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Motivation Research: A Discourse On Psycho-Illogical Advertising

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MOTIVATION RESEARCH
A Discourse On Psycho-Illogical Advertising

by
Wayne H. Miller

A Thesis
submitted to the
Department of Business Administration

In partial fulfillment
of the requirements for Academic Honors
leading to the B. A. degree

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This Thesis for Honors Recognition
by
Wayne H. Miller
Has been approved for the
Department of
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by

[Signature]
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Further thanks are tendered Mr. Luke Rivers, whose pertinent advice, suggestions, and encouragement were greatly appreciated.

To my typists, Joyce Leonard, Bev Gratton, Michele Donahue, and especially Diane Brewer, who stayed with me to the bitter end--my heartfelt appreciation.

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Lastly, to the "Spirit of Carroll College," which imbued me with the endurance to complete this thesis.
INTRODUCTION

Twenty years ago this thesis need not have been written. Psychological advertising was but a gleam in the eye of a farsighted few; as a selling technique it was ignored by serious businessmen. The volume of marketable goods in our pre-war economy was not of sufficient quantity to warrant any significant changes in advertising technique.

After World War II, however, our vast industrial complex turned from the manufacture of war goods to the production of consumer items. Advertisers soon discovered that their old standby techniques were inadequate to prevent the market from becoming glutted with unwanted, unsellable products.

The basic problem was not that of overproduction, but underconsumption. Although there was indeed a huge increase in the volume of consumer production after the war, there was also a corresponding increase in the amount of "discretionary dollars" which Americans had accumulated because of the wartime scarcity of consumer goods, extra wages for overtime, and such. War-wary citizens were hoarding their money

1Refers to money spend above and beyond the amount required to live adequately.
instead of spending it. Worried advertisers groped for a means to reverse this trend. So it was that psychology wed advertising in a hasty, "shotgun" marriage; motivation research was the awesome offspring of that union.

The purpose of this thesis is fourfold: first, to discuss briefly the history of advertising, so as to better understand motivation research; second, to acquaint the public with the phenomena of motivation research, its theory and practice; third, to determine the effects of motivation research upon our economic society; fourth, to describe the internal and external actions which have been taken to subordinate the aims of motivation research to the common good.

An assiduous effort has been made to exclude personal value judgments as regards the ethics, morality, or value of motivation research. Any such conclusions have been made, to the best of my ability, on the basis of data garnered from experts in the study of modern advertising.

Motivation research is dynamic; it is controversial. Therefore it is my hope that this thesis will serve as an introduction to one of the most fascinating fields of our time—psychological advertising.
CHAPTER I

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE MAJOR ADVERTISING MEDIA

PRECEDED MOTIVATION RESEARCH

It may not be of great value to undertake an analysis and discussion of the history of a subject when our topic deals with the practical problems of the present day. Nevertheless, a brief survey of the history of advertising will provide a background which will enable us to understand more completely the problems which arise at the present time.

Advertising—the dissemination of information concerning an idea, service, or product to compel action in accordance with the intent of the advertiser—is the most important of several selling tools which businessmen use to coax the consumer into buying wares. Advertising as we know it today is a development substantially of the last 100 years, beginning about the middle of the 19th century. It was no radical innovation of the Industrial Age, however. Advertising in one form or another has been around over 2,000 years, and there has probably been


advertising as far back as there has been any method of recording ideas by means of visual symbols. Indeed, it has even been argued that advertising began when Eve ate an apple and recommended to Adam that he do the same.3

The advertising man has always been an integral factor of any industrial economy, however simple, but in the past his craft was limited by the absence of duplication techniques, and by the enormous illiteracy of the buying public. His modest ads were of necessity written one at a time, and even after being laboriously handwritten and posted, illiteracy precluded most of the public from favoring them with more than a passing glance. For centuries advertising consisted solely of the monumental and the word of mouth, for the sake of highly localized markets.

The invention of the printing press, and the revival of learning in the 15th century alleviated these two formidable problems. The printing press made possible the production of large numbers of newspapers, handbills, books, and pamphlets—all excellent media for carrying the sellers' message to prospective buyers. The increasing literacy of the people assured ads of more public attention.

This early period saw the use of exaggeration in its boldest form. Beverages, cosmetics, and patent

medicines held a prominent place in the early media. The famous coffee advertisement printed in 1652 is illustrative of the early beverage advertisements. Compare this three-century-old selling appeal with some of the advertising of today:

The Virtue of the Coffee Drink
First Made and Publicly sold in England by
Pasqua Rosee

The grain or berry called coffee growth upon little trees only in the deserts of Arabia...It is a simple innocent thing, composed into a drink, by being dried in an oven, and ground to powder, and boiled up with spring water...and to be taken as hot as can possibly be endured; the which will never fetch the skin of the mouth, or raise any blisters by reason of that heat.

The quality of this drink is cold and dry; and though it be a drier, yet it neither heats nor inflames more than hot posset. It so encloseth the orifice of the stomach, and fortifies the heat within, that it is very good to help digestion...It much quickens the spirits, and makes the heart lightsome, it is good against sore eyes...It suppresseth fumes exceedingly, and therefore is good against the headache, and will very much stop any defluxion of rhems that distil from the head upon the stomach, and so prevent and help consumption and cough of the lungs.

It is excellent to prevent and cure the dropsy, gout, and scurvy...a most excellent remedy against the spleen hypochondriac winds and the like...4

It is obvious from the foregoing example, written over three hundred years ago, that modern advertising has no claim to originality in the realm

of advertising "puffery" and wild hyperbole.

The function of the printing press in early advertising endeavors was significant, but the scarcity of transportational facilities with which to distribute printed material lessened its effectiveness. The volume and effectiveness of advertising has always been dependent upon the quality of the media available for carrying the sellers' message to the prospective buyer. But mass distribution techniques such as direct mail, daily newspapers, magazines, and the like, are a comparatively recent development. Without such agencies, early advertising was necessarily of a modest nature.

Advertising's function as a factor in marketing economy became more crucial with the advent of the Industrial Revolution,\(^5\) when machinery began to supplant hand labor, with a resulting tremendous rise in production. For possibly the first time in history, large-scale production was rendered so effective that supply began to exceed demand. Unwanted goods accumulated in manufacturers' warehouses. Businessmen turned to advertising as the medium which would best dispose of this ever-increasing volume of unwanted goods.

Even with the growing importance of sound advertising techniques, however, early practitioners,
going back to the mid 1800's, did little more than make bare announcements of available products. But the advertising business suddenly mushroomed, together with the gigantic magazine business, around 1900. The development of extensive transportation systems—the railroads and waterways—made profitable the distribution of advertising media on a large scale. Periodicals with national coverage began to carry crude advertisements; Harper's Magazine ran its first ad in 1864; Scribners in 1872.6

Other factors spurred the growth of advertising during this period: the rapid population growth; the almost universal literacy of the American people;7 the spread of the Rural Free Delivery program, which made economical the mailing of advertisements to rural areas; the prevailing low mail costs for magazines; the development and subsequent improvement of the advertising agency; and, probably most important, the need to create demand for a growing number of consumer products, which our very capable industries were spewing out at an incredible rate.

7 By 1890 more than 87 per cent of the population over ten years of age could read and write. (Source: Sandage, op. cit., p. 22).
As advertisers groped for ways to differentiate one mass-produced product from its painfully similar competitor, the whole temper of ads changed. An ad no longer consisted of a mere factual statement regarding a product. It grandly expounded upon the product's vast superiority over competitors, and often conjured claims which were obvious exaggerations. Patent medicines promised instant health; cosmetics guaranteed beauty from a bottle or your money back; and, most insidious of all, an alarming number of ads described lucrative get-rich-quick opportunities, wherein with a nominal investment one could reap tremendous profits. The notorious Ponzi swindled several million dollars from the public in 1920 by offering a return of 45% on one's investment within a short period of time.⁹

In 1921 Mr. Houston Thompson, then the Federal Trade Commissioner, estimated that the American public loses $500,000,000 annually in unsound, alluring investment opportunities which are advertised in reputable magazines and newspapers.¹⁰ Soon after this announcement a Cleveland bank made the following experiment. A poster was placed in the window of the bank which read as follows:

⁹Starch, op. cit., p.266.

¹⁰Ibid., p.267.
Glorious Opportunity to Get Rich Quick

Invest In

The California Ranching Company, now being organized to start a cat ranch in California.

We are starting a cat ranch in California with 100,000 cats. Each cat will average 12 kittens a year. The cat skins will sell for 30 cents each. One hundred men can skin 5,000 cats a day. We figure a daily net profit of over $10,000.

Now What Shall We Feed the Cats?

We will start a rat ranch next door with 1,000,000 rats. The rats will breed twelve times faster than the cats. So, we'll have rats to feed each day to each cat. Now what shall we feed the rats? We will feed the rats the carcasses of the cats after they have been skinned.

Now Get This

We feed the rats to the cats, and the cats to the rats, and get the cat skins for nothing. Shares are selling at 5 cents each, but the price will go up soon. Invest while opportunity knocks on your door.11

Added was the following in large letters: "Some gullible people will try to buy this stock. It is a foolish fake, of course, but no more foolish than many 'wild cat' schemes being promoted today. Investigate before investing. Don't hand your money over to any unknown glib-tongued salesman."12

The poster drew immense crowds. Numerous inquiries were made for the stock by mail and in person,

11Ibid., p.267.
12Ibid., p.268.
asking about literature of the company. Inquiries became so numerous the bankers were obliged to take the sign down. 13

The consumer of forty years ago was often taken in by similar ridiculous advertisements, be they for a cosmetic, a panacea for human ills, or a wild speculative investment. Much of this naivete was due to the immense awe of the public toward the giant corporations which produced these goods. The corporate form of business came to wield such power and influence that a large segment of the citizenry eventually equated Big Business with Big Government. Many blithely assumed that the former, like the latter, would never pursue a policy which was contrary to public welfare.

So extreme did many advertising claims become that in 1911 a crusade was launched against the more objectionable types of untruthfulness. A law was passed, known as the Printers' Ink Model Statute, which made dishonest advertising a misdemeanor. This statute has since been ratified by several states; Montana has adopted it in a modified form. 14

Various advertising associations arose during this period of reform, among them the American Association of Advertising Agencies, the Association

13 Ibid., p. 268.

14 Ibid., p. 458.
of National Advertisers, and the Advertising
Federation of America. These organizations tended
to give a semi-professional character to the advertising
business, and had some influence in solidifying the
business and raising the ethics somewhat above the
level of preceding periods. Also, the earnest efforts
of these groups to expose fraudulent advertising had
the salutary effect of acquainting the uninformed
consumer with the "little white lies" of advertising,
and thus enabled him to buy more intelligently.

Because of the growing public awareness of
untruthful ads, there was a decline of blind faith in
all ads during the 1920's and 1930's. Many consumers
who had bought items indiscriminately, and often solely
on the basis of an exaggerating advertisement, now
completely reversed their buying habits, and viewed with
distrust any ad which was not strictly factual. Such
cautious examination naturally led to a decrease in
sales. Since people were no longer enticed by luxury
and impulse items, but rather were hoarding their
money, the volume of money in circulation decreased,
and our economy suffered a slight downturn.

The problem became critical after World War II,
with our industries daily mass-producing millions of
consumer items, to be sold to a wary public. Americans
had to be coaxed into buying more. But the shallow,

\[15\] Literally, items which one had no intention of
buying, but which were bought on impulse.
sugary ads of the preceding era were definitely inadequate as buying incentives. Some new, "deeper," subtler approach to advertising must be developed, which would bypass the surfeited senses of the consumer and literally compel him to buy, by exploiting his innermost self. That new approach was motivation research.
CHAPTER II

MOTIVATION RESEARCH

DISCOVERY—DEVELOPMENT—THEORY AND PRACTICE

Motivation research, the adman's answer to market glut, is the type of research that seeks to learn what motivates people in making choices. It employs techniques designed to reach the unconscious or subconscious mind because preferences generally are determined by factors of which the individual is not conscious.¹ Exploring our attitudes toward products at the subconscious level is the function of this new science of motivation analysis or research.

As a mass advertising technique, motivation research is basically a postwar phenomenon, although there were a few attempts some years previous toward applying psychoanalytic principles to market research. Ernest Dichter, president of the Institute for Motivational Research, Inc., and Louis Cheskin, director of the Color Research Institute of America, who have been actively competing for the title of "father" of the depth-approach, both claim that they were proposing depth-probing studies back in the 1930's.

Says Dr. Dichter, "It is almost two decades now since I started using the words 'motivational research' and 'depth interviews.' Little did I realize they would become standard phrases..." Not to be outdone, Mr. Cheskin's institute now cites in a leaflet ten different "firsts" to his credit.\\

Many factors induced the development of motivation research. One was the growing store of knowledge accumulated by practicing psychoanalysts and psychiatrists concerning man's covert inner self, which lent itself readily to the application of psychology to the advertising field. Marketers realized that some powerful, penetrating selling pitch was necessary to spur the consumer to buy more. Also, the similarity of mass-produced goods—the growing standardization of ingredients in items like cigarettes and soaps—resulted in products that defied reasonable discrimination. This was strikingly brought out in a recent test wherein three hundred smokers loyal to one of three major cigarettes were given the three brands (with labels taped) and asked to identify their own favorite brand. Only 35 per cent were able to do so; and under the law of averages, pure guesses would have identified the correct brand one-third of the time.\\

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2 Ibid., p.19.
3 Ibid., p.19.
4 Ibid., p.38.
Marketers figured that if people couldn't discriminate reasonably, they should be motivated to discriminate unreasonably, in some warm, easy, emotional way.

One of the maxims of motivation research is that people usually do not purchase logically. Pierre Martineau, the Chicago Tribune's research and marketing director, maintains that logic and common sense play a minor role in today's "deep sell." As he says, "Behavior stems more often than not from emotional and non-rational causes than from logic. Men live by symbols—not senses." 5

Motivation research's effectiveness as a buying incentive stems from the fact that we think and communicate with symbols—a high-powered but also potentially treacherous way of thinking and communicating. As a result, skilled manipulators of symbols can often control that part of our personalities that is hidden or imperfectly known from ourselves, by the use of psychological techniques. It follows that one can buy unsatisfactorily, for what he buys is often a symbol of something that remains disguised from himself. 6

A most effective way of manipulating man's predilection toward symbolism is to create a favorable


image or symbol of the product, within the buyer's mind. By the use of pictures, attractive layout, appealing color, and "mood" music, the motivation research specialist tries to clothe his product with a "personality." Ads that appeal to the worship of youthfulness, the trend toward informal living, the desire to be different, more sophisticated, or more sociable, all are excellent for injecting a "personality" into a product. Martineau affirms this by describing the ideal ad as "a blend in varying degrees of both logic and emotion, of both realism and fantasy." Accordingly, Proctor and Gamble's image builders have charted a living personification for each of their cakes of soap: Ivory is mother and daughter on a sort of pedestal of purity; Camay is a glamorous, sophisticated woman.

The job of motivation research is to fit the product with the right personality. This is not always simple: researchers sometimes discover to their chagrin that their custom-tailored personality is a market wallflower. Ford spent over $100,000 in "depth studies" alone before coming out with the Edsel, one of the biggest flops in advertising history.

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7 Martineau, op. cit., 102.
9 "Reading the Consumers' Mind," Newsweek, L (July 15, 1957), 81.
Marlboro cigarettes, which for many years had projected a feminine image, made tremendous gains soon after researchers altered the Marlboro image to one of rugged masculinity (the tattooed he-man enjoying a Marlboro after a tattooed he-man's job).

In their efforts to determine the perfect personality for a product, motivation researchers use as their tools the techniques of psychiatry: Rorschach ink-blot tests, hypnotism, word-association tests, group interviews, and the "depth interview," one of the most widely used techniques for probing in depth. The expert conducting the depth interview tries to get the consumer into a reverie of talking, to get him musing absent-mindedly about all the pleasures, joys, enthusiasms, agonies, nightmares, deceptions, or apprehensions the product recalls to him. It is hoped that the consumer's subconscious feelings about the product can thus be brought to a focus by the skilled "depth manipulator" who conducts the interview.

Some of the findings of the depth interview border on the fantastic. For instance, "depth men" claim that the growth of supermarkets can be attributed to the increasing number of young housewives, who avoid clerk-manned grocery stores because they are afraid to betray their ignorance about food. Consequently, the experts recommend that clerks in grocery stores be especially attentive and patient with young housewives.  

10Packard, Hidden Persuaders, p.119.
When the manufacturers of Ry-Krisp were informed that their product was bought only by those who wanted to punish themselves, it altered its image to that of a merry harbinger of good times and fun, with a subsequent increase in sales.

Researchers trying to explain the phenomenal success of high-interest loan companies concluded that to the average consumer the bank was the symbol of a stern parent who disapproves of our untidy financial affairs; therefore we go to the "lower-moraled" loan company, where we, the borrowers, do the condescending. The higher cost of the loan is a small price indeed to pay for such a great change in outlook.

Choosing product personalities and manipulating symbols are but two of the motivation researchers' fortés. Another area where they are especially effective is in the sale of impulse items—literally, those items which the shopper does not have on his shopping list, but which he buys on impulse. Motivation research provides data which selects the best color, size, shape, and even the shelf position of the packaged product which will best sway the impulsive shopper.

Impulse buying constitutes a considerable segment of today's market purchases; the Folding Paper Box

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12 *Ibid.*, p.120.
Association found that two-thirds of all purchases were completely or partially on impulse. The circular *Progressive Grocer* put the impulse figure at seven out of ten purchases.\(^\text{13}\) In this beckoning field of impulse buying psychologists have teamed up with merchandising experts to persuade the wife to buy products she may not particularly need or even want until she happens to see them invitingly presented.

According to some psychologists a woman’s eye is most attracted to red. One package designer has developed an interesting theory to explain this. He has concluded that a majority of women shoppers leave their glasses at home when shopping, so that a package to be successful must stand out "from the blurred confusion."\(^\text{14}\)

Other merchandisers have concluded that in the supermarket jungle the all-important fact in impulse buying is shelf position. One was so concise as to state that vertically, the best position is arm-high for a medium-sized woman; horizontally, everyone wants the last six feet of the display island.\(^\text{15}\)

People also are stimulated to be impulsive if they are offered a little extravagance: a California supermarket found that putting a pat of butter on top of each of its better steaks caused sales to soar 15 per cent.\(^\text{16}\)


\(^{16}\) Packard, *Hidden Persuaders*, p.95.
Also among the impulse item gimmicks are multiple-unit specials. One midwest grocery chain reports it sold only nine cans of sauerkraut a week at a dime a piece, but 440 cans priced at 10 for $1.00. A west coast pet-food packer sells more 3-can packages priced at 29 cents than three individual cans priced at 9 cents a piece.

Motivation research also functions as a subtle tool which plays on the several hidden needs of the consumer. Paramount among these needs, with examples of products which they help to sell, are the following:

- Emotional Security---big home freezers are often unnecessary, but comforting to people who want more food than they need.

- Reassurance of Worth---too-expensive luggage which gives an air of importance to go-now-pay-later travelers.

- "Creative Outlets"---ready-make cake cake mixes which need one or two ingredients.

- Sense of Roots---relating one's product with 'the good old days'---the wine that grandma used to make.

- Immortality---life insurance assures buyers that they will continue, even after death, to control the destinies of their beneficiaries.

- Sense of Power---automobile makers produce cars with ever-higher horseposer.

Some of the findings of the motivation research...

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18 Ibid., p.66.

specialists might seem far-fetched or even ridiculous, but the majority of U.S. corporations don’t think so. Two-thirds of America’s one hundred largest advertisers have geared campaigns to the depth approach. Lever Brothers won’t even consider bringing out a new product without first making an exhaustive survey; often corporate fortunes ride on the results.

Regardless of this vote of confidence by our nation’s shrewdest businessmen, motivation research is not infallible. The before-mentioned Edsel campaign attests to the possibility of error inherent in a motivation research prognosis. Today, according to professors of marketing, there are at least 600 different motives for being willing to buy. This in itself shows how complex and unpredictable an advertising campaign can be.

Motivation research, to be effective, must be based on good market research. It is not intended to be the sole criteria or judgment upon which to base an entire advertising campaign. Its function in aiding the copywriter may be compared with the function of an X-ray to a surgeon; it does not perform the operation,

21 “Reading the Consumers’ Mind,” op. cit., p.82.
22 “Consumer Motivation,” Consumer Reports, XXII (June, 1957), 299.
but provides information which facilitates the successful completion of the job.

Man, especially consumer man, is a complex and enigmatic entity. Few, if any, of his actions can be accounted for by one factor alone. Therefore, the ever-clever ad-man was quick to realize that since different people are driven by different needs and desires, no one single psychological "prod", however potent, could be universally applicable. Accordingly, a multitude of appeals—all psychological, but all appealing to different facets of consumer man—were developed. The following chapter deals with these psychological appeals.
CHAPTER III

TYPES of MOTIVATION RESEARCH
HARD - SOFT - INVISIBLE - DEEP SELLS

The advertising trade journal Printers' Ink early in 1960 defined advertising's burdensome problem—"How can the consumer, like Pavlov's dog, be taught the habits of buying a specific brand?" Motivation researchers, after years of intensive study, have not yet arrived at a simple answer to this question. While probing ever deeper into the recesses of the consumer mind, they find that it is a complex and puzzling mechanism. An ad which is highly effective in motivating housewives to buy is often completely unpalatable to a male audience. The wide variations in the ages, sex, habits and desires of members of the consuming public render the possibility of an ad with universal appeal almost nonexistent.

To be effective, an ad must deliver a concise, powerful message to the potential buyer; but this very conciseness and power necessarily limits the scope of an ad. Just as a flashlight will penetrate the darkness less readily if its beam is wide and

1 "Consumer, Like Pavlov's Dog," Consumer Reports, XXV (May, 1960), 266.
diffuse, so also will an ad be less "illuminating" if it endeavors to enlighten the mind of every consumer.

This narrowing in scope is not in itself a disadvantage, however, since those products with a definite "personality" or image are usually geared to a specific, narrow segment of the buying public. Obviously, Maidenform need not fret if its ads are not well received by the male audience.

Products with bi-sexual appeal have also narrowed their message, with considerable success. Usually this sharpening in focus centers upon the housewife, whom researchers recognize as the most influential consumer in the United States today. With the growing preoccupation of the "Organization Man" with his work, and the hours he spends commuting from suburban home to downtown office, a major amount of household needs must necessarily be bought by the housewife. Even the purchase of such a significant item as the family car is largely determined by the woman of the house. Her voice is particularly persuasive in deciding color and styling. Car makers are taking this into account. As one maker proclaimed in 1956, "You never had it so stylish!"2

In addition to narrowing the scope of their ads, motivation researchers also work to perfect their already formidable tools for probing in depth. After

exhaustive studies of the human psyche, in which man's innermost weaknesses, desires, and frustrations were laid bare, ad-men have evolved a group of "sells", each carefully designed to appeal to a certain facet of the consumer personality. Marketers are confident that by applying a certain "sell" to a certain audience, they can effectively influence the entire market, just as if their product had universal appeal!

All of these "sells" draw upon the findings of psychology to some extent, but the intensity with which they apply this psychological data to the advertising media varies considerably. Probably the shallowest of these appeals is what admen call the "hard sell" — the use of blatant, irritating ads which force their way into our conscious awareness, while they impress their message upon our subconscious.

Everyone has endured at least once the Anacin commercial, with its cutaway view of the human mind, harassed by the incessant pound of the hammer, the clang of the gong, and the spastic charge of nervous electricity. The average viewer is discomfited by such a bold display of man in pain, and upon subsequent viewing, learns to ignore it by the process of selective inattention. But to a substantial segment of the viewing audience, the agony of headache pain is something to be taken seriously.

3 Psychological blindness and deafness to a television commercial brought on by excessive repetition of that commercial.
They identify themselves with the headache-plagued hero, suffer with him in his pain, and rejoice with him when at last he attains his ecstasy of pain-free bliss.

The "hard-sell" technique is restricted almost exclusively to the medium of television. Most of the products plugged by this method are the so-called low-interest products such as cold remedies, pain relievers and deodorants which are able through the visual medium of television to demand attention denied them in print. The hard-sell school believes in rubbing it in by frequent repetitions of the same blaring commercial, and for this reason most researchers agree that it represents the key problem area in national advertising.4

It is inevitable that the hard sell technique must eventually diminish in importance in today's advertising world, because in order to achieve a measure of reliability, the machines which grind out the hard sell must ultimately move toward tasteless conformity. Also, the restoration to public view of many bodily functions once socialized into privacy must soon offend public taste to such an extent that these ads will no longer be effective. One critic ventured his opinion (with tongue-in-cheek) that how long such hard sell will linger may depend upon the enduring charm of the advertised armpit, the attention-span of a cross-sectioned cranium, and the Nielson

rating of a gastro-intestinal gurgle.5

To mitigate the wave of criticism engendered by the crudeness of the hard sell, and to add more depth to their appeals, researchers reverted to a technique which, naturally enough, has been termed the "soft-sell." Instead of bludgeoning the consumer with razzle-dazzle commercials and ranting copy, admen began buttonholing him with quiet humor, soft talk and attractive art. Many of the animated figures that more and more are dominating TV commercials are planned to do just that. They dance upon your subconscious with feet so light you can't even feel them. Kangaroos sell airline tickets, giraffes promote Ethyl. Mr. Magoo plugs beer. Banks use cartoons to encourage thrift.6 Admen have found that an ounce of charm can be worth a pound of pressure.

The difference between the hard sell and the soft sell is made visual in a demonstration provided by General Motors Corporation. A large heavy ball hangs from the ceiling of their Detroit showroom. A visitor takes a ten-pound sledge and swings mightily; the ball hardly moves. Instead the hammer rebounds, nearly knocking the person over. Then the visitor is instructed to use but one finger, and push with the motion of the ball. It


6"Advertisers' Swing to Subtlety," Time, LXVIII (September 3, 1956), 68.
moves easily.\textsuperscript{7} By means of this demonstration, General Motors hopes to impress upon its salesmen the superiority of the low-pressure, soft sell method over the high-pressure hard sell.

Humor is an integral factor in most of today's soft sell. The good, humorous ad sets the consumer up for a bit of solemn nonsense that he would otherwise have fended off. "Remember—to really appreciate Chevron Supreme," advises gasoline expert Hy Finn, "you need a car."\textsuperscript{8} Such ads are the essence of the soft sell, which carries added punch for a public wearied of syrupy overstatement and blatant puffery.

In 1956 Manhattan's McCann-Erickson spent \$3,000,000 on a study of consumer psychology. Significantly, this motivation research firm now uses situational salesmanship aimed at creating the soft sell.\textsuperscript{9}

It is also interesting to note that a listing of the top ten magazine ads of the past decade revealed that every one uses the soft sell in preference to the hard sell method.\textsuperscript{10} One of the front-runners, the Life Savers

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{7}}Charles Harold Sandage, Advertising Theory and Practice, (Homewood, Illinois: Richard D. Irwön, 1953), p. 141.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{8}}"Funny," Newsweek, LV (March 14, 1960), 76.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{9}}"Advertisers' Swing...," op. cit., p. 68.\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}{\footnotesize\textsuperscript{10}}"Top Ten," Time, LXXIV (August 17, 1959), 85.\end{flushleft}
advertisement is a classic:

These days if somebody tries to sell you something that tastes good and costs only 5 cents, look into the proposition carefully—there's bound to be a hole in it.

The American consumer's preference for the soft sell has led to similar attempts by admen in other countries to inject humor into selling appeals. Russia as yet has not reacted toward the soft sell (which is not surprising), but if such an approach ever catches on behind the Iron Curtain, we might expect such appeals as "Pavlov's dogs—they make your mouth water," or perhaps "I dreamed I jammed Radio Free Europe in my Cominform Bra."12

Since humor is such a universally recognizable and enjoyable phenomenon, especially when found in an advertisement, the soft sell has the widest appeal; must couch his advertisement in very general terms, to appeal to the broad spectrum of people attracted to the ad. As a result, he rarely makes a concrete statement concerning his product; rather, the consumer is "chuckled into" an affection for it. If today's soft-sell adman were around at the time Moses got his precepts from God on Mount Sinai, he would have revolted at the uncompromising terms of the Ten Commandments, and perhaps changed the name of that.

11Ibid., p. 85.
12"Buy Red or You May Drop Dead," Readers Digest, LXXI (September, 1962), 43.
great document to something like "Ten Ways to be Successful," or "Prescription for Happiness."
After all, he wouldn't want people to accuse him of being tolerant, by advocating the worship of only one God.\textsuperscript{13}

While the soft sell undoubtedly has the broadest appeal of all the selling approaches, it certainly is not the most devious. For sheer trickery and slyness, nothing can top the third of the sells—the "invisible sell."

The technique which inspired the "invisible sell" has long been familiar to psychologists in its experimental usage, consisting merely in the brief exposure (perhaps 1/1000 of a second) of printed material on a screen, by means of a device called the tachistoscope. The message, while invisible to a viewer and not recorded by his conscious mind, presumably takes effect upon him by a process known as "subliminal perception"—the ability of the mind to absorb sights that are too fleeting to be detected consciously.\textsuperscript{14}

Subliminal perception, as a technique for the transmission of advertising messages on television and movie screens, began with the efforts of James Vicary,


\textsuperscript{14}"Subliminal means "below the limit of," hence subliminal perception means "below the limit of perception."
now the head of Subliminal Perception, Inc. His now-famous experiment took place in a movie theater in New Jersey. Over a period of six weeks, 45,699 persons attended the theater, and were thus the unwitting subjects of the test. Two advertising messages—"Eat Popcorn" and Drink Coca Cola"—were projected subliminally. When sales figures over the test period were compared with previous sales records, it was found that popcorn sales increased 51.5%, and coke sales 18.1%.16

While these sales increases were not phenomenal, and might possibly have been influenced by factors other than the subliminal message, they were nonetheless impressive. If such results could be achieved by a process still in an experimental stage, it was argued, the invisible sell might eventually be refined into a formidable advertising tool.

However, a few reservations must be made regarding the validity of Cleary's experiment. First, as a member of the American Statistical Association, he claims to have employed standard research procedures. But he is very vague concerning the nature of these procedures. Therefore it is possible that a variable other than his invisible message might have caused the

15 The coke tests were conducted at performances other than those for the popcorn tests, so that thirst raised by popcorn-eating would not be a factor.

increase in sales, such as a seasonal variation in coke or popcorn consumption.

Secondly, the speed of $1/3000$ of a second which he used in the experiment is perhaps the highest tachistoscopic speed ever used; psychologists would like to know more about his actual technique.

Finally, the products thus advertised were easily available. Would the invisible sell work for less readily accessible items?

Vicary himself is among the first to ridicule any claims that the invisible sell is infallible, or even strongly influential in motivating people in the making of choices. He maintains that in order for the subliminal message to be effective, the viewer must be attentive, and the message must be a familiar, easily identifiable one. Also, our threshold, or lower limit of perception varies from day to day and from person to person, and responsiveness may develop until one is consciously aware of perception.

Despite Vicary's efforts to tone down the mind-manipulating powers of the invisible sell, however, the Code Review Board of the National association of Radio and Television Broadcasters in 1958 asked its members--all three major television networks, and 300 independent television stations--not to allow subliminal techniques to be used through their facilities, at

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least until further directives are issued.18

The invisible sell, if used in the visual media of movies and television, would considerably reduce the number of commercials which the viewer must endure, because such subliminal messages could be flashed intermittently throughout the program, without consciously distracting or annoying the viewer. Nevertheless, the invisible sell has not found favor in today's advertising world. This may be due in part to the fact that it is not as effective as claimed. More probably, however, the reason for the unpopularity of the invisible sell is that any company caught using such a tool would be severely censured by the all-powerful consumer, who resents any such unperceived invasion of his mind.

Thus far we have discussed the hard sell, with its emphasis on blaring repetition; the soft sell, with josh and condor which tries to instill an affection for one's product; and the invisible sell, which endeavors to impress its message upon the viewer's subconscious in a crude, mechanical manner. We have seen that, to some degree, all three selling approaches employ the findings of motivation research. None, however, can approach the complexity and skill of the ultimate in psychological sells—the "deep sell." Whereas the first three approaches to selling

18 John Brooks, op. cit., p. 10.
may be likened to the solving of marketing problems with arithmetic, the "deep sell" uses calculus and boolean algebra.¹⁹

Much of the deep sell is still highly theoretical, as are all studies of man unmellowed by years of intense fact-finding and analysis. But it is based on sound psychology. All of the tools of psychiatry are put to use—depth interviews, Rorschach ink-blot tests, word-association tests, hypnotism, Freudian analysis—anything that will aid the motivation researcher to formulate an effective selling pitch.

The depth salesmen look for "triggers of action" which will provoke a desired response. They are convinced that once a response pattern is established in terms of persuasion, they can persuade people in wholesale lots, because, as Clyde Miller, the author of The Process of Persuasion has said, all of us are "creatures of conditioned reflex."²⁰ The crux of persuasion is to develop these conditioned reflexes by developing the right trigger words, symbols, or acts.

Since the deep sell is at present more theory than theorem, and since nearly every persuader uses different methods for probing in depth, perhaps the

¹⁹A mathematical system which, in one of its applications, reduces everyday statements into symbols and draws conclusions from them.

²⁰Vance Packard, op. cit., p. 16.
best way to explain the deep sell would be to describe how each psychiatric tool is used, and mention a few of the curious results each has achieved.

One of the most widely used of these probes is the "depth interview," which was discussed at some length in the preceding chapter. These interviews in depth are conducted very much as the psychiatrist conducts his interviews, except that there is no couch, since a couch might make the chosen consumer guinea-pig wary. Sometimes whole groups of people participate, because many people are less inhibited in a group than when they are alone with the interviewer. The trained interviewer, by adroit questioning, tries to ascertain the subjects' true feelings about a product, so that he may plan his selling pitch for maximum effect.

Much valuable information concerning consumer product preferences are gleaned from the depth interview, but its effectiveness is hampered by the fact that it is hard to elicit a true response, since the subjects are aware that they are being studied. Sometimes hypnotism is used to evoke an unconscious response, but the time and expense involved renders this method impractical for general use. Therefore, it is sometimes necessary to resort to "disguised," or indirect tests, wherein the person tested is given the impression that he is being
tested for some reason other than the real one.

A very popular indirect test is the famed Rorschach ink-blot test. Here a series of ten cards is used on which are printed bisymmetrical ink-blots. They are ambiguous forms, signifying nothing whatever. The subject sees in the picture what he "needs" to see, and thus projects himself into it—his anxieties, conflicts, inadequacies. These are analyzed to determine a selling pitch which best appeals to these inner needs.

In other tests, instruments are used to gauge the subjects' physiological responses as clues to their emotional states. James Vicary, our invisible seller, has developed a special hidden camera that photographs the eye-blink rate of people under varying test situations, as a clue to their emotional tension or lack of tension. One of his experiments is worthy of note. Vicary concealed his camera in a supermarket, and proceeded to count eyeblinks of women shoppers as they entered the store. The results were astounding, even to him. Their eye-blink rate, instead of rising as an indication of mounting tension, went down to a very subnormal fourteen blinks a minute! Mr. Vicary theorized that upon entering this supermarket fairyland, where they could buy

21 Vance Packard, op. cit., p. 32.
items that in former years only kings and queens could afford, these ladies fell into a very light hypnotic trance. Thus entranced, they tended to buy more than they had intended.22

The discovery that women become hypnotized upon entering the neighborhood supermarket was a revelation to the depth men. Because of this phenomenon, great care must be taken in designing the package which houses one's product, so that it will catch the fancy of the now-more-susceptible woman shopper. A package with too much personality is objectionable; it should show attention, then fade and let the product come forward.

The color of packages is crucial, since colors arouse emotion. Some colors are cold—like blue, associated with ice; others are warm—like red, reminiscent of fire. Black is "heavier" than white; thus, most appliances which require constant lifting or pushing, such as vacuum cleaner, are now being colored lighter.23

Word-association tests are another important motivation research tool. By means of questionnaires, personal interviews, and trial tests in pilot areas, the expert is able to predict, with considerable

22 Vance Packard, op. cit., p. 107

accuracy, the image which a prospective brand name is likely to create within a consumer's mind. Many large corporations will never market a new product without first making a depth study to determine whether or not the proposed name has favorable connotations for the buying public.

Nothing is sacred or taboo to the motivation researcher in his quest for the perfect pitch. Thus it is not surprising that one expert maintains that sex "has the greatest universal acceptance of all the stratagems ever used in advertising." Not bold, brazen sex, mind you, but covert sex, neatly entwined with the selling pitch, and so subtly presented that the buyer rarely realizes that he has lost another "battle of the sexes."

The typical cigarette ad is an excellent example of sex symbolism in advertising. The majority of cigarette ads depict a lovely woman, arm in arm with a handsome, oh-so virile man, romping in the surf or roaming the hills, and linked forever by the common bond of their favorite brand. Mr. Consumer, you too may enjoy such togetherness, but only by smoking Brand S!

A classic example of the motivation analysts found merchandising possibilities in our sexual

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24 Ibid., p. 83.
yearnings came as the result of a study which Dr. Dichter, "Mr. Mass Motivations" himself, once made for the Chrysler Corporation. He was hired to find out why dealers could draw more males into their showrooms by putting convertibles in the window, when most men bought sedans and rarely convertibles. After exploring the situation, he concluded that men saw the convertible as a possible symbolic mistress. Such day-dreaming drew them into the showroom, where they finally chose a four-door sedan, just as they would marry a plain girl who would make a fine wife and mother.25

Dr. Dichter's study helped inspire the hardtop; as a union between the dependability of the wife plus all the romance, youth and adventure man wants in a mistress, it fooled the id and scored a marketing bullseye.26

Richard Baxter, research director of the advertising agency Cunningham and Walsh, Inc., is quite reluctant to admit that he and his fellow motivation researchers are such ardent advocates of Freud. He maintains that along Madison Avenue, the fad for Freud is starting to fade. "After all," he


comments, "Freud dealt with the abnormal personality, but the person we want to understand is the average consumer."

A clever rationale, perhaps; but the indications are that the psychologist-turned-adman, with his penchant for sex symbolism, triggers of action, conditioned reflexes and the like, still leans heavily upon Freudian theory in formulating his selling appeal.

Even man's religious learnings becomes a tool in the hands of the skilled depth man. The A.F.C. Fire Equipment Service, Inc. advertises itself as "the first Christ-centered fire extinguisher sales and service corporation in the United States." The company's letterhead uses a Star of David as an emblem and the text "I must be about my father's business" as a slogan.

From Christian Supply, you can buy the book, "Divorce Problems Made Easy"--called "A fascinating liberal approach from a conservative Biblical point of view." From Christian Supply, you can buy the book, "Divorce Problems Made Easy"—called "A fascinating liberal approach from a conservative Biblical point of view." 29

"Prepare now for the inevitable," advises the Pet Memorial Products Company. How? By sending


29 Ibid., p. 1019.
§12.95 for a water-proof, rodent-proof, machine pressed, contoured satin-padded, exterior wrought-iron black, gold-mist finished burial vault for your small pet.30

Most of the "great" Biblical epics which Hollywood grinds out every year offer an intriguing blend of religious edification augmented by an appeal to come see a good old-fashioned sex orgy. Who can resist such a combination, brought to the screen in blushing Nudovision, with a cast of thousands of holy people wearing hundreds of garments?

Even disregarding the slight tinge of sarcasm in the preceding paragraph, it must be evident that motivation research as a selling tool is not entirely devoid of faults. But it does serve a purpose in our highly productive economy. The following chapter discusses the more important functions of modern advertising. In order to be as objective as possible a sampling of authoritative sources both within the advertising profession and without will be represented, to determine the advantages and disadvantages of modern advertising, particularly modern advertising based on motivation research.

30 Ibid., p. 1019.
CHAPTER IV

MOTIVATION RESEARCH----BOON OR BANE FOR OUR ECONOMY?

Thomas McCauley, the British essayist, once remarked, "Nothing except the mint can make money without advertising."¹ There is much truth in McCauley's statement. With the possible exception of the Hersey candy bar, which owes its success to its early start, fine dealer organization, and use of other sales promotional methods,² no product, however excellent, has ever achieved nationwide favor without first having been extensively advertised. Even after a product has become known it must still be advertised, lest it suffer a fate similar to that of Pears' Soap, the world's best selling soap at the turn of the century. Following an ingenious advertising campaign, the Pears' company was a huge success for many years until its director decided that it was so firmly entrenched market-wise that it was no longer necessary to advertise. Lever Brothers were quick to show them the fallacy of this.


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supposition.\textsuperscript{3}

Since this chapter is to be devoted to a critical analysis of the merits of modern advertising, an important distinction must be made between the function and the execution of advertising. While many critics are quick to point out the faults of modern advertising, they would never advocate the elimination or even diminution of the function of advertising. As long as we have competitive enterprises and people who want to make a profit from them, advertising will always be an inevitable business function---along with production, packaging, distribution, sales, and other accouterments of management. Advertising as a function is irreplaceable in our economy; whether it is looked upon with admiration or with loathing is of no consequence whatever; because, in Grover Cleveland's words, "... We are faced with a condition."\textsuperscript{4} As our economy grows in size and complexity and labor costs increase, advertising is an indispensable substitute for the personal salesmanship of times past.

What the critics are concerned with, then, is not the function of advertising---which is vital if our


\textsuperscript{4} H.C. Groome, "How to Criticize Advertising", Saturday Review, IVL (October 12, 1963), 54.
nation is to prosper—but the execution of advertising—-matters of technique, or taste, or noise level, or whatever the current fad of the motivators. The abusive practices which sometimes prevail in the execution of advertising provide critics with the fuel to fan the flame of public indignation.

Modern advertising consists basically of two distinct types of persuasion: first, objective statements concerning a product which can be tested in a laboratory; second, advertising which is basically subjective in nature. It is this latter type which forms the essence of motivation research.

As Marion Harper, chairman of the American Association of Advertising Agencies says, "The principle of [motivation research] is to establish not utility, but 'psychological value.'" Since this value is dependent upon the psychological makeup of the subject, such 'psychological value' cannot be verified or measured. But, critics maintain, such "image" advertising can be just as deceptive as "objective" advertising. Because such ads cannot be verified, it is difficult to determine when they are deceptive. One cannot, for example, prove or disprove that drinking Pepsi will make one "sociable".

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5Peter Bart, "Honesty in Advertising", Saturday Review, IVL (January 12, 1963), 96.
Because motivation research is the most potent weapon in the arsenal of the modern advertiser; and because its subjective appeals are not easily conformable to objective standards, it is naturally the advertising method most subject to attack by those who maintain that psychological advertising has made us a nation of greedy gluttons who are spending ourselves into bankruptcy. As proof they cite the activities of the American Bar Association, which in 1961 was urged to look into the growing number of consumer bankruptcies, up 400% over 1950. They also mention the concern of the American Bankers' Association, which is uneasy because installment-loan delinquencies are increasing every year.

The motivation researchers do not question the validity of these findings, but suggest that much of the consumer overspending is due to the almost universal availability of credit, which makes it very easy to "buy now—pay later", to the extent that many imprudent consumers do buy beyond their ability to pay. Retailers have discovered that they can often make more money on the interest charges in financing a purchase than on the sale of the item itself.

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6 "Pink Smoke", Nation, CVIII (February 25, 1961), 158.
7 Ibid, p.158.
The problem of consumer overspending may not be entirely due to advertising, however, but to our basic economic system, wherein advertising plays a significant role. Even if the ad-men are totally to blame, researchers argue, they should be commended rather than scorned. Ours is a gargantuan economy, capable of mass-producing goods at a tremendous rate. Were it not for the motivation researcher who induces the consumer to buy just a bit more than he needs, they argue, there would accumulate such a huge inventory of goods that manufactures would be forced to curtail production. This would result in a decrease in the flow of money, since the unneeded laborers would be deprived of their salaries. The decrease in the money flow would further cut production, since there would be less money with which to buy goods. This downward spiral would continue until we were in a recession; if not checked, it could terminate in a depression. Therefore, by stimulating the consumer to overbuy, advertisers state, they are actually maintaining our prosperous economy.⁹

⁹As a business student, I must question the motivation researchers' assumption that anything which results in raising the gross national product is automatically good for our economy. Wanton consumption can only make our already artificial economy more inflationary, and hence more unstable. Spending qua spending is not the key to economic prosperity.
Motivation researchers may justify overconsumption, but they are hard-pressed to rationalize away the overcommercialization which plagues the consumer "ad nauseam" every day. One estimate places the number of selling pitches to which we are daily exposed at 1600 per person. These ads assail us from billboards, radios, television, newspapers, direct mail—any form of mass media communication.

Newton Minow, former head of the F.C.C., expressed concern in 1963 about the excessive number of commercials which flood radio and T.V. sets. Although the National Association of Broadcasters' own code limits commercials to six minutes per hour, only 38% of radio stations, and 70% of T.V. stations subscribe to the code. Minow stated that among those not subscribing to the N.A.B. code, the pattern was one of steady deviation, with occasional spectacular infringements—such as the Southwest radio station which broadcast twenty-two consecutive commercials, played one record and followed with thirteen more. Of course, the solution would be to adopt the N.A.B. code as F.C.C. rule; but as yet this has not been done.

Radio and television, of course, are not the only media where the stepped-up effort to exert selling

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11 "Twenty-two Straight Commercials", Newsweek, LXI (April 15, 1963), 87.

12 Ibid, p.87.
leverage on the public can be noted. Some newspapers, especially on Thursdays and Sundays, have become so bulky because of dozens of solid pages of advertising that the readers' arms become weary from turning pages.

So pervasive have billboards become along many stretches of highway in the United States, that an investigator for the Readers Digest concluded that the new 41,000-mile federal highway system would become a "billboard slum" unless state legislators acted to prevent it.\(^1\)

Herb Shriner neatly capsulated advertisers' problems when he told agency heads, "I hear things have gotten so bad that you're letting Brand X win now, and you're letting the A's beat the B's into the stomach."\(^2\) Public awareness of advertising malpractices have increased in the past decade, largely because of scathing exposes such as Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders, which alerted the consumer to a situation about which he had previously been blissfully ignorant. Packard's was the first widely-read book to describe the activities of motivation research.

The prevalence of riggid quiz shows, wherein

\(^{13}\) Vance Packard, *op. cit.*, p.195.

the most popular contestant usually won; the use of payola—paying disc jockeys to play one's record until it became popular; and the campaign of the Federal Trade Commission to expose fraudulent advertising, have also intensified the criticism of advertising. This criticism has become a three-sided problem to the motivation researcher. First, as concerns the government, he fears investigations and subsequent regulations governing questions of taste in advertising. Second, he worries about the growing cynicism of the consumer, who may brand all advertising as mere puffery. Thirdly, he fears the loss of clients, who may not wish to be associated with any business that gets a bad name.

It must be stated in all fairness to the motivation researchers that they are not the leering ogres that many would have us believe. If they have not "sold" themselves as well as their products, it is partly because they are not nearly so masterful at "huckstering" and "hidden persuasion" as their detractors imagine. All is not bad in motivation research.

Motivation research is fascinating and controversial; therefore we must assume that many of the
criticisms directed at it have been written more to attract the readers' attention than to expose a public evil. As mentioned previously, it spurs the population to consume excess production. It makes the results of production and advertising more predictable, and thus lessens investment risk. In addition, it is possible that much of motivation research's amazing discoveries have been done out of a sheer enjoyment of learning new things about people. Therefore, we must certainly reject historian Arnold Toynbee's statement that:

The destiny of our Western civilization turns on the issue of our struggle with all that Madison Avenue stands for, more than it turns on the issue of our struggle with Communism.15

Not all modern advertising is self-seeking or manipulative. Public service advertising, which grinds nobody's ax but the public's, has no hidden motive; it is designed solely to get done what needs to be done. In 1961, for instance, the total value of advertising given away to help reduce forest fires was over $5,000,000.16

In public service advertising there is no profit, nor even a profit motive. This has been going on for over twenty years in money-mad, dollar-crazy, what's-in-it-for-me America. Those who lament the

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15“Am I My Brother's Keeper?”, Time, LXXVIII (September 22, 1961), 112.

"horrible power" of Madison Avenue should find the mushrooming growth of public service advertising a comforting phenomenon.

Motivation research does have certain disadvantages to the economy, however, and these are indeed subject to attack. The very complexity and expense of motivation research dictates that only large firms can afford to use it as an advertising method; therefore it lessens competition. The smaller firm must use less penetrating and hence less effective methods.

Since it wants to equate the consumer with Pavlov's dog and therefore insults his (the consumer's) dignity, motivation research may be ethically questionable. It preys upon the latent weaknesses in man's nature. It whets our appetites for a unrealistically high standard of living and makes us more the slaves of the things it has taught us to use. 17

Because of the vast audience to which advertised products appeal, it is necessary to present many repetitions of standard ads for standard products. This tends to bring about a conformity of tastes.

and may in time lead to a homogenization of our culture—that is, toward mass conformity in thinking and acting. This is definitely not to be desired. To the extent that motivation research does reduce the consumer to an automaton, it is indeed ethically questionable.

In 1959, ad-men worried about their public image, requested the services of George Gallup's famous polling facilities. Gallup's sounding of consumer opinions about advertising was amazing, considering the intense criticism which had been directed at the advertising profession. Seventy-five per cent of those questioned liked advertising; sixty-five per cent felt life would be "more difficult" if ads should disappear. 18

A similar poll of 2400 businessmen, the clients of the advertisers, revealed that the majority approve of advertising per se. They strongly believe that advertising helps raise our standard of living, results in better products, and speeds the development of new markets for products. Most disagree with Packard and Toynbee, who claim that advertisers have an almost

18 "Yours Sincerely", Newsweek, LIV (October 26, 1959) 96.
unlimited power over the consumer. Businessmen in general agree with H.G. Morgan, the head of Proctor and Gamble, who stated, "No amount of advertising can make people buy what they don't want; it can only create a market for products filling a genuine—though often latent or unexpressed—consumer want."

For all its faults, modern advertising has matured into a respectable profession with tremendous social influence. Annual expenditures for advertising are tremendous and increasing yearly. Many advertisers, aware of their social responsibilities, have made earnest efforts to "purify" their profession. The following chapter describes the internal regulations which advertisers have imposed upon themselves to brighten their public image, and a short account of governmental efforts to control objectionable advertising.

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The United States has made tremendous scientific and technological advances in the 20th century. Automobiles, airplanes, radio, television, rockets, laser beams—all these inventions attest to the American genius in things mechanical. This predilection for the accumulation of empirical rather than philosophical knowledge is fast becoming a national trend, as more and more schools gear their curriculum to the scientific. Of the 120,000 students who attend the six schools of the California university system, 94% are majoring in some field of scientific endeavor; a scant 6% prefer the social sciences and humanities.¹

The hoard of knowledge accumulated by scientists poses a significant social problem. As B. F. Skinner has observed, science "has expanded our control of... nature without preparing for the serious social problems..."

¹Chet Huntley, "The 100 Mile Campus," CBS Reports, March 24, 1964. (A special television commentary on California's university system.)
which follow. Many scientific discoveries have considerable influence upon our society, and not only in the realm of material advancement. For example; when scientists perfected the laser beam, they not only developed a device with many beneficial uses, but also created a weapon with vast moral and sociological implications. The laser beam can be used to preserve life—by burning out cancerous tissue; or to destroy it—directed at a human being in a certain way, a laser beam can kill almost instantly. Consequently, our social scientists and philosophers must set norms and limitations upon the use of such a tool. But since the great majority of our educated population is engaged in creation rather than control, a "culture lag" develops, and our society is faced with a social problem.

Modern advertising is confronted with a similar social problem. Nearly all of the people associated with advertising are engaged in the creation of selling appeals, not in their control. As a result, many abuses have crept into the advertising profession.

The control of such a penetrating tool as motivation research is just as important as the control of

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Refers to the theory advanced by William F. Ogburn which states in essence that all parts of a culture do not change at the same rate. Material (scientific) aspects are likely to be altered more quickly than nonmaterial (philosophical) aspects of a culture.
a laser beam. But until recently, any curbing of motivation research has been done by the government. However, of late the advertisers themselves have made concerted efforts to regulate objectionable advertising. This internal reform has not been initiated entirely out of pure altruism, however; the advertiser knows that if he is unable to "keep his house clean," "Uncle Sam" will do it for him.

The American Association of Advertising Agencies, generally recognized as the principle spokesman of American advertisers, has long appreciated the importance of presenting a favorable public image. Therefore it came as no surprise when in 1961 this organization requested the services of Hill and Knowlton, one of the nation's largest public relations firms, to improve the public image of advertising. This is a massive job, reflecting the deep concern of some of the most important people in the advertising profession at the attacks on a business essential to the proper functioning of our economic system.

Madison Avenue has become a dirty term to many people, who question the validity, and not simply the judgment, of the whole business of advertising. Many of our educational leaders condemn advertisers, saying in

effect, "My profession is altruistic, self-sacrificing, and underpaid, and your profession stinks." Because of the criticism directed at them by eminent scholars, many advertising leaders began to wonder about the moral implications of some of their trade practices. As a result, what may be referred to as a mass "examination of conscience" took place early in 1959 at a two-day conference held at the New School for Social Research in New York. Michael J. Soriven, assistant professor of philosophy at Swarthmore College, later commented upon this unprecedented move by remarking, "Madison Avenue has finally asked itself the question: 'Are our methods right from a moral standpoint?'

Scriven further cited David Finn, president of the Ruder & Finn advertising agency as "one advertising man who is now concerned over the moral issues involved in today's psychological advertising."

Other advertisers also recognize their responsibility to the moral law. John E. McMillan, the editor of Sponsor, a magazine for radio and television advertisers, has said, "We shall make no Christian sense whatever out of the problems of advertising men... if

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6 Many of these scholars were very probably our social scientists and philosophers, belatedly trying to maintain control over the adman's creations.

7 "Admen Morally Worried," America, C (March 14, 1959), 675.

8 Ibid., p. 675.
we forget the primary obligation to something greater than society, and more important than consumers."\(^9\)

McMillan insists that advertisers must "speak the truth with love;"\(^{10}\) with respect for the dignity of one's audience, not blaringly, insultingly, or egotistically.

The sudden fervor with which many organizations have pledged themselves to internal reform within the advertising profession has resulted in the creation of a number of "codes of ethics" for advertisers. The Better Business Bureau, which for fifty years has been a "sturdy watchdog" over deceptive business practices, has designed such a code, to protect consumers from questionable advertising practices and thus restore public confidence. It covers "bait ads,"\(^{11}\) tricky pricing, such descriptions as "like new " for used goods, and careless phrases such as "money-back guarantee" and "factory to you," when obviously the advertiser is himself a middleman.\(^{12}\) The Better Business Bureau has also set up a special committee to combat comparative-price advertising.\(^{13}\)

In a similar spirit of moral reform, the A. A. A.


\(^{10}\)Ibid., p.808.

\(^{11}\)Ads for items the store does not intend to sell, but which are offered cheaply to draw customers to the store, whereupon they are offered other goods.


\(^{13}\)Ibid., p.46.
A. has devised what it calls a "Creative Code."

Essentially, this code proclaims that

Advertising bears a dual responsibility—to the public and to the advertiser.

Advertising enjoys a particular relationship to the American family.

Advertising is directed to the public at large; while the interests of the majority must be fulfilled, the rights of minorities must be respected.14

Therefore, creators of advertising copy will not knowingly produce advertising which contains

False or misleading statements, visual or verbal.
Testimonials which do not reflect the real choice of a competent witness.
Misleading price claims.
Unfair disparaging claims.
Claims insufficiently supported, or misinterpreted.
Statements, suggestions, or pictures offensive to public decency.15

This all sounds splendid; the only drawback is that the A. A. A. A.'s code is unenforceable. No legal action may be taken against an offender. It follows that if this new code is to mean anything, it will have to be more than words.

Not all advertisers are sincerely dedicated to the improvement of advertising standards, but many feel that they must follow the trend. Accordingly, they have come up with "internal reforms" which are

15Ibid., p.48.
plainly ludicrous. Such a farce is the Association of National Advertisers' attempt to define an honest advertisement:

An advertisement is honest when objective facts which bear you the product or service advertised fulfill in all respects the understanding regarding them that is generated in people by the advertisement when observed in the way or ways that they normally perceive it.

Truthful advertising...is a matter of philosophy and intent...the honest seafarer needs no chart. He need only keep his eye on the star of truth.\(^{16}\)

Such a quaint blend of ambiguity, pseudo-poetry and just plain "beating around the bush" does nothing to alleviate advertising's problems.

Advertisers striving for internal reform have recently received unexpected help from an outside source other than government--their clients. Some magazines and newspapers now refuse objectionable ads. The huge New York Times, which has long appalled readers by what has been described as the "Sunday Burlesque"--the parade of scantily-clad females plugging various products--recently dropped such distasteful ads from the average of eight, to none, or at most, one.\(^{17}\) Such a raped turnabout augurs well for the success of the public in agitating for decency in ads.

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\(^{16}\)"Truth or Consequences," Nation, CXC (June 25, 1960), 543.

\(^{17}\)"Decency in Ads," America, CVI (November 11, 1961), 176.
While the efforts of motivation researcher regulation of advertising are commendable, they are often no more than token attempts at improvement, because to date none of the rules against objectionable advertising made by the A. A. A. A. or other bodies are legally enforceable. Moral suasion is fine when it succeeds in preventing fraudulent advertising, but it is useless when someone actually does violate the rules. Therefore, the government has deemed it necessary to regulate, by enforceable laws, all objectionable advertising. Several governmental regulatory agencies have been pressed into action. The Post Office Department bars the use of the mails to false and fraudulent advertisements; the Securities and Exchange Commission regulates ads promoting securities; the Federal Power Commission oversees the ads of public utilities; the Civil Aeronautics Board does the same for airline ads; the Agricultural Department watches over ads for insecticides, rodenticides, meat products, and seeds; and the Federal Trade Commission is given the sweeping power of prohibiting false or misleading statements in any advertisements.\(^{18}\)

This last agency has initiated a campaign to strengthen governmental enforcement of the truth-in-advertising law, which to date has been in-effectual.

\(^{18}\)Samuel Y. Hyde, "Is Advertising Moral?" *America*, CIV (March 11, 1961), 762.
for a threefold reason. First; the law itself allows so many opportunities for legal maneuvers to delay corrective action. Second; the F. T. C. has done little to speed up its own procedures. Third; the F. T. C. has been less than frank about its effectiveness in controlling fraudulent advertising. However, the new chairman of the F. T. C., Commissioner Paul Rand Dixon, has promised that his agency would speed up its internal procedures so that both businessmen and consumers could be saved from false advertising "with a squad car instead of a horse."20

It is strange that the consumer should feel the pawn of motivation research, when really the reverse is true. The depth man's livelihood depends upon the consumer; therefore the latter, properly educated, can exert considerable influence upon the quality of advertising. The consumer can encourage the advertisers to grope for a higher course by rewarding—by his purchase and comments—those advertisers who make their appeals in a responsible, respectful and dignified manner, and who indicate their regard for the important nonmaterial values in life. As we have continually stressed, advertising as a function, is essential to


20Ibid., p. 426.
a private enterprise economy. The immortal Winston Churchill apparently regards it highly, for he once said:

Advertising nourishes the consuming power of man. It creates wants for a better standard of living. It sets up before a man the goal of a better home, better clothing, better food for himself and his family. It spurs individual exertion and greater production...

Motivation research, at once the child prodigy and the prodigal son of the modern advertiser, is developing into a formidable force in our economy.

Whether it becomes a power for good or for evil, only time will tell. But one thing is certain: the best defense against its manipulative powers is education. If this thesis has made you an educated, responsible consumer, then my efforts have been worthwhile.

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