COMM 287
ADVERTISING AS SOCIAL COMMUNICATION

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* ***WARNING*** * This is ***not*** a course in ***how*** to advertise, how to construct ad campaigns, how to design ads, etc. It does ***not*** approach advertising from a practitioner's viewpoint. This course looks at advertising from the viewpoint of ***social theory,*** of how we can understand advertising's broad political, economic, social and cultural role in modern society.

This course will examine the social, political, cultural and economic role of national advertising in consumer societies.

Part One: Existing Debates and the Development of the Consumer Culture

We will start by examining the predominant ways in which the debate about advertising has been framed until the present. Specifically we will focus on the critics who view advertising as an institution that manipulates people against their will, as well as looking at the defense of advertising that has come from the industry itself in seeking to legitimate its influential role. The rest of Part One will examine the historical, social, cultural and economic roots of advertising as a key institution of consumer societies. Specifically, we will focus on how changing relationships between different media forms, marketing theories, industrial strategies and popular culture have affected the content of ads when viewed historically. We will establish the existence of five separable stages in the development of national advertising through this century. There will a specific concentration on advertising as an industry that produces communication products.

Part Two: Advertising & Social Issues

Here we will start examining the products of the industry - the advertisements themselves. We will analyze the complex ways in which commercials are created, how they work in terms of the mediation of meaning, the basic formats that have been used through this century by the industry to accomplish this communication, and specific ways in which we can approach the study of advertisements.

With a fuller understanding of the complex ways in which advertising developed and the ways in which it works, we can now proceed to examine some of the major social issues connected with it including: the role that new direct-to-consumer advertising of pharmaceutical drugs plays in how consumers think about their personal health; the advertising of alcohol and tobacco; the specific issues that arise when discussing advertising to children; and the relationship between food marketing and the changing dietary habits people all over the world

Part Three: Advertising, Happiness and Environmental Collapse

We will start by looking at issues of labor and globalization, (and what has to be hidden for the advertisements to be able to have their intended effect) and move on to examine the processes of satisfaction and communication in modern society. The recent sociological literature on the satisfaction of needs and the constitution of "happiness" will be closely examined. Special attention will be paid to the way in which advertising is part of a process that leads to a limit on the nature of satisfaction that contemporary society is able to offer. We end the course with a major focus on how a host of pressing environmental, climate and financial issues are connected to the realm of consumption and advertising.

FORMAT:

This course is an asynchronous online course. All students must regularly check their UMASS email (@umass.edu). Important information will be delivered via this email address and it is the responsibility of students to access it.

REQUIRED LECTURES, READINGS & MOVIES:

All required lectures, readings and movies for the course are available via CANVAS at no cost. There will be **online quizzes and exams** or all required readings and movies.

Students are responsible for all the assigned reading and viewing.

GRADING REQUIREMENTS:

Three exams will be held **on-line** during the semester. Deadlines are listed in CANVAS

- Exam I (25%)
- Exam 2 (25%)
- Exam 3 (25%)
- On-Line Quizzes (25%)