

ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATION

tools to encourage better consumption

Gigantic hoardings, TV commercials, flyers, magazines ... there is no way to escape advertising as it spreads to the four corners of the globe. Advertising creates an illusion of material abundance, starts trends, sows the seeds of new wants and propagates the idea that buying means happiness. This expanding sector generates global revenues equal to one and a half times France's national budget. Some countries invest almost as much in advertising as they do in education. Intermediary between manufacturer and consumer, advertising plays an essential role in keeping the public informed and shaping their decisions. Whereas at one time its sole function was to make people buy more, today advertising must respond to new demands. Those of consumers who are looking for greater significance, transparency and ethics. Those of NGOs and governments that pressure advertisers to inform, alert and encourage responsible behaviour in the face of the issues now threatening our planet. And, finally, the demands of the United Nations Commission on Sustainable Development which, in 1997, engaged the advertising industry to help promote new -and most importantly sustainable- consumption patterns.

IMPACTS

Encouraging excessive consumption

Whether in developed industrialized nations or developing countries, over a quarter of the world's population has adopted a lifestyle that revolves around consumption. With people constantly on the lookout for new products, influenced by advertising and distribution, private consumption expenditures have increased fourfold since 1960. At this rate the planet will soon be unable to go on providing the necessary raw materials to keep pace with such demand for goods and services, or absorb the waste they produce. www.worldwatch.org/press/news/2004/01/08

One culture fits all

In developing countries, the arrival en masse of advertising campaigns by multinational firms tends to heighten frustration among the very poor. It also incites local populations to aspire to western lifestyles and abandon local traditions in favour of new consumption patterns.

Visual pollution

From Barcelona to Tokyo or Dakar, the same sight greets people as they enter any city: hundreds of advertising hoardings, sometimes displaying shocking images, disfigure the landscape. Meanwhile, energy-hungry illuminated signs and mobile outdoor advertising are becoming increasingly commonplace. http://portal.unesco.org/en/ev.php-URL_ID=13067&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html

Wasted paper

Brochures, catalogues and other mailshots are among the tools developed by the advertising industry to reach consumers. They are now so numerous as to pose problems of forest management, ink, paper recycling and waste processing. www.worldwatch.org/pubs/goodstuff/paper
www.iied.org/smg/pubs/rethink7.html

SOME COMPANIES HAVE ADOPTED GREENWASHING IN THEIR COMMUNICATION TO MAKE THEMSELVES APPEAR MORE ENVIRONMENTALLY FRIENDLY THAN THEY REALLY ARE. NGOs AND CONSUMER GROUPS HAVE SINGLED OUT THIS TECHNIQUE FOR CRITICISM, OBLIGING FIRMS TO RETHINK THEIR ADVERTISING STRATEGIES IF THEY HOPE TO REMAIN CREDIBLE.

→ **3/4**

of the world's population owns at least one television set



↓ Young people are the most influenced by advertising. Hedonist and idealistic, they want it all brand-name clothes and a sustainable planet. They are however increasingly savvy to corporate advertising techniques and know how to decipher their messages.

IN HIS OR HER LIFETIME, A CHILD BORN IN A DEVELOPED COUNTRY WILL CONSUME AS MUCH AS 30 TO 50 CHILDREN FROM A DEVELOPING COUNTRY.

REPORTING ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Under pressure from environmental groups and consumer lobbies, companies must now consider their role as members of the wider community and become good citizens. They have developed new tools to inform the public of their social and environmental values. In some countries, led by the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark and France, this is even a legal obligation. When publishing their financial reports, several thousand companies now include information on sustainable development, compared with just a few dozen in 1997. www.sustainreports.org
www.globalreporting.org

ANTI-ADVERTISERS AND ANTI-CONSUMERISTS ARE BECOMING MORE NUMEROUS AND WINNING MORE SUPPORT.

→ **23 H**

a week: the average amount of time young Americans spend watching TV. Almost the same amount of time they spend in school

SOME POLLUTING PRODUCTS ASSOCIATE THEIR NAME WITH IMAGES OF NATURE TO CONVEY A NOTION OF PURITY AND RESPECT FOR THE ENVIRONMENT THAT ONLY EXISTS ON PAPER OR ON THE SCREEN.



↓ World advertising expenditure reached \$446 billion in 2002, around 9 times more than in 1950.

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

→ Advertising and sustainable development: first steps towards rules

The French advertising standards bureau (BVP, Association française des publicitaires pour une publicité responsable) has published its recommendations on how the concept of sustainable development can be used in advertisements. From now on, this theme can no longer be used indiscriminately to promote products or brands. When it is used, advertising messages must respect the principles of truthful, objective and fair communication. This is the first ever example of the advertising industry taking steps to self-regulate how sustainable development is used in communication. www.uneptie.org/outreach/compact/docs/GC-Dialogue2004-presentations/Jean_Pierre_Teyssier.pdf
www.corpwatch.org/index.php



→ In 2004, the Palais des Festivals in Cannes hosted ACT Responsible, an exhibition on "how advertising can help change the world" by encouraging responsible behaviour. Proof of growing awareness within the advertising industry of the role it can play in promoting non-consumerist values. www.adforum.com/specialerevents/act4/responsible.asp

→ SER and responsible communication



Since the nineteen-nineties, a company's performance is no longer judged in purely economic terms but in view of its social and environmental impact too. The corporate world has grasped this change in attitude and increasingly focuses communication on social and environmental responsibility (SER). The Body Shop, Patagonia and Ben & Jerry's were among the trailblazers, directly informing their customers of the ecological value of their products or on labour conditions, and supporting environmental and development projects. Today, more and more companies are putting sustainable development at the heart of their campaigns. http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/csr/csr2002_en.pdf

→ Events organizers go green

Events planners are also beginning to incorporate sustainable development into their activities. The international sports world recently joined this movement: in 1999 the International Olympic Committee (IOC) adopted the Olympic movement's Agenda 21, which was drafted by the IOC's Sport and Environment Commission. By approving this declaration, the Olympic Games agree not only to minimize their impact on the environment, but to help improve it and leave behind a positive green legacy. Other organizations have followed suit. www.olympic.org/uk/organisation/commissions/environment/index_uk.asp



DOES SUSTAINABILITY SELL?

While activities in favour of sustainable development are now acknowledged as being part of a company's overall performance, the corporate world still has doubts as to its repercussions on sales. Some companies have shown there are profits to be made by positioning themselves in this register. Others meanwhile still have cold feet and are slow to promote their exploits in favour of sustainable development or ethical trade. This way they avoid laying themselves open to criticism from NGOs and the media if the rest of their activity doesn't quite reflect these values.

PUTTING IDEAS INTO PRACTICE

Individuals

- LEARN TO DECIPHER ADVERTISING MESSAGES AND GAUGE THEIR CONTENT
- REFUSE UNSOLICITED ADVERTISING IN THE LETTERBOX → LIMIT THE AMOUNT OF TELEVISION WATCHED → LOBBY FOR THE REMOVAL OF ILLEGAL ADVERTISING HOARDINGS → ASK COMPANIES FOR THEIR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT REPORTS
- REPORT MISLEADING ADVERTISEMENTS TO SELF-REGULATION AUTHORITIES

Companies

- PROVIDE TRANSPARENT INFORMATION ON CONCRETE ACTIVITIES BY THE COMPANY IN FAVOUR OF RESPONSIBLE AND SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT → ENSURE ADVERTISEMENTS RESPECT THE INDUSTRY'S OWN RECOMMENDATIONS → BAN DELIBERATELY MISLEADING ADVERTISING MESSAGES ("GREENWASHING") AND OTHERS THAT ENCOURAGE UNNECESSARY CONSUMPTION
- AVOID CREATING ENDLESS SELF-PROCLAIMED LABELS THAT ONLY CONFUSE CONSUMERS → LIMIT USE OF PRINTED ADVERTISING AND KEEP MAILING LISTS UP-TO-DATE → SET UP FOUNDATIONS IN SUPPORT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AND HUMANITARIAN PROJECTS AND DEVELOP SOCIAL MARKETING

Local authorities

- IMPLEMENT AND PROMOTE ENVIRONMENTALLY AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE PROJECTS → RAISE PUBLIC AWARENESS BY DIFFUSING MESSAGES AND MOBILIZING MUNICIPAL INFORMATION CHANNELS (RECYCLING, FAIR TRADE MARKETS, WORK BY LOCAL VOLUNTEER GROUPS, ETC.) → ENSURE ADVERTISEMENTS IN TOWNS AND CITIES STAY WITHIN THE LIMITS OF DECENCY AND THAT THEIR CONTENT RESPECTS RECOMMENDATIONS BY SELF-REGULATION BODIES
- PREVENT ADVERTISING SPRAWL (BILLBOARDS AND ILLUMINATED SIGNS)

HOW TO IMPLEMENT A RESPONSIBLE COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

- BE CREDIBLE, TRANSPARENT AND HONEST → GIVE SIMPLE, FACTUAL INFORMATION
- BE REALISTIC AND DESCRIBE PROBLEMS → ENSURE ENHANCED COLLABORATION BETWEEN MARKETING, COMMUNICATION AND ENVIRONMENT DEPARTMENTS → BRING SUCCESS STORIES TO PEOPLES' ATTENTION WITHOUT BEING AFRAID TO MENTION FAILURES
- ENCOURAGE EVERYONE IN THE COMPANY TO GET INVOLVED IN ITS SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY

FIND OUT MORE

The media in the information society, European Commission: http://europa.eu.int/comm/internal_market/media/index_en.htm
Young people and the media, awareness network:

www.media-awareness.ca

Canadian advertising standards:

www.adstandards.com

International Chamber of Commerce code of environmental advertising: www.iccwbo.org/home/statements_rules/rules/2001/code_of_environmental_advertising.asp

European Advertising Standards Alliance:

www.easa-alliance.org

Centre for a new American dream:

www.newdream.org

Responsible advertising and children: www.responsible-advertising.org

The global voice for consumers: www.consumersinternational.org

AT UNEP

→ THE ADVERTISING AND COMMUNICATION FORUM ON SUSTAINABILITY

In response to the obstacles and challenges the advertising sector, UNEP set up in 1999 the Advertising and Communication Forum. Its purpose is to raise awareness among advertisers, advertising agencies and the media of sustainable development issues, and to get them thinking about alternative forms of communication that better reflect consumers' changing expectations.

www.uneptie.org/pc/sustain/advertising/advertising.htm