Introduction

How can marketing strategies change for the better when their effect on target audiences is taken into consideration? The advertising and marketing industry is expansive and continually shifting and growing. It involves an effort to connect companies and their products to customers, as well as stimulate consumer spending and increase sales. According to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2022), jobs in the field are projected to grow by 10% in the next ten years, and because of recent advancements in technology, these jobs are subject to change in response to current consumer culture. In addition to catering to this consumer culture, advertising strategies can also influence and exploit it. Anticipating how culture will be affected by an advertisement is an important skill not only for companies but for consumers too so that they can make informed purchases with a clean conscience. For companies, predicting how a target audience will react to a certain advertisement is crucial in forming a successful ad campaign.

Over time, there have been many marketing strategies used to promote products and services that have worked quite well, but there are also plenty that haven't. What aspects of a campaign signify its success in a market? How does our culture/society affect advertising strategies used by businesses? This research paper examines the psychological, political, and societal impacts of different types of marketing and how that correlates to having a "successful" strategy. The goal of these findings will be to understand how society interprets and responds to advertisements so that a company can better plan and execute a marketing strategy ethically and also help consumers better prepare when participating in consumer culture.

Literature Review

In order to determine how marketing strategies can more effectively cater to their audiences, it is important to start with what companies already know. An article by Stephanie Hooper for Infront Webworks (2021) outlines the basics for influencing consumer behavior. A main element of this is brand awareness, which allows a company to spread quicker than word of mouth. Another strategy discussed is developing a brand identity; this gives consumers something to associate with the product so that they trust it more. Repetition is the last of the main talking points, which involves repeated exposure to a product. This article considers surface-level influencer tactics, but it doesn't go into detail about the science behind them or any of the more individualistic marketing approaches.

One way advertising has changed is in its delivery and format. Businesses are now more connected to their customers than ever before, which allows for feedback as well as more direct marketing tactics. Research by Lee and Cho (2020) describes how "messages reach consumers directly without having to be delivered through traditional channels, thus enabling consumers to directly respond" (Lee and Cho, 2020). This kind of marketing can be beneficial in catering to an audience because of its individualistic approach. It also allows companies to monitor results more closely since the number of interactions via a like button or link to a webpage can be monitored. Another advantage of this strategy is that it doesn't rely on guesswork for when people will see the ad. Traditionally, for television ads, a predetermined fee is paid by a company to a broadcasting service in exchange for a timeslot that they will use for an advertisement. That fee is a gamble in a sense because

there is no guarantee to the number of people who will be watching that ad. On the other hand, using Instagram to advertise, for example, a company would pay for a certain amount of ads to be shown to users. In this method, the company pays a fee for the exact number of viewers required; whereas, in television, it pays for the estimated number of viewers. As a result, social media marketing has become beneficial as a more reliable form of advertising.

Similar to social media advertising, influencer marketing involves celebrities who build followings online and shoot ads themselves for their audience. This method allows a brand to associate itself with a known and trusted celebrity, increasing the chance that viewers will trust the product. Additionally, Rosengren and Campbell's (2021) research found that:

Influencers are more likely than brands to facilitate positive engagement around a cause. It also highlights how influencers can mitigate consumer skepticism around cause-related messaging. This suggests that advertisers should not restrict their influencer collaborations to efforts focused on sales and that researchers should extend their investigations to examine non-sales-related outcomes (p. 507).

Using influencers to market a product can do more than just create exposure and profit. For certain brands, community engagement can make up a portion of their mission statement or corporate values, and using influencers to communicate this can generate a positive public opinion, something critical in today's consumer culture.

While social media/internet advertising has its benefits, there are also downsides. For example, some companies now offer subscription-based services, allowing people to

bypass ads for monthly fees. In an attempt to bypass these ads without paying a premium, the total amount of adblocking software users rose to an estimated 763.51 million according to Statista (2021). Other issues outlined by Kitts and McCoy (2019) involve the selling of personal information by big tech, false information, and discriminatory ad algorithms. Big companies (Google and Facebook for example, which held 53.8% of all US digital ad revenue in 2020 according to Statista [2022]) have a big responsibility to uphold transparency with consumers, but on some occasions, they haven't. For instance, Facebook's ad algorithms are formulated from "illegally" (allowed by the government but unethical) attained and sold personal information, and involve personal bias from ad moderators: "Facebook has increased its number of human moderators…This is difficult work - there are regular accusations of bias and there have been reports that the human moderators are developing Post Traumatic Stress Disorder–like symptoms and believing the conspiracy theories" (Kitts and McCoy, 2019). Despite these injustices, culture has normalized social media, and consequently, they are viewed as a small price to pay in order to enjoy different social platforms. Media and television are not excused from these injustices either, although they operate differently from internet advertising.

One "pseudo-crime" the media is guilty of is enforcing a limiting kind of consumer capitalism described by Lewis (2013) as a political force that "appears to have created a cultural system that makes it difficult to conceive other models of human progress" (p. 8). Elaborating on this idea, James Mcneal (2008) identifies how the "cultural system" persists by saying that "the consumer embryo begins to develop during the first year of existence. Children begin their journey in infancy, and they certainly deserve consideration as

consumers at that time" (as cited in Barbaro et al., 2008). By starting with young children,

mass media can surround the population with its ideals before the people are too old to

recognize it; it becomes a part of everyone's identity and is instilled in their behavior to

participate in this consumer culture.

       Another injustice the media is guilty of is sex and social status-based advertising.

The concept of a hierarchical status is not a new one; it's been around for thousands of

years and is used to manipulate public discourse. Additionally, the phrase "sex sells" is a

widely known motto that encourages sexuality within the context of advertising, sometimes

even affecting questionable age groups such as children or teenagers. Research from

Acikalin et al. (2018) compared human and primate responses to sex and social

status-based advertising and found that they develop preferences for this marketing

strategy "even though choosing them provided no tangible rewards…Our results endorse

the hypothesis that the power of sex and status in advertising emerges from the

spontaneous engagement of shared, ancestral neural circuits…[and] that simple associative

conditioning is sufficient to explain the formation of preferences for…sexual or

status-based images" (Acikalin et al.,2018). Given that people are especially susceptible to

this strategy of marketing, there's no doubt that some corporations have used it to control

public opinion and manipulate consumers to buy their products.

       While considering the fact that existing research stems from fields like social

science, media education, and economics which help explain the current state of

advertising, it is also important to highlight some of the shortcomings. For example, the

fundamental statistics and extent to which personal information is shared and sold

through corporations like Facebook and Google are not exactly known, however, it's understood that not all companies are benevolent. It is therefore important for researchers to continue investigating this topic, in addition to corporate efforts to set a standard of transparency and ethicality. Another shortcoming of existing research on this topic is the lack of variety or applicable context in which the studies are conducted. To gain a better understanding of how and to what extent advertising affects people and society, research focusing on all age groups and cultures worldwide is required. As a response to this lack of cultural variety in current research, one study has taken the theory of evolutionary psychology and applied it to cross-cultural advertising. And in response to the pushback associated with big business and the "behind-closed-doors" method of controlling society through media, a study has used an interpretation of Marxist theory (critical theory) to evaluate how society has been affected by the political, cultural, and economic agendas that are spread through mainstream media.

Using Theories to Understand the Effects of Advertising

In determining the role of media in today's society, evolutionary psychology provides the framework for how people across cultures could respond to an ad. It also gives clues to how companies are currently trying to target different markets by explaining the behavioral and reactionary differences of people depending on where a campaign is done. If companies are aware of this, then it would mean that they are making an effort to cater to different cultures. After the basis for understanding how a market will respond to an ad is understood, critical theory can describe why people react the way they do, and also explain

how they come to accept the state of advertising forced onto them from birth through the Capitalist Advertising and Marketing Complex (CAMP). It also provides context for how the CAMP maintains power and influence in society.

On their surface level, critical theory and evolutionary psychology share one basic similarity: they both involve studying and interpreting human behavior and how it relates to shaping society. Critical theory takes a more philosophical approach and also examines the political, economic, and social consequences of thought, while evolutionary psychology is rooted in biology, so it takes a more scientific approach to studying thought. Despite these differences, critical theorists have been known to claim that social sciences have a place in philosophy (Horkheimer, 1993). Their argument for this demonstrates critical theorists' intent to find a balance between hard science and behavioral phenomena, which could formulate a superior thought process for investigating how behavior affects and reacts to society.

One way that these two theories clash is in their opinion on mass culture. Taking a neutral perspective, Nickerson (2022) says that "one of the main concerns of the scholars of the Frankfurt School (critical theory's origin) was the rise of 'mass culture'—the technological developments that allow cultural products, such as music, movies, and art, to be distributed on a massive scale" (Nickerson, 2022). Hoping to devalue mass culture, a critical theorist might try to denounce evolutionarily psychology, since part of it involves investigating the benefits of cultural blending. Analyzing a similar global topic, critical theory is a popular tool for studying political materialism and how mainstream media

affects and reacts to culture. Evolutionary psychology couldn't do this because it would focus too much on the individual and how it interprets political materialism.

To grasp the complexity of mainstream media's influence on culture, an understanding of critical theory history is useful. It originated at the Frankfurt School of Critical Theorists, which included Marxist-inspired thinkers such as Herbert Marcuse, and is described by Nickerson (2022) as an "attempt to find the underlying assumptions in social life that keep people from fully and truly understanding how the world works. These underlying assumptions, in the view of critical theories, create a 'False consciousness' that actively undermines people's progress toward a true democracy" (Nickerson, 2022). This concept of false consciousness was used in Marxist theory to describe how lower classes misperceive social relations organized by the elite. It is a tool used to fool the lower classes into accepting the power structures which oppress them.

Research conducted by Guardino and Snyder (2017) uses this critical theory to examine political materialism in the US: "Products and services are increasingly developed and designed explicitly with commercial imperatives in mind…For example, an advertising-dependent media industry influences the production of political news, and a marketing-dependent pharmaceutical industry shapes the production of healthcare services by influencing medical education" (Guardino and Snyder, 2017). This control over what the public can see and do is the primary function of the Capitalist Advertising and Marketing Complex.

Not just limited to American social institutions, evolutionary psychology is an important theory that affects everyone on Earth and thus plays an important role in understanding how societies respond to advertisements. Leo (1964) finds that

> advertising is an appeal to human fundamental needs, desires, and motivations, it is an appeal to basic human nature. People over the world have the same basic need for food, clothing, shelter, the same ambitions, egotism, and the same temptations...And so, the traditional advertising appeals of economy, comfort, advancement, and social approval are equally applicable in all markets" (p. 181, 182).

Evolutionary psychology helps explain these findings by studying human nature through biology, and in the context of advertising, studies the reactions to advertisements that target that human nature. Ivanov et al. (2020) conclude that there are three distinct categories of behavior: human universals (instinct), local adaptations (evolved similarities), and local socialization (learned behavior). Thus, three different marketing strategies should be applied to a campaign depending on which behavioral category is being targeted and exploited.

Viewing human behavior as a science to be studied, evolutionary psychology relies on hard facts and evidence to investigate different topics. This style of research has led cross-cultural advertising to be studied as a process to be learned. Rather than hypothesizing the applications for studying the causes of human behavior, evolutionary psychology is used to explain the benefits and trade-offs of cross-cultural advertising, almost like a how-to manual. As a result, corporations (whether they are benevolent or not)

wishing to advertise their products look to this kind of research for answers to hook the audience most efficiently.

At the same time certain corporations research how to cater to their audience, they also take part in the CAMP by trying to control it. Researching these actions is extremely hypothetical and complicated because of the secrecy surrounding this topic. In order to get anywhere significant while researching, studies must lean into this hypothetical nature and begin with speculations as to how shady institutions affect the society they inhabit. Critical theory is a formalized version of this speculation in a sense because it doesn't originate from any concrete scientific ideas, unlike evolutionary psychology. In a similar fashion, corporate materialism and the CAMP are also investigated through speculation and then rely on evidence to support that speculation. While evolutionary psychology and cross-cultural advertising also rely on evidence, critical theory and corporate materialism differentiate themselves by studying how the CAMP influences culture, instead of how psychology changes throughout different cultures.

Another way that the two theories operate differently in current research is their popularity and development. Because evolutionary psychology is a newer field relative to critical theory, it is generally less developed and structurally sound. Consequently, there are many criticisms of it, one being that the theory isn't very testable. On the contrary, critical theory is older and more developed, and instead of having concrete criticisms, people who oppose this theory simply have a different theoretical framework for how they think culture is controlled, if they even think that at all.

While studying the controlling of culture, the term "capitalist advertising and marketing complex" is used by Guardino and Snyder (2017) to describe "the range of corporate and state institutions that support and empower advertising and marketing in politics, culture, and the economy" (Guardino and Snyder, 2017). This operational definition serves as proof of what they study by giving name to the institutions that benefit from political materialism and the exploitation of the US social order. Stemming from the work of critical theorists, Guardino and Snyder's research attempts to further the thoroughness of critical theory's investigation of elitist institutions. While the Frankfurt School was never known to reference these institutions as the CAMP, Guardino and Snyder give it credit for first theorizing that they exist. By giving the institutions a name, it allows the reader to form a vivid picture in their head and develop a more close relation to them and their effects on society.

Discussion and Conclusion

The use of critical theory in the research of advertising and marketing is beneficial because it provides an alternative viewpoint to someone simply participating in consumer culture. Critical theory operates from a Marxist standpoint, identifying the bourgeoisie and its manipulation of the proletariat. Within the context of the research discussed in this paper, the bourgeoisie uses advertising as its method of manipulation against the general public. Given this identification of the injustices that operate within our culture, critical theory and its research applications are more suited to explaining how the ethics of advertising can be improved. Where it falls short, is in the effort to find more effective

marketing strategies. Looking forward, this theory suggests that a more ethical CAMP

situation involves transparency between institutions and the public, and the total absence

of a hierarchical difference between them.

Evolutionary psychology's application operates inversely to critical theory. Its

strength lies in helping companies (especially those worldwide) find better marketing

tactics than the ones they currently use. By studying hereditary and learned behaviors of a

particular group of people, ad campaigns can be better tailored to their audience. Current

research that uses evolutionary psychology as a theoretical framework evaluates this idea.

Where this theory fails to make itself useful is in the evaluation of a marketing strategy's

ethicality because it only identifies commonalities in human behavior.

Both critical theory and evolutionary psychology were used approximately the same

amount in researching advertising and marketing strategies. Deciding which theory should

be used more in the future depends on a person's values. I believe that critical theory and

its evaluation of current ethical advertising practices is more important than studying how

behavioral differences between populations can be exploited. Regardless, both theories

have proved useful in their own way and should continue to be used in evaluating the

current state of advertising and marketing. Though, some changes to their uses would

provide companies with a more complete picture of how marketing practices can change

for the better. Firstly, there is the fact that neither of these theories is complete. And

considering how critical theorists express the desire to merge their ideas with social

sciences, a joining of theories would serve companies better in learning how to create

effective and ethical methods at the same time. It would also help each respective theory

further develop and become closer to a complete and proven idea. For critical theory,

evolutionary psychology would help explain why humans allow their exploitation by

studying their behavior. For evolutionary psychology, critical theory would provide the

chance to see how social science is used in the real world; unfortunately, that real-world

example would be the exploitation of the proletariat. A possible future avenue of research

that joins these two theories is a comparison of different cultures-one that has hierarchical

separation and exploitation, and one that doesn't. This would make exploitation and

behavioral differences more apparent and easier to study, which would benefit both critical

theory and evolutionary psychology.

How can marketing strategies change for the better when their effect on target

audiences is taken into consideration? Companies can start by evaluating their current

practices i.e. what they already know, and then making an effort to learn about the science

behind human behavior and how their ads use it to their advantage. To remain ethical,

companies should reflect on their actions and how they influence consumer culture; this

would also put them in positive standing with society, and set them apart from

corporations who choose unethical practices to market their products. Examining the

psychological, political, and societal impacts of their marketing and how that correlates to

having a successful strategy can put businesses ahead of others, all while avoiding the

ethical issues associated with elitist institutions and their exploitation of the proletariat.

Looking forward, an understanding of the theoretical frameworks that seek to understand

consumer culture can allow companies to predict how advertising will change in the future,

which gives them the advantage of flexibility. And in today's culture, change is the only

constant thing.

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