

Reflective Paper About Marketing And Representation

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How Marketing Entered My Everyday Life

Before studying marketing, I thought of it mainly as the activity that persuades people to buy products. I noticed advertisements, but I did not always notice the assumptions hidden inside them. A sports commercial showed determination, a food advertisement made a meal look irresistible, and a clothing campaign presented a lifestyle that seemed more confident than ordinary life. I understood the sales message. What I did not understand was how often marketing also tells people who they should be.

Marketing begins with needs, competition, products, pricing, communication, and value. Jobber (2012) explains it as a process of identifying and satisfying customer requirements profitably. That definition is useful, but my experience has made me see another layer. Businesses do not merely respond to needs that already exist. They can frame a problem, attach emotion to it, and offer a product as part of the solution. Sometimes that process is helpful. Sometimes it makes an insecurity more profitable.

Nike is one example that shaped my early understanding. Its campaigns rarely discuss shoes only as material objects. They connect sport with discipline, courage, equality, and personal transformation. Children and adults can see themselves in that story even when they are not professional athletes. The message can be motivating, but it also demonstrates how representation works: the person wearing the product is shown as the kind of person the audience may want to become.

Seeing Myself in Advertisements—and Not Seeing Myself

Representation concerns who appears, how they appear, and what meanings are attached to them. Stuart Hall argued that representation does not simply reflect reality like a mirror; it helps produce meaning through language, images, and cultural codes. This idea changed the way I look at marketing. An advertisement showing a family, a successful professional, or an attractive body is not neutral. It selects one version of normal life and places it in front of millions of people.

When an advertisement includes people who resemble the audience in age, culture, skin color, language, disability, religion, or family structure, it can create recognition. That recognition matters. It tells viewers that they are visible and that the company considers them part of the market. On the

other hand, representation can become shallow when diversity appears only as decoration. A brand may use inclusive images while its products, workplaces, or business practices remain inaccessible.

I have noticed that older marketing often treated the “ideal customer” as if there were one body, one household, and one path to success. Women were commonly shown through beauty, domestic work, or the approval of others. Men were shown as decisive, powerful, and emotionally controlled. People from minority communities were absent or reduced to stereotypes. Contemporary campaigns are more diverse in many cases, but the old patterns have not vanished. They sometimes return in subtler language.

This has shaped the way I understand myself because advertisements create standards against which people compare their ordinary lives. If every successful person is presented with perfect clothes, expensive technology, clear skin, a fashionable home, and constant energy, an ordinary viewer may begin to interpret normal difficulty as personal failure. I have become more careful about separating a brand’s story from my own worth.

The Personal Feeling Behind a Commercial Message

The most effective marketing often feels personal even when it is designed for a large audience. Food brands do not sell only taste; they sell comfort, family, reward, nostalgia, or convenience. Technology brands may sell creativity and belonging. Cars may represent independence or status. This emotional dimension is why certain advertisements remain in memory after the product details are forgotten.

I have made purchasing decisions because a campaign created the right feeling at the right moment. That does not mean the product was always poor or the decision irrational. Emotion is a real part of how people choose. The problem arises when emotion hides important information. A “healthy” image may distract from nutrition facts. An environmentally friendly color palette may hide wasteful practices. A message about confidence may depend on convincing the audience that it is inadequate without the product.

Learning marketing has not made me immune to persuasion. It has made me slower. I ask what problem the advertisement is naming, whether I had that problem before seeing the message, and which evidence supports the promise. I also ask who is missing. These questions do not remove enjoyment from advertising. They make the relationship more conscious.

Digital Marketing and the Feeling of Being

Watched

Social media changed my understanding of marketing more than traditional television did. On television, I knew that millions of people were seeing roughly the same commercial. Online, an advertisement often appears connected to something I searched, watched, liked, or discussed. The message can feel unusually relevant because platforms organize advertising through data about behavior and inferred interests.

Whenever I open Facebook, Instagram, YouTube, or another platform, I encounter ads from several industries. Some are useful. They introduce a local service or a product I was already looking for. Others create discomfort because the timing feels too precise. Digital marketing can reduce waste by reaching people who are more likely to care, but it also raises questions about privacy, consent, and how much a company should infer about a person.

Representation online is also shaped by algorithms. The images that receive attention are more likely to be repeated. This can reward familiar beauty standards, dramatic transformation stories, outrage, and simplified identities. It can also allow creators from communities ignored by traditional media to reach audiences directly. Digital marketing is therefore not automatically more inclusive or more harmful. Its effect depends on platform design, advertiser choices, and the power users have over their data and feeds.

Food Marketing and Manufactured Desire

The original version of my reflection connected industrial agriculture and food marketing after World War II. The relationship is more complicated than one historical cause, but the concern remains important. Increased production, processing, distribution, and competition created strong incentives to encourage frequent consumption. Advertising could turn convenience foods into symbols of modern living and large portions into better value.

Food marketing is powerful because it works through appetite and habit. Bright images, sound, repetition, celebrity endorsements, toys, discounts, and limited-time offers can influence choices before a person evaluates nutrition. Children are especially important to this discussion because they do not interpret persuasive intent in the same way as adults. A product can become connected with fun, popularity, or reward long before a child understands the business strategy.

At the same time, consumers are not passive. People bring culture, budget, family routines, health needs, and personal taste to every choice. It is too easy to blame marketing for every unhealthy habit or to blame individuals for every purchase. The more accurate view is that choices take place inside an environment built by companies, retailers, public policy, social expectations, and access.

Uniform Campaigns Across Different Cultures

Global brands often want a consistent identity, but one message does not carry the same meaning everywhere. Humor, family roles, clothing, gestures, religion, gender, color, and ideas of status differ across communities. A campaign can be successful in one country and offensive or simply confusing in another.

Earlier, I assumed that uniform marketing was efficient because the company could repeat one campaign across the world. I now see efficiency as only one concern. Local teams need enough authority to adapt language and representation without turning the brand into something unrecognizable. Translation alone is not localization. The company must understand how people actually live and how a product fits into that life.

There is also a danger in treating culture as a set of stereotypes. A marketer may read that a society is “collectivist” or “traditional” and then create a campaign that ignores generational, regional, class, and individual differences. Research should involve listening to people rather than deciding in advance what their culture means.

What Representation Taught Me About Other People

Marketing once encouraged me to sort people quickly into segments: age, income, lifestyle, and likely purchase. Segmentation is useful for strategy, but it becomes ethically weak when the category replaces the person. Two customers may buy the same product for completely different reasons. A person can belong to several communities without wanting any one of them to define every decision.

Studying representation has made me more aware of the distance between being visible and being understood. A campaign can include a person with a disability while showing no understanding of accessibility. It can show women in leadership while preserving unequal assumptions about appearance. It can use a cultural festival to attract attention without respecting the people for whom that festival carries spiritual or historical meaning.

This realization has made me more cautious and also more curious. Instead of assuming that I know why an audience reacted negatively, I should listen to the criticism. Marketing professionals often defend intention: “We did not mean to offend.” Representation teaches that impact matters too. A responsible response does not begin with protecting the campaign. It begins with understanding what the campaign communicated to people whose experience differs from mine.

The Professional I Want to Become

I remain interested in marketing because it combines creativity, research, psychology, communication, and business judgment. It can help a small organization find the people who need its services. It can make useful information clear. It can introduce new ideas and challenge old stereotypes. The fact that marketing has power is not a reason to reject it; it is a reason to practice it carefully.

As a future marketing professional, I want to ask several questions before approving a campaign. Is the product claim true and supported? Does the creative work respect the people it represents? Is the audience able to recognize paid persuasion? Are vulnerable groups being targeted because the product helps them, or because their insecurity makes them easier to influence? Does the campaign create long-term trust or only short-term attention?

I also want to avoid the belief that modern tools automatically produce modern thinking. A company can use advanced targeting, artificial intelligence, and real-time analytics while repeating an old stereotype. Technology can improve delivery, but judgment still determines the message.

Reflection

Marketing and representation have shaped the way I understand both myself and other people. They taught me that consumption is not always a simple response to need. Products can become connected with identity, belonging, ambition, and fear. Images can widen a person's idea of who can succeed, or they can make a narrow standard appear natural.

I no longer look at an advertisement only by asking whether it is creative. I ask what kind of world it presents and who is allowed to feel at home in that world. This has made me a more critical consumer, but it has also strengthened my motivation to study marketing. I want to learn how to help businesses grow without treating human insecurity as an unlimited resource. Effective marketing should not only be memorable. It should be truthful enough to deserve the memory it creates.

References

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