Reflective Paper About Marketing And Representation

Posted on July 31, 2022

View this essay online:
https://academic-master.com/reflective-paper-about-marketing-and-representation/

Introduction

Before studying marketing, I understood it mainly as the activity businesses use to persuade people to buy products. I noticed advertisements, logos, celebrity endorsements, and discounts, but I paid less attention to the assumptions underneath them. Studying representation changed that perspective because I began to see that marketing does more than describe a product. It also presents ideas about success, attractiveness, family, gender, age, culture, and the kind of person a consumer might want to become. A sports advertisement can turn shoes into symbols of discipline, while a technology campaign can connect a device with creativity or belonging. These associations are not automatically manipulative, but they demonstrate how commercial communication participates in identity formation. Hall's theory of representation helped me recognize that images do not simply mirror reality; they select, organize, and give meaning to it. Marketing therefore deserves evaluation not only for whether it increases sales but also for the social world it asks audiences to recognize as normal or desirable (Hall, 1997; Jobber, 2012).

Marketing, Identity, and the Experience of Representation

Representation matters because audiences notice who appears in advertising, what roles they occupy, and which bodies, families, languages, or lifestyles are treated as ordinary. Seeing people who resemble oneself can create recognition, while repeated absence can suggest that a brand imagines its "real" customer differently. Yet visibility alone does not guarantee meaningful inclusion. A campaign can place diverse faces in an advertisement while preserving inaccessible products, stereotyped roles, or unequal assumptions inside the company. Older commercial imagery often presented women through beauty, domestic labor, or approval from others, while men were more often shown as decisive, powerful, and emotionally controlled. Minority communities were frequently absent or simplified. Contemporary advertising has broadened in many markets, but tokenism remains possible when difference functions only as decoration. Studying representation has made me more cautious about allowing commercial images to define personal worth. A brand may construct an appealing lifestyle around perfect clothing, clear skin, expensive technology, or constant energy, but

ordinary life does not become a failure simply because it lacks the visual polish of a campaign.

Emotional Persuasion and Consumer Self-Understanding

The advertisements I remember most clearly are usually those that created a feeling rather than those that listed technical details. Food brands can associate products with comfort, family, reward, or nostalgia; cars can symbolize independence or status; and clothing can suggest confidence, attractiveness, or belonging. Emotion is not an illegitimate basis for choice because consumers are not purely calculating decision-makers. Problems arise when the emotional story hides information or creates insecurity that the product then claims to solve. A “healthy” visual identity can distract attention from nutrition facts, and an environmentally responsible aesthetic can exceed the evidence supporting a company’s actual practices. Learning about marketing has not made me immune to persuasion, but it has made me slower and more reflective. I now ask what problem a campaign is naming, whether I recognized that problem before seeing the message, what evidence supports the promise, and whether the advertisement is connecting self-worth with consumption. These questions allow me to appreciate creative work while separating a brand’s narrative from my own identity and needs.

Digital Targeting, Algorithms, and Privacy

Digital advertising changed my understanding of marketing because the message is no longer merely placed before a broad audience. Social platforms, search engines, video services, and online retailers can organize advertising around browsing behavior, purchases, location, inferred interests, and interactions with content. Sometimes this makes advertising more useful because it introduces a product or local service that matches an existing need. At other times, the timing feels uncomfortably precise and raises questions about what data were collected, what conclusions were inferred, and how much control the user actually has. Algorithms also influence representation because they determine which images and creators receive visibility. Content that produces strong engagement may be repeated more often, which can reinforce familiar beauty standards, dramatic transformation narratives, outrage, or simplified identities. The same infrastructure can also help creators from communities overlooked by traditional media reach audiences directly. Digital marketing is therefore neither automatically more inclusive nor automatically more harmful. Its effects depend on data governance, platform design, advertiser choices, transparency, and whether users have meaningful control over targeting and recommendation systems.

Food Marketing, Vulnerability, and Manufactured Desire

Food marketing demonstrates how commercial environments shape choice without fully determining it. Modern food production, processing, distribution, retail competition, and advertising have created a setting in which convenience, large portions, limited-time offers, celebrity endorsements, toys, vivid imagery, and repeated exposure can encourage consumption beyond immediate hunger. Children deserve particular attention because their understanding of persuasive intent develops gradually and because brand associations can form before they understand the business purpose behind the message. At the same time, it would be too simple to blame advertising for every unhealthy choice or to blame individuals for every purchase. Food decisions are also shaped by income, culture, time, family routines, health needs, neighborhood access, pricing, and public policy. This complexity has changed the way I think about responsibility. Ethical marketing should not treat vulnerability as an unlimited commercial opportunity. The strongest campaign may be the one capable of producing desire, but professional judgment should still ask whether that desire depends on misleading health impressions, pressure on children, or the deliberate exploitation of insecurity.

Culture, Global Campaigns, and Ethical Representation

Global brands often seek consistency, yet a message does not carry identical meaning across cultures. Humor, family roles, clothing, religion, gender expectations, gestures, color, and status symbols can change substantially between communities. Translation is therefore not the same as localization. A campaign that works well in one market may become confusing or offensive in another if the company assumes that language conversion is sufficient cultural research. The opposite error is to reduce a culture to a few stereotypes and design the campaign around a simplistic label such as “traditional” or “collectivist.” Real communities contain regional, generational, class, religious, and individual differences. Representation has taught me that marketing research should involve listening rather than deciding in advance what an audience means. Intention also cannot be the only standard when criticism occurs. A company may not intend to offend, but the impact of a message can reveal assumptions that the creative team failed to notice. Ethical practice requires curiosity, correction, and enough local authority for people who understand the audience to influence the campaign before problems become public.

The Marketing Professional I Want to Become

I remain attracted to marketing because it combines research, creativity, psychology, communication, technology, and business judgment. It can help an organization find people who genuinely need its

services, make useful information understandable, introduce new ideas, and challenge old stereotypes. Its power is therefore not a reason to reject the field; it is a reason to practice it carefully. As a future professional, I want to ask whether product claims are supported, whether the audience can recognize paid persuasion, whether the people represented are treated with dignity, and whether vulnerable consumers are being targeted because a product helps them or because their insecurity makes them easier to influence. I also want to resist the belief that advanced tools automatically produce advanced thinking. Artificial intelligence, behavioral targeting, and real-time analytics can improve delivery while still reproducing a shallow stereotype or misleading claim. Technology changes how messages reach people, but professional ethics still determines what those messages ask people to believe about themselves and others.

Conclusion

Studying marketing and representation has changed both how I consume advertising and how I imagine working within the field. I now see consumption as more than a response to practical need because products can become connected with belonging, aspiration, fear, attractiveness, culture, and status. Representation can widen people's sense of who is visible and valued, but it can also turn a narrow social ideal into something that appears natural. Digital targeting adds new questions about privacy, algorithms, and data, while global campaigns demonstrate why cultural awareness requires more than translation. These lessons have made me a more critical consumer without eliminating my interest in persuasive communication. I still value creativity and commercial effectiveness, but I increasingly measure good marketing by whether it deserves the attention it receives. The kind of professional I want to become should be capable of helping organizations grow without treating human insecurity as an unlimited resource. Memorable marketing is most defensible when its creativity is matched by truthful claims, respectful representation, and responsible use of audience knowledge.

References

Goffman, E. (1979). *Gender Advertisements*. Harvard University Press.

Hall, S. (1997). *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*. Sage.

Jobber, D. (2012). *Principles and Practice of Marketing*. McGraw-Hill.