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How did advertising evolve and what are the effects of modern-day advertising on consumers?

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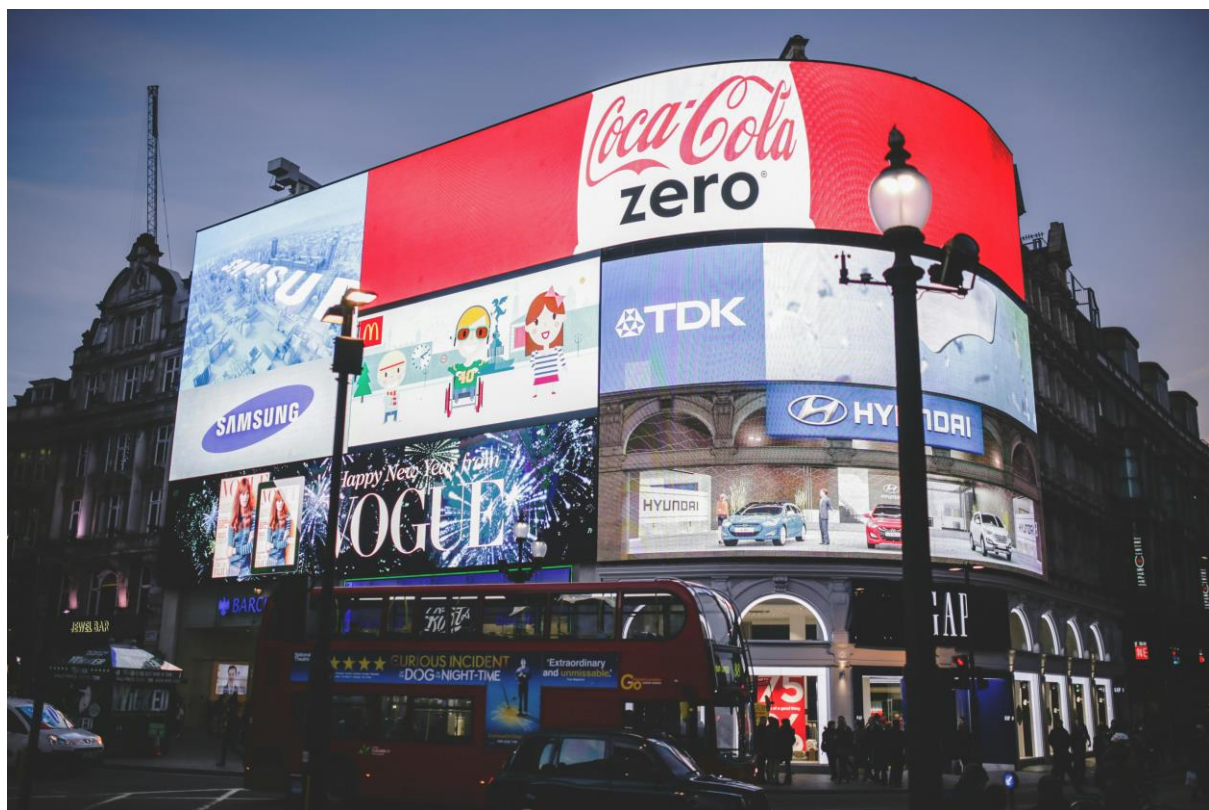


Figure 1

Advertising is a powerful tool. It exists in the world around us constantly. Shaping the way we view, feel and behave. Very simply advertising works by appealing to people's psychological processes such as memory and perception. What this means is that a brand will usually use advertising to create a positive association. This essay will explore not only what advertising is and how it came to be in the form we now know it as, but also the impact it has on consumers that engage with it.

History of Advertising

No one officially knows when advertising began. However early history shows the existence of advertising. "The ruins of Pompeii and Arabia had political campaigns and commercial messages displayed."

Kaur (2022)

This quote shows how advertising was used in early history. Some early advertising includes 'town criers' who would shout about their stores. Other places would have entertainment to get people to come over to their shop. Signboards would also exist which would communicate to customers through images rather than words. Some places would have a trademark either by having a unique symbol or by using their fingerprint to create a symbol belonging only to them. This type of advertising is still used, although the form of advertising that we commonly associate with the title currently started in 1439 with the invention of Gutenberg printing press which led to print advertisement being more accessible. Although this revolutionised what advertising was, fundamentally the core principles of advertising stayed the same.

"Advertising is carried out by three main groups of participants: clients, the media and agencies"

(Jones ,1998, p2)

This quote shows the key groups of advertising, without any of these groups advertising falls apart. The clients consume the media; they are the people you are selling the product to. The media is whatever you are selling and how you are selling it and the agencies are whoever is selling the product whether that be the company itself or an advertising agency.

How Does Advertising Spread?

Through exposure, ads create a sense of urgency. They make you associate products with positive feelings and utilise FOMO (Fear of Missing Out) tactics to make you feel like you need the product. It also plays a vital role in shaping people's opinions on brands. This makes consumers more likely to choose certain brands compared to competitors. Overall, advertising not only informs consumers about available products but also shapes market behaviour. This quote shows how advertising is usually viewed; the company does not want their products to be seen negatively. Therefore, leading to advertising mainly being about persuasion rather than information.

"A moments thought will show that in real life it's very difficult if not impossible to separate information from persuasion"

(Taplin,1963, p36)

We see this in the world around us. Propaganda is an example of this process. Below is an image of a recruiting poster from WW1.



Figure 2

This poster shows how advertising shapes views. As this poster makes the individual seem unique as if the Uncle Sam depicted was choosing them specifically to help. This poster was just one of many, all of which contributed to a culture that encouraged the hero persona that people had when in reality they just needed people to fight in the war. While advertising is impactful, it would be ignorant to ignore the way culture and people around us impact and reinforce advertising. A clear example is the White Feather Brigade in WW1. Women gave white feathers to those who weren't in uniform to shame them for not enlisting. This was to depict them as cowards. Below is an image showing what the Brigade would do.



Figure 3

This still happens today although not as blatantly. Think about the way that social media can be used to pressure individuals into certain behaviours whether political or product based. Additionally, I am going to describe the idea that advertising is all around us when we go online.

“It’s widely accepted that the number of ads we see a day is somewhere between 4,000 and 10,000. However, to reach the upper end of this range, we’d have to see 625 ads every hour, assuming we spend eight hours a day sleeping. This figure may indicate the total number of ads we’re exposed to, but it doesn’t necessarily reflect the number of ads we actively notice.”

Park (2026)

These quotes show the number of ads we see nowadays is astronomical compared to what people used to engage with even a hundred years ago. This means that any effects that advertising has is much more prominent. Social media ads are not the only types of ads we are exposed to; we are also exposed to ads in the real world. Although, “Digital accounts for 70-75%” MN4U Bureau (2026) that does not mean that ads are not present everywhere else. It exists on vehicles, buildings, billboards and even in the media we consume.

“Every day and for most of our lives we see and hear many advertisements”
(Dyer, 1989, p1)

As this quote sums up, advertising is a constant and is so commonplace we don’t tend to acknowledge it. Due to this, the harm that this push of over-consumerism can do to the individual is often ignored. So why has advertising become so common place and what are the effects it has?

Effects of Advertising

People buy products not only because they might need it or the product is something they like but also because they are persuaded to.

“But it’s very doubtful whether we know what we want even at lower levels.”

(Taplin, 1963, p21)

“For most of the time we simply do not know what we want”

(Taplin, 1963, p20)

These quotes sum up the way that a lot of ads view consumers, in that they are someone to convince and that is the key focus. When looking at companies you can see the way that this convincing can cause harm based on the

product alone. For example, Bet 365 is constantly advertised whether it be in football matches, social media or adverts on television. In these ads gambling is portrayed as being something where making money is easy and present the idea that even an idiot can bet. Presenting betting as a positive idea.

“In 2021, 50% of adults had participated in a gambling activity in the last 12 months. Men (55%) were more likely than women (45%) to take part in any gambling activity.”

(National Health Service [hereafter NHS], (2023))

However, when looking at statistics like this we can see how wide spread of an issue it is. In my opinion, while all cannot be contributed to advertisements, the way it is pushed is a factor in how popular issues such as gambling become. Furthermore, I will analyse some information from an article that

“aims to develop a comprehensive understanding of offensiveness and harm in non-commercial advertising by analysing actual complaints.”

(Auxtova and Brennan,2024)

Offensive advertising is used to ‘trigger’ people. Some recent examples would include the Sydney Sweeney jeans ad which triggered a response which put more eyes on the product. However, this can cause negative ideas to become more acceptable. A good way to explain it is a concept usually used for politics, although I think it can be applied to other scenarios known as the Overton Window.

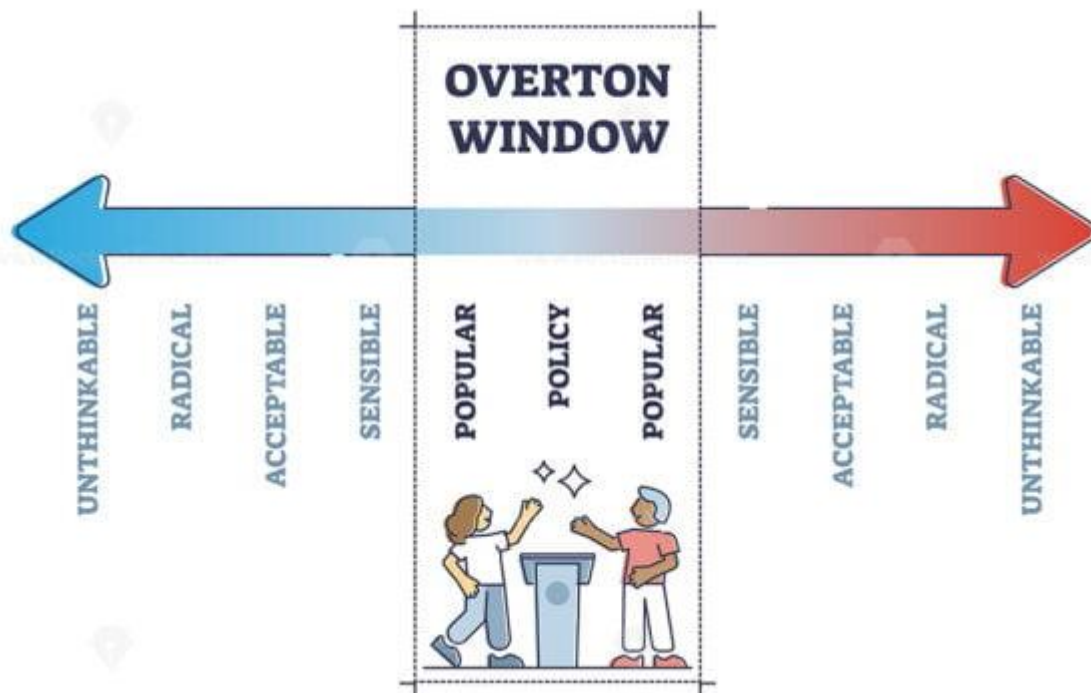


Figure 4

The Overton window is what we would consider ‘normal’ in society. As society is exposed to more extreme ideas ‘normal’ starts becoming more extreme and radical. If these outrage ads become more widespread, we could see scenarios like this where the ideas become more expected, essentially causing desensitisation.

“Their research into public perceptions of harm (and offense) identified two types of harm – harm to individuals, particularly vulnerable people, and harm to wider society.”

(Auxtova and Brennan,2024)

A lot of people in this study are complaining about graphic imagery and negative portrayals, particularly age and gender and the way that can create prejudice in society. But those are just the issues with the way that advertising is portrayed and the products within them. What is the issue with the overall state of advertising? Does the amount

we're exposed to lead us to consumerism? I believe that it does with technology, people are experiencing constant exposure, as well as seeing people who they idolise with certain products which can lead to people consuming more than normal. Look at modern day trends such as the Labubu, Starbucks Bear Cups and the Dunkin Donuts Buckets. These products have become so desired they've caused people to break out into brawls or travel through snowstorms to get them. A lot of this was caused by scarcity marketing and use of FOMO.

In conclusion, advertising has progressed from being something simplistic into a constant influential presence in modern life. As I have explored throughout this essay, advertising's focus is on persuading rather than informing. Blurring the lines between what people need and instead encourages over-consumerism. The sheer volume of advertising combined with strategies that companies have used helps promote a society where people are pressured to buy more. Despite all this people still have a choice about what they want to purchase it's just important to not get lost in the advertising we see.

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List of Figures

Figure 1

This is an image of some advertising that exists in the world around us on billboards. Available at <https://www.bing.com/images/search?view=detailV2&ccid=HOhKNmtx&id=B11E4AD497E4345B944BB47F1E21DD2A4734D394&thid=OIP.HOhKNmtxRTJklj1aDfhsLwHaE8&mediaurl=https%3a%2f%2fimages.pexels.com%2fphotos%2f34639%2fpexels-photo.jpg%3fcs%3dsrgb%26dl%3dpexels-negativespace-34639.jpg%26fm%3djpg&cdnurl=https%3a%2f%2fth.bing.com%2fth%2fid%2fR.1ce84a366b71453264223d5a0df86c2f%3frik%3dINM0RyrdIR5%252ftA%26pid%3dImgRaw%26r%3d0&expv=3648&expw=5472&q=advertising&FORM=IRPRST&ck=5DCEBD1AD9DA1523CCF1788B36AE6DD4&selectedIndex=5&itb=0> (Accessed:25/4/2026)

Figure 2

This is an image of the Uncle Sam propaganda poster. Available at [James Montgomery Flagg Uncle Sam Poster](#) (Accessed:25/4/2026)

Figure 3

This is an image depicting what the White Feather Brigade did. Available at https://cdn-prod.opendemocracy.net/media/images/whiteFeather-ArnoldBennettCollier.2e16d0ba.fill-1200x630_jvf4nbN.jpg (Accessed:25/4/2026)

Figure 4

This is an image visually showing what the Overton Window is. Available at https://vectormine.b-cdn.net/wp-content/uploads/overton_window_outline-1-576x360.jpg (Accessed:25/4/2026)