

THE ATTENTION MERCHANTS

From the daily newspaper to social media, how
our time and attention is harvested and sold

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The Attention Merchants



MASTERS OF BLAZING MODERNITIES

THE CONQUEST OF TIME AND SPACE

THE THIRD SCREEN

WON'T BE FOOLED AGAIN



Masters of Blazing Modernities



HARVESTING HUMAN ATTENTION

- The game of harvesting human attention and reselling it to advertisers has become a major part of our economy.
- This industry, whose very business is the influence of consciousness, can and will radically shape how our lives are lived.
- The attention industry has asked and gained more and more of our waking moments in exchange for new conveniences and diversions.
- As a society and individually, we have accepted a life experience that is in all of its dimensions mediated as never before in human history.
- Potential for surrender to the charms of magical thinking, remains imbedded in our psyche awaiting only the advertiser to awaken it.

ATTENTION IS A COMMODITY, LIKE A CROP, WHEAT OR PORK BELLIES.

- Attention is a resource that is always being spent. There is no saving it for later. The question is always, what should I pay attention to?
- Since the time the serpent in the garden of Eden influenced Eve and Eve in turn persuaded Adam, the world has tried to find out ways and means of controlling human behavior.
- In most areas of life, we rely on others for the presentation of facts and ultimately choose between manufactured alternatives.
- We are compelled with carrots. Advertisers rely on the power of entertainment to weld audiences into a sellable product.
- For the advertisers, by far the most valuable function of advertising is the shaping or creation of demands that would not otherwise exist.



The Conquest of Time and Space



NEARLY EVERY PART OF OUR LIVES IS COMMERCIALY EXPLOITED

- Propaganda must be total. The propagandist must utilize all the technical means and media available in his time. Movies, posters, meetings, door-to-door canvassing in one century and social media in another.
- Sporadic or random effort does not bear the full propaganda fruit and will come up short to capture full attention.
- The full potential of the business model where attention is converted into revenue was discovered during propaganda during the World Wars. Industry took note.
- Britain grew its army from 80k at point of declaring war against Nazi Germany, who had over 6 million soldiers, to over 700k in 3 months with the first advertising/propaganda campaign by a nation to fight for “King and Country.”
- Out of 5.5 million men of military age in England half volunteered to enlist to fight in the war. The campaign achieved by persuasion what all other countries achieve by legal coercion (the draft).
- Any communication is potentially propagandistic in the sense of propagating a view. For it presents one set of facts or one perspective fostering or weakening some stereotype held by the mind.

THE MASSES PREFER A COMMANDER VERSUS A PETITIONER

- The conscious and intelligent manipulation of the organized habits and opinions of the masses is an important element in a democratic society.
- The New York Sun was the first newspaper for the masses. It's sold for just one cent, significantly under the cost of production. This was also five times lower than the competition that was meant more for the wealthy. This paper created advertisement and public opinion.
- The great masses receptive ability is only very limited, their understanding is small, but their forgetfulness is great.

The Third Screen



DEMAND ENGINEERING

- Many of us are perpetually distracted, spending more time on social media and watching TV consequently consuming more advertisement than we could ever serve our own useful purpose.
- As adults we are hardly ever unreachable. Seldom away from a screen of some kind. Rarely not being solicited or sold to.
- Demand engineering: Creating the desire for products that otherwise might not exist.

BRANDING

- Branding: creating loyalty for some maker by creating an impression, valid or not, that something truly sets it apart from others like it.
- In the battle for our attention, there is a particular importance of who gets there first or most often.
- Establishing a warm association at a young age, when we are impressionable, can yield payoffs that last a life time for businesses by driving purchase decisions through brand awareness.
- The most effective brand advertising does not try to convince you to try and make a choice, but rather to convince you that there is no choice.
- It can succeed if it can manage to make the brand part of your identity.
- True brand advertising is an effort not so much to pursue, but to convert.
- At its most successful, it creates a product cult, whose loyalist cannot be influenced by mere information.
- What is offered is not merely a good product, but something deeply more fulfilling; a sense of meaning.
- Information cannot be acted upon without attention. Thus, attention capture and information are essential to a functioning market economy.

Won't Be Fooled Again



WE HAVE THE POWER TO TUNE OUT, IGNORE, AND UNPLUG

- Any and all information that one consumes or pays attention to will have some influence, even if just forcing a reaction.
- With all the influence surrounding us daily, we over estimate our own capacity for truly independent thought.
- The only communications without influence are the ones we learn to ignore or never hear at all.
- When advertising misleads, confuses, or fools customers, it does not aid the market process but instead defeats it.
- CBS pamphlet to advertisers: “Radio presents the living voice of authority giving it the subtle power to move people, to mold them, to enlist them, and command them.”
- It is far more taxing to learn to ignore messages that seem to speak to you specifically.
- Did the cable channel appealing to market clusters, called fragmentation, actually increase the fragmentation of American society?

MY EXPERIENCE IS WHAT I AGREE TO AND WHAT I ATTEND TO

- “When we reach the end of our days, our life experience with equal what we paid attention to, whether by choice or by default.” - William James
- All effective propaganda must limit itself to very few points and to use them like a slogan until every last man can understand what was intended by the word.
- The successful philosophers were also advertisers who could sell their new models of the universe to a large number of others thus converting thought to action, mind to matter.
- The counterintuitive truth: Anti-commercialism yields great commercial success.