

# Capitalism and marketing



Everywhere we look, we see advertisements and logos. These features of capitalist commodity culture have become not just ways of selling goods but an inescapable mode of modern communication (Cartwright and Sturken, 2001). In the commodity culture of the twenty-first century, advertising images and corporate logos are no longer simply a part of the marketing strategies of consumer goods manufacturers, but features of our culture. Many members of the advertising profession see advertising as consistent with the needs of a democratic society, helping to make consumers aware of available market choices and educating consumers about product benefits (Myers, 1996). But the vision of advertising as a democratic information service is distorted by the fact that “ it is the job of each individual advertiser to promote one product at the expense of competing products, and, implicitly, to systematically foreclose the appeal of alternatives by creating desire” (Myers, 1996, p. 485).

Marxist analysts have constructed advertising as the iconographic signifier of multinational capitalism (Nava, Blake et al, 1997). This construction portrays capitalism, commodity culture, and therefore advertising as inherently flawed, as bad and beyond redemption. By analysing single ads, theorists come to conclusions where poor consumers are duped into buying more than they really need. Consumption will never fulfil the true human needs, because the fulfilment of these needs would mean changing our lifestyles and societies, it will never happen. According to Marxist theories large corporations control everyday social and cultural identities nationally and globally, whilst their global brands make the world seem more uniform, denying real choice.

Although Marxist criticism gives a good account of the state of the contemporary consumer societies, it tends to dismiss or ignore the trends in twenty-first century culture. Adverts and logos are an essential feature of post-modern life, where individuality, consumption, freedom, fragmentation and heterogeneity are the main features of Western societies. Post-modern cultures and societies are constantly changing and cultural practices are constantly being reinvented. Advertising is part of the culture of capitalism where meanings are a constant site of struggle. Commodities are understood to be a central part of these societies and individuals participate in the exchange of commodities in search of new trends, new meanings for coolness. Post-modern culture is above all a mix of different things. Art, politics, trends, consumption, economic issues and social relationships all mix with each other and in the end none of the features of contemporary life would have a meaning without the others. Although the influence of large corporations is bigger than ever, there still remain sites for resistance. Resistances and subcultural trends work in a constant cycle with market forces that appropriate them into the mainstream culture. Therefore, the impact of advertising and branding is constantly being renegotiated. However, despite being a well-established part of contemporary culture, advertising continues to attract moralistic disapproval. One could ask why does advertising attract more disapproval than other forms of post-modern culture, say, television, magazines, cinema or the music industry?