Textbooks to teach advertising with: A review of *The Psychology of Advertising, 2nd edition* (Fennis & Stroebe, 2016) and *Advertising: Critical Approaches* (Wharton, 2015)

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Fennis, B.M, and Wolfgang Stroebe. *The Psychology of Advertising*. 2d ed. London: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2016.

Wharton, Chris. *Advertising: Critical Approaches*. Abingdon, Oxon; New York, NY: Routledge, 2015. Print.

As Bob M. Fennis and Wolfgang Stroebe note in their preface, there seems to be a dearth in textbooks on advertising research, especially when it comes to the psychology of advertising. A comprehensive critical perspective, Chris Wharton's aim, is arguably even rarer. Yet the fact that both books can be written as *textbooks* testifies to the reason of this scarcity: Advertising research is (by necessity!) so inter- and multidisciplinary that any attempt to write an umbrella introduction will fall short. I emphasise that these are textbooks because they both aim to introduce a novice audience to the breadth of their respective domains, elaborating on baseline theory as they proceed and dipping into 'parent disciplines' when necessary. One can easily imagine either book being the 'spring plank' reading in introductory courses in their respective foci, though neither suggests 'further readings' at the end of their chapters (this choice is, admittedly, much easier critiqued than realised). Either way, both proved helpful in putting quite a few ducks in a row even for the (only slightly) more experienced (and to very differing degrees of experience of each, admittedly) reader.

Before I delve into the actual review, I have to confess that I had an agenda before starting: I had hoped the books would, together, point the way to an (at least partially) integrated course on advertising, one that is both knowledgeable of state-of-the-art psychological inquiry and 'critical' in the cultural studies sense of the word. Yet that synergy remains somewhat elusive and certainly invites interested teachers to ponder its potentials—a project for another day.

Fennis and Stroebe's second edition of their *Psychology of Advertising* is a comprehensive overview of not only the latest research insights in the eponymous field (cross-cutting consumer psychology, social psychology, and cognitive psychology), but also makes a point out of discussing the theoretical backdrop from which these studies have sprung and the ways in which the predictions were tested. The authors suggest that this information should enable the reader not only to determine the validity of the outcomes, but also to consider how context may matter a lot in the way these results are interpreted. In light of the ongoing debate on the (seemingly poor) reproducibility of psychological research, this attention greatly benefits the novice student. Finally, and thankfully, this collation of research is thorough and very readable. To the lay person with a vested interest (such as myself), the book is accessible, informative, and helpful.

'Setting the stage,' chapter 1, offers a very brief overview of advertising research (though this is probably better served by indeed matching readings with a chapter or two from Wharton's book), but most illuminatingly includes a generalised discussion of the type of research typically conducted in the field. Though it may elicit numerous objections from culturally oriented readers (e.g., the close reading of the infamous "We're only No.2" Avis campaign comes across as force-fitted to exemplify the power of the 'two-sided advertisement,' and socio-cultural approaches to persuasion are overlooked wholesale), it is nevertheless useful in its clear exposition of the rest of the book's genealogy. Following an implied progression in dissecting consumer psychology, we then proceed in chapter 2 by separating out information processing into four stages that are relevant to the advertising context and which will echo with the diverse viewing modes Wharton expounds below: preattentive processing; focal attention; comprehension; and elaborative reasoning. Advertisers can call on different features to understand how each moment might affect the eventual reception on the brand. We think of: hedonic fluency (in preattentive processing);, salience,

vividness, novelty, and categorisation (drawing focal attention); the relationship between repeatability and believability (as related to comprehension); and finally self-schematas and metacognition (in elaboration). Yet, of course the moment of 'processing', whether intentional or incidental, as the authors put it, also relies on the functioning of memory. Chapter 3 thus reviews different theories on memory and spells out how advertising may influence choice at the moment of a purchase decision. Yet given the media landscape, advertising must also be able to cut through clutter, and advertisers have therefore devised techniques (such as repetitions, jingles, and layout) that make a brand more memorable (note that this is an explanation for advertising discourse that contrasts with constructivist approaches). Finally, the authors discuss whether advertising can distort memories, and the evidence is decidedly mixed.

The backbone of persuasion, however, is whether and how attitudes can be changed (chapter 5) and can influence buying behaviour (chapter 6). Chapter 4 is therefore dedicated to defining attitudes (and for which there is by no means a consensus), understanding their formation, their structure, and, finally, their functions. Chapter 5 then elaborates on the various forms of processing persuasive information that might lead to attitude change, including the theoretical debate about information processing and cognitive response models, how the debate yielded the trusty dual-process theories, and finally the unimodel. Particular strategies, such as humor, sex, two-sided arguments, product placement, and sponsorship are discussed as potentials to attract attention and lower resistance. Finally, chapter 6 takes us to the frontline of the purchase-decision moment, first recapping the theoretical history of the attitude-behaviour relationship, and then detailing the theory of reasoned action/planned behaviour, and commenting on how the intention-action gap can be narrowed. In the second part of the chapter, the authors comment on automatic processes and conclude with a review of the latest studies subliminal advertising ("the return of the hidden persuaders," p. 277), and nuance their

results—subliminal messaging is unlikely to change attitudes, making their effect short term. Yet, compliance is not always achieved by changing attitudes, and Chapter 7 thus moves the conversation 'beyond persuasion' to social influence and seven related mechanisms: the principles of reciprocity; commitment/consistency; social validation; liking; authority; scarcity; and confusion. Then, revisiting the many instances in the other chapters that drew on the mindlessness that consumers display, the authors suggest that the limited-resource account of cognition might provide an explanation.

Finally, chapter 8 reminds us we live in the 21st century, and singles out the Internet as a medium and a context that must be considered in its own right. Reviewing the literature on how features of online advertising differ from its predecessors, a key distinction is the opportunity for finer targeting. From online trust to online heuristics, decision support systems, and the impact of Google on memory, the chapter revisits topics discussed in depth before and details how the medium may alter both the nature of advertising and the processes of persuasion. The dynamics of online 'chatter' (or more word-of-mouth, interpersonal interaction) are given particular thought, having become more immediately observable and controlled compared to its offline counterpart.

Overall, Fennis and Stroebe's textbook is indeed an all-round companion to the psychological study of persuasion. It is therefore unsurprising that, given the field, references to the 'unconscious,' 'implicit,' and even 'subliminal' effects of advertising are made continuously. The research that relates to these notions would make excellent materials for discussion in classes, even if the course is not solely focused on psychology. For example, the proposition that consumers are generally uncritical of information because it is easier to accept a belief than to reject it clearly has thorough-going consequences for advertising, as one would assume that cognition (comprehension) would suffice for persuasion. In reality, this is obviously not straightforward (nor do the authors intend to imply so), but this strikes me as an

ideal moment for the integration of insights from critical socio-cultural or literary perspectives: the very nature of information, its context, and the importance of genre could challenge the extent to which this 'truth effect' has any effect at all on behaviour. Perhaps Wharton's *Advertising: Critical Approaches* can help us in such a mission.

It would be wrong to say that Wharton's focus on critical approaches is the first such book of its type, but it certainly has little competition in terms of what it aims to achieve: an introduction to thinking about advertising as a practice shaped by, indicative of, and structuring economic, social, and cultural orders. Most critical studies in book form tend to address marketing or media at large, and while helpful to understanding the method and the context, they might still overlook some of the medium's specificities. This is perhaps why, helpfully, Wharton begins not by expounding on a theory of the critical, but with a series of chapters called 'Foundations,' which progressively build an understanding of the advertising phenomenon as a creature of history and economics.

Chapter 1, 'The nature of advertising history,' perhaps slightly surprisingly, introduces historiography (the study and debating of historical methodologies) as a whole, pointing out the relevance of crucial questions about sources of evidence, differences in focal lenses, and establishing historical truths to the study of advertising across the ages. In other words, Wharton is implying that despite the tendency of some historical accounts to suggest an unproblematic progression to today's state of affairs, those accounts are only one potential version of events. Differences in scholarly interests and political trends, for example, will determine these accounts as much as the very availability of historical materials. Though bread and butter for humanists, the hazards of historical determinism is crucial knowledge for students in the social sciences.

With such a critically minded start, Wharton proceeds with an 'Historical outline' in chapter 2, starting in quite some detail with evidence of promotion in the ill-fated Pompeii, and

developing into a rather more cursory overview of technological innovations (printing press, photography, TV, radio, the Internet) that "have created the parameters of contemporary advertising and a constantly developing consumer culture" (p. 46). The emphasis on the culture that envelops advertising practices is warranted, and sure enough, chapter 3 is dedicated to 'Market society and its critics.' First delineating the formation of the market society in Britain from its agrarian beginnings to the industrialising empire, Wharton sketches a world in which commodities became both increasingly available and increasingly coaxed onto consumers: "[o]n behalf of consumer capitalism, advertising created not only wants but altered perceptions of needs, fashioned new views of specific products which took on meanings far removed from their use value and brought organized consumption close to the centre of social life" (p. 53). While this passage is not meant, I am sure, to be read in terms as stark as it seems to suggest, it does reveal a historical narrative that students are called to watch out for in chapter 1. The distinction between a product's use value and an advertising message that 'brings' the product *into* social life could be argued to be one such bias towards the conceptualisation of advertising that may be challenged with alternative historical and anthropological insights (e.g., that no object has even been devoid of a place in social life, and advertising certainly did not generate a new relationship to the material world in this sense). Nevertheless, understanding advertising in this way is fundamental to recognising where the critics that Wharton subsequently introduces come from. Marx and Marxist thought are of course on the playbill, but also Matthew Arnold's cultural conservatism and William Morris's lesser known criticism of industrialist capitalism feature in the line-up. The positions of all three critics do exemplify the breath of possible objections to market society, thereby introducing this vast topic quite concisely.

The fourth 'foundational' chapter is a contribution by Jonathan Hardy, who introduces us to 'Political economy approaches to advertising,' which "tend to share and amplify critiques

of advertising as the leading ideological agency for capitalism, for its role in promoting consumerism and possessive individualism, and its regressive, stereotypical representations of gendered, racial and other identifies" (p. 65). This agenda clarified, critical political economy (CPE) research specifically aims to develop a better understanding of the entire advertising system, the formation of the advertising industry, the nature of advertising work, the governance and regulation of advertising, and finally, the (power and financial) relationships between media and advertising. Topics such as the 'audience as a commodity' and digital 'free' labour find a natural home within the CPE lens, thus broadening, as Hardy intends, the concept of advertising. The chapter is an insightful addition that will give students some clear domains to take into account when developing any kind of critique, although Hardy's acknowledgement of the role of an interpreting consumer remains limited. Wharton's final chapter of the section, 'Cultural and critical approaches' follows the great traditions in cultural criticism, whirling through an overview of the Frankfurt School, the Birmingham Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies, scholars of ideology and hegemony (i.e., Althusser and Gramsci, of course), and the giants of postmodernism (Lyotard, Foucault, Baudrillard, and Derrida).

After such an introduction, which is admittedly ambitious in the materials it covers, Wharton's second 'Frameworks' section—divided into chapters respectively titled 'Advertising framework and encoding,' 'Texts,' and 'Reception'—reveals Wharton's own scholarly background in cultural studies more clearly, and it might leave scholars in consumer research, as I am, wondering where all the *other* critical research approaches to advertising have gone. Introducing Hall's seminal encoding-text-decoding model of cultural communications is useful, but compared to the humanist—and particularly reader-response—works conducted under the aegis of 'consumer culture theorists' (for a comprehensive overview, see Eric J. Arnould and Craig J. Thompson, "Consumer Culture Theory (CCT): Twenty Years of Research*," Journal of Consumer Research* 31 no. 4 (2005): 868–82), the

encoding/decoding model seems rudimentary at best. Sure enough, content analysis and textual analysis (or what I would more often term 'close reading') are introduced in chapter 7 as broad methodologies before plunging into iconography, formal analysis, and semiotics, but finer examples of rhetorical analysis remain elusive even in the case study on car advertising. The eighth and final chapter in this section on audience reception again usefully summarises and critiques advertising research in broad brushstrokes as either comprising studies about effects or 'uses and gratifications' studies, but overlooks reader-response theories and historical, cultural, and phenomenological studies about the way consumers generate meaning from advertisements in everyday consumption settings. Again, each chapter provides useful insights into the many ways in which advertising research has been and can be conducted, especially drawing out Hall's model into its intended full expression, but I do deplore the disappearance of work that has been otherwise influential within research on advertising-as-practice.

Finally, the third section introduces yet more advertising topics under the curious heading of 'Applications'. Going from 'Advertising in the home' (chapter 9) to the outdoors (chapter 10) and ending up in a special chapter dedicated solely to 'Sound and vision' (chapter 11), this section—and the book—culminates in a very brief discussion of 'Consumer culture' (chapter 12). Applications, as it turns out, refers to the further application of the encoding/decoding framework across the variety of settings and circumstances in which we might encounter (or that may be pervaded by) contemporary advertising. Given my reservations of using Hall's model as a global theory for a critical approach to advertising, this structure fails to appeal in its entirety. However, the topics drawn into each discussion are certainly of interest, and once habituated to the angle, avenues for alternative conceptual understandings do present themselves. The chapter on the home, for example, elaborates on: conceptions of public versus private spheres and spaces; the interrelated notions of the home,

the household, and the family; and the way in which advertising may form a part of the 'household flow.' The household as a horizontal interpretive community (versus the vertical community that comprises producers and receivers of communications) can be understood as potentially inhabiting different viewing scenarios, each calling for different activities and engagements with the advertising text. Outdoor advertising, in chapter 10, sees the discussion of what it means to be advertised to in an urban space, potentially experiencing 'neat capitalism' (the "new, informal, and irreverent face of capitalism" [p. 164]) in the form of youth culture and confrontational billboards, as well as activist activities, such as UK Uncut. By introducing these consumer culture phenomena in this chapter, it seems that Wharton is arguing public spaces are essential to their constitution.

Chapter 11, 'Sound and vision' digs briefly into film studies to propose three viewing activities, 'looking,' 'glancing,' and 'gazing.' Coming back to earlier remarks about the sometimes cursory, sometimes intent, nature of advertising viewership, the chapter provides terminology that might be helpful in thinking through key distinctions in advertising contexts and viewer reception. The passage on sound, unfortunately, seems unnaturally short despite the availability of further research, and the tantalizing reference to the construction of consumer 'life worlds' warrants more elaboration. The last chapter, 'Consumer culture,' then forms the summarising tail of the book, though one could argue that consumer culture was an implied presence all long. Still, the chapter picks up on the formation of consumer identity as key in understanding advertising, as well as branding as a special form of advertising.

It feels as if the book runs slightly out of steam by the last few chapters, although this might be appropriate for an increasingly knowledgeable readership—it sets the scene for further inquiry rather than attempt to be the decisive compendium of critical advertising research. My objections to Wharton's oversight of large pockets of consumer research literature might be unfair, as it is also true that advertising researchers have been known to do

the same with cultural, sociological, and media studies at large. Yet I include it in the review because if the aim is to provide students with a well-rounded understanding of critical approaches to advertising, at least some of the discussion must be oriented towards the works of those scholars who attempt to do so from 'within' the discipline of marketing. Cultural researchers might be pleasantly surprised at some of the insights this can afford. Nevertheless, Wharton's introduction does approach and summarize the many critical approaches in thought-provoking ways, without ever assuming too much background knowledge on the part of the reader nor extending his observations for too long. Despite its tapered end, the book is, impressively, both pithy and far reaching.

In conclusion, does a double bill of Fennis and Stroebe and Wharton yield cross-cutting potential for teaching a critical advertising psychology in the classroom? Not quite, but this fantasy is admittedly a tall order, and there are glimmers of intersections to be reaped by the attentive reader.

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