

"the rap anthem of the Mideast Revolution." The song and a subsequent one that praised the growing protest movement in Tunisia brought the wrath of the Tunisian government, which arrested El Général, only to release him a week later after political protestors rallied to his cause. After the Tunisian government was overthrown, El Général was invited to perform his anthem live for thousands of young demonstrators.

Ultimately, the example of rap music at home and abroad demonstrates the workings of hegemony. Mass media texts are contradictory; they can be oppositional, presenting ideological alternatives, even as they reproduce specific dominant ideological assumptions. But maintaining even this limited form of critique is difficult. Commercialization is part of the process through which the ideological struggle is waged; even critical media products have a tendency to be (at least partially) incorporated into mass, commercial products that accept the boundaries of mainstream definitions of social reality. This is, of course, an ongoing process, and incorporation is never total. But the media industry has proved to be remarkably resilient and innovative—it seems that virtually any form of expression can be tamed enough to be sold to a mass market. But the rise of platforms like YouTube also suggests that, under the right circumstances, rap music can now be distributed in a way that bypasses the taming influences of the commercial marketplace to play a role in vibrant movements for political change.

ADVERTISING AND CONSUMER CULTURE

Each day, we are bombarded with advertisements in our homes, cars, workplaces, online, and on the street. As businesses seek new places to advertise their goods and services, ads can be found just about everywhere. Buses and subways have long been prime advertising spaces, catching the eyes of riders and passersby alike. Airlines sometimes sell ad space on the outsides of planes. Television and radio have long been chock-full of ads. When you log onto the Internet, you find that colorful advertisements are also part of the cyberspace experience: pop-up windows in online newspapers, banner ads at the bottom of e-mails sent through "free" e-mail services, in "free" blogging platforms and websites, and also on Google and Facebook. Ads surround sporting events, both on television and in sports arenas. They arrive in the mail and via cell phone. We wear advertising logos on our clothes and hum advertising jingles in the shower. In short, ads are so deeply embedded in our environment that we are likely to see, hear, and even smell them (in the form of magazine perfume ads) without thinking twice.

What kinds of stories do advertisements tell about ourselves and our society? Certainly, on one level, ads are specific to their product or service. They tell us that if we drink a particular brand of beer, we will meet attractive women or that if we wear the right makeup, we will meet handsome men; if we purchase a certain automobile, we will gain prestige; if we use specific cleansers, we will save time; and if we wear certain clothes, we will find adventure. Ads may also tell us that a particular item will save us money, that a specific service will make us healthier, or that a new product will make a great gift for a loved one. There is a wide range of specific messages in these ads, suggesting connections between products and lifestyles and between services and states of mind and presenting a host of information about prices, availability, and the like. We are not



Advertisements occupy increasingly large amounts of public space. This photo shows a particularly striking example of ads towering over an urban setting. Ads also populate our daily landscape in less dramatic ways. In addition to the regular media, T-shirts, bumper stickers, grocery bags, junk mail, and many other sites all carry ads. Where have you seen advertisements today?

simply passive participants in all of this. We recognize advertising conventions and don't expect the connections depicted in ads—cosmetics and love, suits and success, for example—to be taken literally.

Despite the diversity of advertising messages and their frequent use of irony and humor, there is an underlying commonality to almost all advertisements: They are fundamentally about selling. They address their audiences as consumers and celebrate and take for granted the consumer-capitalist organization of society. This perspective is, of course, decidedly ideological. Ads tell us that happiness and satisfaction can be purchased, that each of us is first and foremost an individual consumption unit, and that market relations of buying and selling are the appropriate—perhaps the only—form of social relations outside the intimacy of the family. Sometimes even the intimacy of the family is seemingly up for sale. One recent commercial implied that a father could spend more quality time with his son if he bought a DirecTV satellite dish! Advertising presumes and promotes a culture of consumption, normalizing middle- or even upper-middle-class lifestyles and making buying power a measure of both virtue and freedom.

In the process, advertising elevates certain values—specifically, those associated with acquiring wealth and consuming goods—to an almost religious status. Moreover, advertising promotes a worldview that stresses the individual and the realm of private life, ignoring collective values and the terrain of the public world (Schudson 1984). The values that advertising celebrates do not come out of thin air, but this does not make them any less ideological. Whether or not ads are successful at selling particular products—some ad

campaigns succeed, and others fail—the underlying message in advertising, which permeates our media culture, is the importance of the values of consumerism.

Selling Consumerism in the Early 20th Century

Stuart Ewen (1976) has explored the historical roots of what we now call consumer culture, tracing the role of early 20th-century advertising in its creation. Turn-of-the-century capitalists, captains of industry, saw mass advertising as a means of shaping the consciousness of the American population in a way that would give legitimacy and stability to the rapidly industrializing society. The key to this new consciousness was the creation of a new way of life based on the pleasures of consumption. Mass advertising emerged in the 1920s, when leaders of the business community began to see the need for a coordinated ideological effort to complement their control of the workplace. Advertising would become the centerpiece of a program to sell not only products but also a new, American way of life in which consumption erased differences, integrated immigrants into the mainstream of American life, and made buying the equivalent of voting as a form of commitment to the democratic process.

From the start, then, advertising was more about creating consumers than selling individual products. If a mass production economy was to be profitable and if those who worked for long hours under difficult conditions in the factory were to be pacified, new needs and habits had to be stimulated. This was the job of advertising. Its early practitioners built on people's insecurities about their lives and their appearances to shape desires for new consumer products. Solutions to personal problems were to be found in the world of consumption, an early version of the currently prevalent attitude that views a day of shopping as a way to cheer up oneself. Ads suggested that new products, such as mouthwash, hand lotion, and deodorant, would protect people from embarrassment and give them tickets to the modern world. Old habits and folkways—the traditions that recent immigrants brought to the United States—were to be discarded in favor of the new “American way,” participation in a consumer society. Ads sold consumerism as a gateway to social integration in 20th-century America and as an ideology that would smooth over social conflicts—especially class conflict—and serve as a form of social cement.

One way advertising tried to sell a cross-class ideology of consumerism was through its focus on the realm of consumption and its neglect of production. The industrial workplace might be unsatisfying, even degrading, but advertising offered a world that was far removed from the drudgery of work, emphasizing the wonders of the consumer lifestyle. It was, after all, that lifestyle and associated worldview that ads were selling, regardless of whether people had the means to really live it. As Ewen (1976) puts it, while the ideology of consumerism

served to stimulate consumption among those who had the wherewithal and desire to consume, it also tried to provide a conception of the good life for those who did not. . . . In the broader context of a burgeoning commercial culture, the foremost political imperative was *what to dream*. (p. 108)

Such dreams could be realized only by consuming goods, and even this was only a temporary realization, requiring continuous consumption in search of the lifestyle promoted by advertising. Our culture of consumption, then, is intimately connected to advertising,

which helped create it and continues, in new forms, to sustain consumerism as a central part of contemporary American ideology.

Women's Magazines as Advertisements

The “women’s magazine” is one medium that is particularly advertising oriented and consistently promotes the ideology of consumerism. Its emphasis on ads—which often seem to make up the bulk of the content—has led one critic to label this genre the “women’s advertising magazine” (McCracken 1993). Publications such as *Vogue*, *Glamour*, *Redbook*, *Cosmopolitan*, and *Modern Bride* include page after page of glossy ads featuring products targeted specifically at women.



Source: AP Photo/Hearst.

So-called women’s magazines are loaded with advertisements and editorial content, nearly all of which promote an ideology that celebrates consumption associated with beauty, fitness, attracting men, and the “good life.”

magazines promote the consumer lifestyle by showing how beauty, sexuality, career success, culinary skill, and social status can be bought in the consumer marketplace. Social problems, from the standpoint of consumer ideology, are redefined as personal problems that can be solved by purchasing the appropriate product. Women's magazines, in addressing a specific social group, identify women as a consumption category with special product needs. The magazines link an identity as a woman with a set of specific consumer behaviors, making the latter the prerequisite for the former. To be a "woman," then, is to know what to buy; the ad content in women's magazines both displays the specific products and celebrates the pleasures and needs of consumption.

But there is more to women's magazines than just the ads, even though a common reading strategy is to casually leaf through the pages, glancing at the ads and headlines. Ellen McCracken (1993) argues that the editorial content—the nonadvertising articles—is itself a form of "covert advertising" that promotes the same kind of consumer-oriented ideology. The most visible ad is the cover of the magazine. The standard image of the ideal woman on the cover suggests that purchase of the magazine will provide clues to how and what to buy in order to become the ideal woman. In addition, covers are often reproduced inside the magazine along with information about the products displayed, suggesting that the image depicted is one that can be purchased.

Even the "editorial advice" provided by women's magazines is a form of covert advertisement, selling the consumer ideology. Beauty advice, for example, routinely suggests the consumption of various forms of makeup as a way to achieve beauty. Such advice often identifies brand names that are most effective—brands frequently promoted in ads in the same magazine. The regular makeover feature, in which an "average" woman is turned into a glamorous model look-alike, is, in essence, an endorsement of the beauty products advertised elsewhere in the magazine. Advice, then, really concerns appropriate consumption habits. Just as early ads identified newfound needs, the women's magazine suggests what women need. In the end, women's magazines use both direct and covert advertising to sell magazines and promote an ideology that celebrates the consumption of gender-specific products as a means to identity formation and personal satisfaction—the dream of the "good life."

ADVERTISING AND THE GLOBALIZATION OF CULTURE

The dreams that advertisements sell within the United States are also exported all around the globe. American-made ads for American brands—from Coca-Cola to Nike—circulate through the growing global media culture. More generally, American media products, from television programming to Hollywood films, are consumed by a vast international audience. Both the ads and the programming serve as a kind of international promotional vehicle for the American way of life by focusing on the material abundance and consumer opportunities available in the United States.

While different products use different sales pitches and the entertainment media explore a range of themes set in various locations, most American media—especially those that are exported—share an underlying frame of reference that defines America by its combination of consumer capitalism and political freedom. Because media are owned and

operated by profit-making companies, it should not be surprising that the cornucopia of images converges in the promotion of the benefits of a consumer society. Given the rapidly growing global economy, American-based companies see the international market as one of the keys to 21st-century success.

If advertisements and exported entertainment promote the American way of life, what exactly are they selling? After all, it is difficult to reduce the United States, a diverse and fragmented culture, to simple, unambiguous themes. The images on global display, like much domestic advertising, are about dreams. America is portrayed as a kind of dreamland where individuals can fulfill (or buy?) their desires. The images of the dreamland do not require a rigid uniformity, because central to the ideology on display are the notions of individuality and freedom, which merge into the concept of *consumer choice*. Dreams are fulfilled by individual consumers who make choices about what to buy: Coke, Pepsi, or 7Up; Calvin Klein, The Gap, or Ralph Lauren; Nike or Reebok; Macintosh or IBM; Avis or Hertz. The route to happiness in this electronic dreamworld is consuming the "right" product. Think about how happy the diners are in McDonald's commercials or how peaceful the world is in the Ralph Lauren magazine ads.

The world portrayed in television programs, such as *Modern Family* or *Brothers and Sisters*, similarly displays images of attractive people living comfortable lives surrounded by contemporary consumer goods. Both advertisements and entertainment media promote a commitment to the latest styles—for example, in clothes, cars, leisure activities, and food—that requires not just consumption but continuous consumption to keep up with stylistic changes. The focus on style is directed particularly at youth, who are increasingly the most coveted market and who are particularly avid media users. The international advertising, television, and music scenes have helped generate an emerging cross-national, global youth culture in which teens and young adults in different countries adopt similar styles in clothes and appearance and select the same brands; consume the same soda, cigarettes, and fast food; and listen to and play the same kinds of music. The international teen market may cross national boundaries; but, with the help of American media products, youth style is based to a great degree on American images and consumer goods.

American media products may be the most prominent in global circulation, but they are not the only media images out there. Various European and Japanese companies also produce media and advertising for an international market, often in concert with U.S.-based companies. Herbert Schiller (1992), one of the early critics of the export of American mass media, argues that globally circulating media images all promote a similar ideology, regardless of their national origin. While the use of mass media as a tool for marketing lifestyles may have had its origins in the United States, it has become a global phenomenon. Although global media images may display national cultural differences as part of the sales pitch, they highlight difference as part of the promotion of the value of consuming and acquiring things. Ironically, cultural differences in global media images—such as multicultural images in American media—attract audiences for the promotion of a consumerist ideology that most fundamentally aims to bring different cultures together into an increasingly homogeneous, international consumer culture. If "we are the world," as the 1980s hit song for famine relief asserted, it is because we all buy, or dream about buying, the same things.

Culture has become increasingly global, with media images circulating across national boundaries. At the same time, U.S. media images display more difference than they did a

generation ago. But what messages do U.S. media images present about the status of Americans and the status of foreigners in this global culture? This question fundamentally addresses ideology.

In his study of advertising images of foreigners, William O'Barr (1994) argues that the ideological analysis of ads requires us to look at what he calls the "secondary discourses" within the advertisements. As opposed to the primary discourse, which concerns the specific qualities of the advertised product, secondary discourses are those ideas about social relationships that are embedded within the ads. The ideology of advertising images, from this perspective, is to be found in the ways the images convey messages about social life at the same time they try to promote a specific product. Context, setting, characteristics of the principal actors, and the interaction between actors within the ad are central to these secondary discourses.

In contemporary print ads, according to O'Barr (1994), there are three main categories of ads that feature images of foreigners: travel ads, product endorsements, and international business ads. The foreigners within travel ads are depicted as the "other"—different from the "us" that the ad is targeting—and the ads suggest that these others are available for the entertainment of American tourists. Implicit both within the images of local people dancing, painting, and smiling with American tourists and within the ad copy that invites tourists as "honored guests" or offers to "open both our homes and hearts" to visitors is a message that foreign lands are in the business of serving American visitors. Such images, by offering satisfaction from local people who aim to please, suggest that the needs and desires of Americans are the key to the potential relationship. The pattern in travel ads is unambiguous; the American tourist dominates the relationship with foreign cultures, particularly when the ads promote travel to Third World countries.

Product advertisements that draw on images of foreigners make connections between the advertised commodity and associations we have with foreign lands. O'Barr (1994) suggests images that, for example, link lingerie to Africa through the use of black models in apparently "primitive" clothing or that connect perfume to China or India by associating the product with Chinese art and characters or the Taj Mahal tell us stories about these foreign societies. The irony is that the products—in this case the lingerie or perfume—have nothing to do with societies in Africa, China, or India; the images of "others" are used to promote products made and used in the West.

Why, then, do ads draw on such images? O'Barr (1994) argues that the images of foreign lands are intended to suggest that the products are exotic or romantic. In so doing, they suggest that Africans, Chinese, or Indians are different from Americans, often depicting them as more primitive and, particularly, more sexual. These associations are intended to make the products attractive while simultaneously reaffirming that foreigners are fundamentally different.

Images of foreigners in ads for travel and products highlight difference, depicting an "other" who is subordinate to, but a source of pleasure for, American tourists and consumers. The ideology underlying these images about the place of the United States in the contemporary global order differs little from the messages in earlier ad images of foreigners. But the globalization of the economy has produced a new ad image of the foreigner: the potential business partner.

When the issue is international business, ad images no longer suggest difference, which might be an obstacle to conducting business. Instead, images of foreigners in international

business ads emphasize that Americans and foreigners share a perspective and have a common set of goals. Foreign businesspeople are depicted not as "others"—as an exotic or threatening "them"—but as people just like us. These ads are directed at a much more limited audience—international businesspeople—than are the travel or product ads. Business ads, however, do suggest that there is an alternative to the depiction of foreigners as others, even if it is now limited to the global corporate community.

The most widely circulating images of "otherness" in advertising convey messages about foreigners from a distinctly American point of view and suggest that there are fundamental differences between "us" and "them"; that we have power in our relationships with "them"; and that "they" are available to stimulate, entertain, and serve "us." Media in a global culture may provide more images of foreign people and lands—and international business ads suggest that new kinds of images are emerging—but the underlying message in advertisements about who we are and who they are draws on age-old assumptions about the relationship between powerful Americans and subordinate foreigners.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has looked at the content of mass media by adopting an ideological approach. We have reviewed the underlying theoretical frameworks of ideological analysis and examined several specific cases to detect ideology at work in mass media. As our examples suggest, there is no singular ideology that is promoted by popular media. Researchers who study the ideology of media are interested in the underlying stories about society that the media tell, the range of values that the media legitimize, and the kinds of behaviors that are deemed "normal." Most popular media promote, often in subtle and even contradictory ways, perspectives that support our basic social arrangements and endorse the legitimacy of social institutions, marginalizing attitudes and behaviors that are considered to be out of the "mainstream."

Media images can and sometimes do challenge this mainstream, status quo-oriented ideology by providing a critique of contemporary social organization and norms, but commercialization makes it difficult for media to maintain a critical voice. The search for popularity, wider distribution, and profitability tends to dull the critical edges of media imagery, pushing media back toward more mainstream (and marketable) ideologies. There are, to be sure, media that consistently promote alternative ideological perspectives. Local weekly newspapers, journals of opinion, public access television, and independent films are often quite self-conscious about providing perspectives that differ from the dominant popular media. These alternatives, however, remain on the margins of the media scene, reaching small audiences and lacking the capital to mount a serious challenge to the dominant media.

In this chapter, we have explored the ideology of various media texts, examining the underlying perspectives within the images that confront us every day. As we examine media content, we need to look even more specifically at the ways that mass media represent the social world. In Chapter 6, we turn our attention to the relationship between media images and social inequality.