . ."

While the geographical appeal was stressed in only 14% of the boarding school advertisements, the attraction of sports activities and facilities was emphasized in 61%. In second place (53%) was the appeal of small classes and personalized instruction. This was followed (in 27%) by the appeal of psychological services expressed in such statements as "Individual attention and wholesome emotional guidance" and "expert guidance staff. Psychiatrists and psychologists."

College preparatory functions were pointed out also in 27% of the advertisements, and training in "study skills" and "study habits" was stressed in 22%. Qualities of military education ("Men in the Making"; "Builders of Men") were noted in 14%. Denominational auspices or religious instruction ("Bible study required") were announced in 11%. The "traditional" nature of the curriculum was stressed in 8%.

Few schools stressed specific subject matter of a more academic nature. The most frequently mentioned subjects of instruction were languages (noted by 6% of the "academic" institutions advertising in the seven papers), reading development and instruction (noted by 4%), training for the ministry (3%), and teacher training (3%).

Private and public colleges and universities advertised services ranging from the announcement of a single course to the listing of an entire curriculum. At one end of the range were such ads as that of "The New School, America's first university for adults. Famous faculty, new buildings, spirit to match." At the other end was the full-page illustrated announcement of New York University's Division of General Education and Extension Service listing 104 course titles (including 40 course descriptions) and tuition.

This was a pilot study on a limited sample and we shall avoid the temptation of drawing

cosmic conclusions. The purpose was to establish the fact that advertising material relating to educational products and services plays a significant part—perhaps equal to that of all news—in presenting to the American public information and “images” of educational relevance. Most of this material is devoted to instruction itself. Implicitly and explicitly, it calls attention to educational facilities, purposes, opportunities, goals, and values. The range of appeals extends from the transparently fraudulent to the highly respectable, although there might be some dispute about which is which. Along another di-

mension, the appeals range from promises of quick and easy success for the backward to the prospect of special attention, prestige, or comfort for the well-to-do.

While most educational advertising is both straightforward and informative, many of the messages cultivate the twilight zone of instructional services. Regardless of the value and legitimacy of the services themselves, however, the steady emphasis on extravagant or fringe-type appeals makes a dubious contribution to the cultivation of public perspectives on learning.