

MSCH-A315

Section 15747

Advertising and Consumer Culture

Spring 2017

11:15 a.m.-12:30 p.m. Tues./Thurs.

FF 312



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Office Hours: 12:30-2:30 p.m., Thursdays

Office Location: Franklin Hall Lobby

Course Summary

It has become commonplace to say that we consume things. We consume food and drink for energy and hydration, and we are consumers of the many goods and services that make up our world. In many respects, consumption fuels our culture and society—it helps organize our lives, fuels how we interact with one another, and offers a foundation for how we constitute our identities. But what exactly does it mean to be a consumer? Where did consumerism come from, and how has it been sustained? How has the growth of advertising played a role in expanding consumer culture? Perhaps most importantly, why might all of us care about this matter for our everyday lives? This course will attempt to answer these questions through the historical study of advertising and consumerism, as well as an examination of the critical debates surrounding advertising in our contemporary moment, with an eye toward the social and political consequences of living in a commercial world.

This is an upper-level course that is designed for self-motivated students. It requires a good amount of reading each week, and its assignments entail significant levels of critical engagement and creativity. This is *not* a course that will teach you how to produce advertising content, or train you in the skills of public relations. Rather, it is a course for students to learn key historical, theoretical, and cultural debates related to advertising and consumerism. These are all skills that can make you a stronger producer and creator of media, but the focus of our course is on historical and critical concepts.

REQUIRED TEXT:

All readings will be made available as .pdf files via Canvas. You can access these materials at the MSCH-A315 Canvas site at any time through the “Files” tab. You should bring a copy of each day’s reading class, in hard or electronic copy. You should have read each reading carefully before class, taking detailed notes, and arrive ready to ask questions about and discuss the concepts of the reading.

COURSE POLICIES AND EXPECTATIONS

Participation/Attendance

Participation is crucial to success in this course; similarly, it is difficult to participate if one does not attend. However, “participation” is often the most ambiguous word in the university environment. You do not have to demonstrate mastery of the material each class, but you should consistently be willing to ask questions, respond to others, and show you have prepared for each class meeting (also known as “doing the reading”). If a student misses more than **three (3)** classes, their participation grade will be lowered by one third of a letter grade for each subsequent absence. If a student misses more than **seven (7)** classes, their overall course grade will be lowered by one half of a letter grade for each subsequent absence.

I do my best to cultivate a respectful and comfortable environment for each and every student, and ask that you please respect the contributions of others. If you feel uncomfortable sharing your opinion or questions, please let me know so I can do my best to adjust my teaching style.

Late Work

If you see a problem meeting a deadline, it is your responsibility to contact me **well** ahead of time to discuss the possibility of an extension. Extensions will only be granted in extreme circumstances. Consult the syllabus for all due dates. Written assignments will be due to the appropriate portal on Canvas by the start of class. All submissions, grading, and feedback will occur through the Canvas system.

Contacting Me/Office Hours

I do my best to return e-mails on the same date, provided they are sent at reasonable hours. If you have not heard from me in 48 hours (a very rare occurrence!), please send a follow-up email to make sure you haven't gotten lost in the shuffle. I encourage each of you to meet with me during office hours at least once a semester. This provides an opportunity to continue conversations and let me know how I can help you succeed. If my scheduled time is inconvenient, you should feel welcome to schedule a meeting at another time via e-mail.

Personal Technology

You are welcome to use a laptop or tablet to take notes or to discuss the day's readings, but please do not use cell phones during class. **Please note:** Technology is a privilege; I reserve the right to suspend technology use at any point in the semester if I feel its presence is impeding learning.

Plagiarism/Academic Misconduct

Plagiarism is defined as “presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged...A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgement. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge indebtedness whenever: directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written; using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories...or offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgement” (“Indiana University Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct”).

If you are concerned about proper citation method, you should contact me for help in advance of turning in your assignments. *I make the assumption that all students understand how to properly cite sources.*

Writing Assignments

Writing is a process and not an event. Good writing takes time and consideration, and cannot be done the night before a paper is due. You should anticipate composing and revising a series of drafts for each of your writing assignments in order to craft the best work possible. I encourage each of you to meet with me in my office throughout the semester to discuss the evolution of your writing, and to seek help on developing and clarifying your ideas. You will have the opportunity to rewrite a paper once per semester if you are not satisfied with your grade.

If you need more intensive assistance, please take advantage of the campus's Writing Tutorial Services (WTS). You can find hours, location, and contact information at www.indiana.edu/~wts

Special Needs

If you have any special needs (economic constraints, illnesses, unusual learning styles, complex schedules, etc.) that may affect your work in this course, please let me know as soon as possible (ideally, by the end of Week One) so we can develop a plan to accommodate them.

Grading

A grade of "A" is not simply given for effort, or for completing the basic requirements of any given assignment, but is rather earned through thoughtful engagement. You are welcome to meet with me at any point in the semester to discuss your grade in the class.

Detailed Grading Criteria

A – Excellent and Exemplary. Work or performance that goes beyond meritorious to the extent of providing an example or model of excellence for others.

B – Good/Meritorious. Work or performance that not only meets all requirements but exceeds them, demonstrating depth, originality, and other marks of quality that give the work distinction.

C – Satisfactory. Work or performance that fully meets all requirements competently and shows the ability to function as a college student.

D – Marginal. Work or performance that either 1) fails to meet all requirements, though what is done may be considered competent; 2) meets all requirements but not at a basic level of competence; or 3) both of the above but not poor enough to be considered failing.

F – Failing. Work or performance that falls significantly short of requirements, basic competence, or both. And this also includes, of course, work not done.

ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW

Attendance and Participation: 15%

Media Advertisement Presentation: 10%

Literature Review: 15%

Midterm: 15%

Brand Analysis: 15%

Forum Posts: 15%

Final Exam: 15%

Media Advertisement Presentation (10%): Once in the semester, each student will present an advertisement of their choice that connects in some way to the topic of that day, and explain its significance for our class. This advertisement can be a commercial, a poster, a billboard, some kind of object, or anything else that is “marketing” a good or service. This will consist of the following elements:

- Introduction of the advertisement (what is it, and why did you choose it?)
- Connection to course material (how does it illustrate a concept from our lectures or readings?)
- Discussion question (ask one question to the class, and moderate the answers)

You will be graded not only on the incorporation of the above three elements, but also your eloquence and poise as a public speaker.

Due Date: Sign up during week one

Literature Review (15%): Due in **week five**, this three-to-four page paper will ask you to compare and contrast two of the course readings from the first month of class in terms of their arguments about and methods for approaching the study of advertising and consumer culture. You will write an argumentative paper that takes a position on why one reading is more valuable than the other. A more detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in class.

Due Date: Thursday, February 9

Midterm Exam (15%): Taken at the end of week eight, this exam will cover all the material in the class to date. It will be a mixture of multiple choice and essay questions.

Date: Thursday, March 2

Brand Analysis (15%): Due in **week eleven**, this four-to-five page paper will ask you to research how a brand is promoted and sold to consumers. As you will see, our class casts a wide net of what constitutes a “brand”—including not just corporations and businesses, but also politicians, celebrities, nations, and ourselves. Your paper will make an argument about how a brand is promoted, drawing on relevant course concepts and readings. A more detailed assignment sheet will be distributed in week nine.

Due Date: Thursday, March 30

Forum Posts (15%): Once each week, you will be responsible for writing a brief, preliminary response to a course reading in our Canvas Discussion Forums. You are expected to post approximately 6-8 sentences each week that:

- 1) identifies and transcribes a specific passage or claim from the day’s reading
- 2) explains something you found to be compelling or interesting about the reading, either from within the passage you transcribed or from another part of the reading
- 3) asks one question of the reading that you would like to discuss in class. This could be something you did not understand, something you would like to discuss in greater detail, or any other related questions that come to mind.

You should consider this a “low-stakes” form of preparing for class discussion. While you should strive to use correct grammar and spelling, as well as write coherently, these are not graded on the formal quality of the writing, but rather on your willingness to work through the three components of the Forum Post each week. Because they will be posted publicly on Canvas, you are also encouraged to respond to other classmates’ observations and ask questions of your peers. The goal is to begin organizing a conversation and developing talking points that we can bring into the class discussion. You have the freedom to select which reading you want, and you can post on **either** Tuesday or Thursday **before 10:15 a.m.** You cannot write a

post for a class retroactively. You must contribute to **ten different weeks** of Forums over the course of the semester.

Due Date: Ongoing, once per week, one hour before the class period for which you post.

Final Exam (15%): This will be a *non-cumulative*, take-home exam that will consist of several essay questions designed for you to synthesize the readings and concepts from the second part of the class.

Due Date: Thursday, May 4, 12 p.m.

COURSE CALENDAR

Week One: Introduction to Consumer Culture

Tues, Jan. 10: Course Introduction

Thurs., Jan. 12: Consumer Culture Today
Read: Gary Cross, "The Irony of the Century" (p. 1-16)

PART ONE: A Genealogy of Consumerism and Culture

Week Two: Industrialization and the Rise of Consumer Culture

Tues, Jan. 17: The Working Class/The Leisure Class
Read: Roy Rosenzweig, "The Rise of the Saloon" (p. 35-57)

Thurs., Jan. 19: The Moment of Mass Culture
Read: Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction"

Week Three: Theories of Consumption: Fetishism and Propaganda

Tues., Jan. 24: Marxism and Commodity Fetishism
Read: Stephen Duncombe, "It stands on its head: Commodity fetishism, consumer activism, and the strategic use of fantasy" (p. 359-375)

Thurs., Jan. 26: Psychology and Bernays
Watch: *The Century of the Self*, Part I
Read: Edward Bernays, "Organizing Chaos" (p. 9-18)

Week Four: Consumer Culture at Mid-Century

Tues., Jan. 31: The Consumers' Republic
Read: Lizabeth Cohen, "Reconversion: The Emergence of the Consumers' Republic" (p. 112-165)

Thurs., Feb. 2: Selling the Television
Read: Lynn Spigel, “The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America” (p. 185-217)

Week Five: Science vs. Creativity: Into the *Mad* Era

Tues., Feb. 7: The Science of Attention
Read: Charles R. Acland, “The Swift View”

Thurs., Feb. 9: Advertising Agencies
Read: Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (p. 1-52)
Assignment: Literature Review Due

Week Six: Countercultural Co-optation

Tues., Feb. 14: Counterculture/Counter-Consumption
Watch: *The Century of the Self*, pt. 3
Read: Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool* (p. 206-224)

Thurs., Feb. 16: Co-optation
Read: Joseph Heath & Andrew Potter, “I Hate Myself and Want to Buy”

Week Seven: The Control Society

Tues., Feb. 21: Controlled Consumption
Read: Charles Duhigg, “How Companies Learn Your Secrets”

Thurs., Feb. 23: Tracking
Read: Eli Pariser, “The You Loop”

Week Eight: Midterm

Tues., Feb 28: Catch-up on Part 1 Material, Review for Midterm Exam

Thurs., Mar. 2: **Midterm Exam**

PART TWO: Issues in Advertising and Consumer Culture

Week Nine: Product Lines and Political Branding

Tues., Mar. 7: Merchandising and the Product Line
Read: Eileen Meehan, “Holy commodity fetish, Batman!”

Thurs., Mar. 9: Politicians and/as Celebrities
Read: Chris Hedges, “Celebrity Culture and the Obama Brand”

*****SPRING BREAK*******Week Ten: Nation Branding**

- Tues., Mar. 21: Nation Branding
Read: Christian Christensen, “@Sweden: Curating a Nation on Twitter”
- Thurs., Mar. 23: *No Class—Away at Society for Cinema and Media Studies Conference*

Week Eleven: Franchising

- Tues., Mar. 28: McDonaldization
Read: George Ritzer, “An Introduction to McDonaldization”
- Thurs., Mar. 30: Media Franchising
Read: Derek Johnson, “Imagining the Franchise”
Assignment Due: Brand Analysis

Week Twelve: Digital Labor—or, from Consumption to Production and Back Again

- Tues., Apr. 4: Outsourcing and Global Consumerism
Read: Andrew Ross, “In Search of a Lost Paycheck”
- Thurs., Apr. 6: Self-Branding and Social Capital
Read: Alice E. Marwick, “Self-Branding: The (Safe for Work) Self”

Week Thirteen: Commodity Activism

- Tues., Apr. 11: Bodies as Advertisements
Read: Samantha King, “Civic Fitness: The Body Politics of Commodity Activism”
- Thurs., Apr. 13: Contemporary Consumer-Citizenry
Read: Melissa M. Brough, “‘Fair Vanity’: The Visual Culture of Humanitarianism in the Age of Commodity Activism”

Week Fourteen: Consumerism and the Environment

- Tues., Apr. 18: “Green” Activism
Read: Jo Littler, “Good Housekeeping: Green Products and Consumer Activism”
- Thurs., Apr. 20: Advertising and the End of the World?
Read: Sut Jhally, “Advertising at the Edge of the Apocalypse”

Week Fifteen: Ethical Consumption and Wrap-Up

- Tues., Apr. 25: Ethical Consumption
Read: Devinney, Auger, and Eckhardt, “The Myth of the Ethical Consumer”
- Thurs., Apr. 27: Review for Final Exam

Week Sixteen: Exam Week

Final Exam Due to Canvas by Thursday, May 4 at 12 p.m.

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