

The Enchanted World of Marketing

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Abstract

This paper studies the impact of marketing as a core component of the modern capitalist society from a philosophical standpoint. By grounding itself in the existential ideas of Friedrich Nietzsche, Plessner, Heidegger, and Husserl, and answering to the critiques of Weber, Adorno and Horkheimer, it aims to show that marketing has the power of enhancing the subject's experience of their lives by giving them meaning and purpose. Ultimately, it will be argued that marketing is a defining by-product of the human condition of possibility expressed in a free, Enlightened world, with the many pitfalls associated with this position.

Keywords: Marketing, Capitalism, Consumerism, Desire, Existentialism, Enchantment

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Introduction

Political philosophers have written extensively about capitalism and the defining characteristics of modern society, but have largely ignored the topic of marketing as a significant component of capitalism. It is the tool through which businesses interface with customers' desires, the key boundary of the capitalist world. Exploring companies' interactions with the individual subject through marketing is necessary for understanding this world. Marketing, just like any form of technology, has inertia, becoming integral to our culture, gaining force and value beyond its initial purpose, being in itself an artifact of both our needs, desires and the goals of the companies having created it. This paper will explore this field as it is espoused in the most influential marketing books from a philosophical standpoint. It will explore its existential as well as its ethical ramifications.

The belief underpinning this paper is that *marketing enhances people's experience of their lives, giving them meaning and purpose beyond what are assumed to be the pitfalls of a consumerist society*. This paper will analyse marketing from a variety of philosophical perspectives, contrasting and drawing parallels between different philosophers and schools of thought. Ultimately, each interpretation espoused in this text aims to be a doorway towards further questions and a deeper analysis of marketing from that particular perspective. Hence, this text will look at the criticisms brought to advertising and the capitalist world by Adorno and Horkheimer as well as Weber and his idea of disenchantment. The idea of identity, meaning and existential purpose will be explored from the perspectives of existential philosophers such as Heidegger, Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Plessner and Husserl. Lastly, it will explore ideas regarding desire from Lacan, Zizek, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari. In doing so, it will touch upon other philosophical ideas such as Baudrillard's hyperreality and Nozick's experience machine.

Firstly, a brief introduction into the field of marketing will be provided as well as a delineation of this paper's scope in addressing the chosen subject. Afterwards, this work will be structured in three key chapters, outlining three ways of looking at marketing. Firstly, it will discuss its ability to enchant the world, contrary to Weber's idea of the disenchantment of modern society. Secondly, it will discuss marketing's capacity to give the subject a sense of identity. Thirdly, it will explore marketing's power to create existential meaning in light of human desires. For each one of the three perspectives, counterarguments and ethical concerns will be discussed.

What is Marketing?

Most people assume that marketing is about advertising, but they are only partially correct. According to classical marketing theory, marketing has three layers, and each layer has a number of components.¹

The first layer of marketing is related to analysing and understanding the environment in which the business is operating from a marketing perspective. Its three subcomponents are the consumer, the competition and the company. A great marketer is capable of understanding the consumer, exploiting the areas that are untouched by competitors while leveraging the company's capabilities.² This paper will focus on the consumer component, as grasping individuals' needs is a key driver of any marketing initiative.

¹ Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind : [the Marketing Classic] : [How to Be Seen and Heard in the Overcrowded Marketplace]* (New York, N.Y.: McGraw-Hill, 2010).

² Joel E. Urbany and James H. Davis, "Strategic Insight in Three Circles," *Harvard Business Review*, November 1, 2007, <https://hbr.org/2007/11/strategic-insight-in-three-circles>.

The second layer is related to the company's strategy. It is composed of segmenting, targeting, and positioning. Segmenting separates the population in segments with distinct needs. This is a form of profiling that the marketer does to potential customers in order to uncover their identities, commonalities and therefore the triggers they should respond to in any future marketing initiative. This enables them to subsequently target the right segments with the right products. They do so by successfully positioning their products such that the targeted segment will perceive them as offering a convincing value proposition.

The third layer regards implementation, setting the possible means of materialising the strategy defined in the second layer. It has four components, commonly known as the 4Ps: Product, Place, Promotion, Price.³

Product: Marketing is not about finding the right way of selling a given product. It is about creating the product and framing it in such a way that it responds to the identified needs of the targeted market such that the company's positioning is respected. Marketing is the department in charge of seeing potential products through combinations of existing technologies. The fact that marketing aspires to predict consumers' needs is why so many products fail from their inception as they find themselves being awkwardly undesirable. It is why marketers like Steve Jobs are highly praised in the world of marketing: he never used consumer research, but only his intuition in deciding upon the design and functionality of his next product.⁴ No user could have known in 2004 that they wanted a touch-enabled smartphone for browsing the internet and using user-developed applications. In most companies, marketing guides the research department. When Jobs decided that users need a touch-screen device because it is the most intuitive means of interacting with a phone, the technology was not where he needed it to be. Hence, Apple's R&D department spent years developing and refining it such that it could achieve Jobs' standards of usability. Marketers have the difficult job identifying spaces for improvement in users' lives in defining the philosophy of the upcoming product, predicting their needs and aspirations in terms of choosing the right mix of functionalities and aesthetic choices, and matching these with what is technologically possible at a certain point in time. The product aspect of the marketing mix also relates to packaging design. It is marketers who decide what the experience of acquiring their product feels like, how the box, the store, the entire purchasing process is. The importance of packaging in today's consumerist paradigm will be discussed further in the essay.

Place: This refers to the touchpoints through which customers can acquire or at least interact with the product. It can be a list of supermarket chains where the product is sold or a complex dealership structure and design. It is, again, about finding the right touchpoints for the targeted market while standing up to the positioning statement of the product: buying a Mercedes-Benz car from the supermarket would be counterintuitive, at the least.

Promotion: This is only a small part of what marketing truly is. It refers to advertisements, to direct and indirect communication between the company and customers. It also refers to branding, to the way in which unconscious associations with the company's product are formed. These unconscious associations are often more important in the world of marketing than explicit communication. Linking the Rolex brand to performance tennis (Rolex is the official sponsor of ATP, and has an ubiquitous visual presence on the courts) is more valuable than saying 'Rolex is a watch for high-performers'. Due to the abundance of products claiming to be the best, customers have developed a sort of skepticism

³ Benson P. Shapiro, "Rejuvenating the Marketing Mix," Harvard Business Review, August 2014, <https://hbr.org/1985/09/rejuvenating-the-marketing-mix>.

⁴ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*. (S.L.: Simon & Schuster, 2021).

towards market promises, a resistance in the face of the idols of the marketplace. Hence, promotion is now focusing more on subtle cues, suggestions and unconscious associations as those have proven more effective in consolidating the desired brand image in consumers' minds.⁵

Price: Most products follow a downwards sloping demand curve, where demand decreases as price increases. Yet, some, usually luxury products, are an exception to that rule. A high price is what actually is shown to drive demand up. One of the key reasons for which customers wish to buy a €25,000 Hermes bag is particularly because it costs €25,000.⁶ This is a key point which this paper aims to explain.

One thing must be remembered about marketing before embarking on this philosophical exploration: *marketing is about understanding individuals' deep needs and desires and finding the most effective and profitable way of addressing them.* The term needs should not be taken at face value: a phone is not a need, while a sense of connection with people is. A luxury car is not a need, but a sense of personal achievement and social status are. These are the needs marketers exploit, or address, depending on the perspective.

The Scope of this Paper

This paper will solely look into marketing and its ramifications, and will not dive into other aspects of business ethics or capitalism. Therefore, it will restrict itself to analysing the relationship between companies and individuals through marketing, looking at the intentions and results of various marketing strategies as well as at the tools employed to implement them. This paper will not explore items such as the ethics of the product as that would be worthy of a dedicated analysis of personal freedom (are tobacco companies worse than alcohol companies?) or of the company's other practices (unfair labor practices, negative environmental impact, etc.). The main reason behind this is that, regardless of the product in question or the company's practices, marketing uses the same mechanisms and has, in itself, the same effect on the subject. It can be used to sell healthy and sustainable products just as well as it can be used for selling cigarettes. Hence, the morality of the company's choices outside of this customer desire-business interface is beyond the scope of this study. This paper will, however, survey the moral implications of marketing's tools for manipulating individuals' choices and desires to a certain extent.

Chapter 1: Marketing as a Source of Enchantment

Weber asserted that modernity comes with disenchantment, with the end of whatever belongs to the world of the mythical, to the sacred and the symbolic. The secular, bureaucratic society cannot account for the unexplainable and the unexplained, it relies on thorough rational analyses and a reasonable understanding of the world through this rationality. The advent of the scientific method alongside the ideals of the Enlightenment come at the expense of superstition and religion. Weber perceives this as an issue, given that science can answer questions about the universe, but cannot give values and bring morals into the world. Science is cold and objective and addresses what is while the enchanted relates to the humane and addresses what ought to be.⁷ Adorno & Horkheimer add to this point by stating that,

⁵ Seth Godin, *This Is Marketing: You Can't Be Seen until You Learn to See* (London: Portfolio Penguin, Cop, 2018).

⁶ Laurie Simon Bagwell and B. Douglas Bernheim, "Veblen Effects in a Theory of Conspicuous Consumption," *The American Economic Review* 86, no. 3 (1996): 349–73, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/2118201>.

⁷ Richard Jenkins, "Disenchantment, Enchantment and Re-Enchantment: Max Weber at the Millennium," *Max Weber Studies* 1, no. 1 (2000): 11–32, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/24579711>.

as the 'ought to' of religion and enchantment fades, humans are left without values and morals, and become barbaric, guiding themselves solely based on individualistic needs and impulses.⁸

The claim that the modern world is disenchanted will be questioned. It will be argued that marketing, which is a by-product of the enlightened world, fulfills our innate need to be enchanted.

Is the modern individual rational?

The Enlightenment has indeed come up with the triumph of science as our provider of truth over religion. It has, too, resulted in the triumph of the individual as a free, rational being, capable of choosing its path, unconstrained by any metaphysical fences.⁹ Yet, the success of modern marketing is the most tangible proof of the lie that is the 'rational human'. It is arguable that reason is not what drives the desire to purchase an expensive bottle of wine. Spending significant sums of money, and therefore time, on a piece of attire knowing that it is worth less than a hundredth of its price, just because it has a swooshing symbol on it comes at odds with what we would define as rational behavior. They are both examples of humans actively and consciously accepting a lie, delving into a story for the sake of the story. While the rational Homo Economicus is meant to make purchases such as to maximize their utility, the Homo Sapiens systematically fail to do so. One could argue that purchasing a statement item such a Rolex watch brings a form of utility to the individual, satisfying their need to display superiority over others. Yet, this does not explain why individuals are willing to pay hundreds of times more on original Rolex watches over high quality fakes which are absolutely identical in all regards. There are many instances where individuals' predisposition to choose emotional criteria over rational ones becomes salient, and marketing's success is one of them. In this sense, a child having a Ferrari poster on their bedroom wall is in no way more rational, reasonable or enlightened than having a religious painting.

One of the key fields that has been poisoned by the idea that humans are rational beings is Economics, which for decades has strived to describe the Homo Economicus, only to discover in the late twentieth century that it does not exist. In the 1950s, Homo Economicus, as a concept, died, and Richard Thaler, Daniel Kahneman, and Amos Tversky killed him. They were the first economists who chose to look at the exceptions that economics had previously ignored, at humans' irrational behaviors, at their unconscious cues and cognitive biases that systematically steer the subject away from the answer that a thorough, rational process would lead us towards.¹⁰ They discovered that losing \$100 causes us more discomfort than the pleasure gained from winning \$100, and that even with the strongest, most convincing scientific evidence in front of us, we still believe that we can beat highly unfavorable odds.¹¹ Their work in what has now become the field of Behavioral Economics has shifted our view of the individual, sparking our interest in researching human behaviors that come at odds with the puzzle of the rational human.

This new field of sociology which surveys the science of human behavior has successfully served the best marketers of the world with tools through which they can manipulate and exploit human needs and desires. In his book on how marketers can use deeply ingrained human instincts in selling their products,

⁸ Max Horkheimer et al., *Dialectic of Enlightenment : Philosophical Fragments* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

⁹ Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?," *What Is Enlightenment?*, December 31, 2019, 58–64, <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520916890-005>.

¹⁰ Richard H Thaler, "From Homo Economicus to Homo Sapiens," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 14, no. 1 (February 2000): 133–41, <https://doi.org/10.1257/jep.14.1.133>.

¹¹ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Farrar, Straus And Giroux, 2011).

Gad Saad presents some of the most salient ‘irrationalities’ of modern human behavior as researched and explored through several experiments and studies.¹² Items such as women’s desires to wear high heels, or men’s fascination for fast cars lie among these ‘irrationalities’. Saad aims to explain these anomalies through evolutionary psychology, and his findings are consistent with evolutionary assumptions. For instance, he shows that men are willing to expose themselves to higher useless risks after being shown images of attractive women than their unprimed counterparts.¹³ In line with the need for scientific explanations justifying humans’ unreasonable behaviors, Saad’s examples rooted in our instinctive reflexes are quite revealing.

Marketing research is anchored in behavioral science. It is, in essence, testing methods through which certain human emotions and behaviors can be triggered as well as studying humans’ desires (like the one for cars as described by Saad). Marketers distinguish between surface and deep desires on the ground that the former are related to explicit utilitarian needs that certain products fulfill, while the latter refer to more abstract, emotional, instinctual, and existential needs. A surface desire is for a tool which enables its user to fix nails in wood, while a potential deep desire is one’s need to craft, build and create. The end goal is to exploit these newly discovered mental shortcuts individuals use in order to nudge them towards a certain act, namely buying a product.¹⁴¹⁵ Cues such as colors which trigger hunger or framing the lack of a gain as a loss have been employed by companies worldwide for decades, and with a significant amount of evidence backing them up, they so far seem to have worked to a great extent. In this sense, Weber was right: there is nothing enchanted in painting walls red to make people buy your food, in exploiting our brains’ ancestral wiring algorithmically. It is mechanistic and it disenchant even the act of being human. These examples are here as they are scientifically-sound illustrations of humans’ irrationality, upon which many of the following points are based. The empirical marketing tools provided by behavioral sciences are integral to the world of marketing, but they do not enchant the world.

Is the modern consumerist world disenchanting?

Behavioral science has given us sound proof regarding humans’ unreasonable behaviors, but it has been mostly incapable of truly encompassing the reasons for which certain brands are disproportionately more successful than others and why these brands become cultural staples, entities with value in the eyes of consumers that go far beyond their nature as simple money-making businesses. Brands such as Apple, Coco Chanel, Mercedes-Benz, or Rolex have significant fan bases and have become cultural staples of the modern world. The most salient example of a blind dedication for a brand comes from what has been described as the ‘console wars’ of 2014, when Sony launched the Playstation 4 console and Microsoft the Xbox One. People who had never owned any of the two consoles were fighting

¹² Gad Saad, *CONSUMING INSTINCT : What Juicy Burgers, Ferraris, Pornography, and Gift Giving Reveal about Human... Nature*. (S.L.: Prometheus, 2020).

¹³ Gad Saad and John G. Vongas, “The Effect of Conspicuous Consumption on Men’s Testosterone Levels,” *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 110, no. 2 (November 2009): 80–92, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.obhdp.2009.06.001>.

¹⁴ Nir Eyal, *Hooked : How to Build Habit-Forming Products* (Norwick: Penguin Books, 2016).

¹⁵ Richard H Thaler and Cass R Sunstein, *Nudge: Improving Decisions about Health, Wealth, and Happiness* (London: Penguin Books, 2008).

verbally and even physically over which one is the best, as two camps of ‘gamers’ coagulated around each of the brands.¹⁶

Before deriving conclusions about these occurrences, a revealing study will be explained, under the assumption that it might provide valuable insight. Throughout the past years, several double-blind experiments have been performed to test whether consumers can truly distinguish between various subjectively-experienced products belonging to different price ranges. Questions such as ‘can cigar smokers feel the quality difference between an expensive Cohiba and an affordable Nicaraguan alternative?’ or ‘can audiophiles hear the difference between a \$500 pair of speakers and a \$5,000 one?’ have been explored in these studies. Most of them have consistently shown that even the most passionate consumers are unable to appreciate which of the two products is the more expensive (and supposedly more qualitative) when cues such as the product’s price, brand or story are absent.¹⁷ Conversely, subjects consistently insist on the fact that they do indeed feel a significant difference between two products when knowing the difference in price or the brands they belong to, despite having tasted, listened to or smelled the same product, unknowingly. However, the most revealing of all such studies looks into consumers’ perception on the taste of wine. In this study, they are given two glasses of wine, both containing identical wine. Yet, they are told that one of the glasses comes from a fancy bottle of wine and are given an elegant bottle to read its pompous description, to see its origins and the types of grapes used. They are also told that the other glass contains a less sophisticated wine, and are shown a less elegant, store-branded bottle. As the subjects taste both glasses, they are placed in an fMRI machine. The results showed that subjects rated the wine with the story as significantly more enjoyable and tastier than the supposedly affordable one. More importantly, they show that the area of the brain associated with the enjoyment of taste was significantly more active when trying the supposedly fancy wine as compared to the supposedly unsophisticated one.¹⁸

What these studies outline is that consumers experience the same liquid in entirely different ways solely based on the story behind it. They show that a good story, a good branding, an elegantly designed bottle can, for the same product, enhance the customers’ enjoyment. One can take an object, such as a liter of wine, and give it value and meaning beyond the one inherent to the properties of the liquid simply by attaching a story to it, and that value will translate into the buyers’ enjoyment of that product, and ultimately into their very purpose for acquiring it. These stories short-circuit senses, but they also short-circuit reason. If one would be reasonable, upon finding this new information, they would accept the fact that their senses have been deceived and would change their buying behavior accordingly. However, when informing a crowd of audiophiles that, in blind tastes, the cables connecting the speakers to the amplifier do not make any difference they will react with anger. The same will happen with avid wine drinkers. They are being told that they have been lied to, they are being shown the evidence for it, and most of them will refuse to accept it, will aggressively contradict and fight against it. The fact that, as shown in the study, they are physiologically enjoying it more is as objective as the fact that there is no difference between the wines. Both facts are equally real. These consumers are enchanted by the products, by their stories, by the hobby they identify themselves with, and refuse to

¹⁶ Keza MacDonald, “Battle for Control: Why the Age-Old Console Wars Show No Sign of Stopping,” the Guardian, November 7, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2020/nov/07/video-games-battle-for-control-ps5-playstation-v-xbox>.

¹⁷ Jeffrey C. Bodington, “804 Tastes: Evidence on Preferences, Randomness, and Value from Double-Blind Wine Tastings,” *Journal of Wine Economics* 7, no. 2 (September 10, 2012): 181–91, <https://doi.org/10.1017/jwe.2012.20>.

¹⁸ Liane Schmidt et al., “How Context Alters Value: The Brain’s Valuation and Affective Regulation System Link Price Cues to Experienced Taste Pleasantness,” *Scientific Reports* 7, no. 1 (2017): 8098, <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41598-017-08080-0>.

be disenchanting. It could be argued that to them, if all wines are the same, the world becomes a little less interesting and a little less enjoyable.

Hence, the question remains: how can modern consumer society be disenchanting when consumers are constantly enchanted by these stories and brands into acquiring products which have little intrinsic value beyond that of the stories they carry? Based on the consistent presence of stories and myths throughout humanity's history, it might be that humans are naturally drawn towards the enchanted, and therefore enchant the world themselves through the ways they perceive it. A very concrete example for this desire to be enchanted comes from human fascination for magic: we watch magicians perform and once we find the trick we are disappointed. The subject is aware that there is nothing surreal about the trick, they know it is ultimately a lie. Yet they enjoy that lie because for a second it detaches them from a reality that operates according to principles of logic, and pulls them towards a world in which nothing is really what it seems, mystifying them. That is why magic can be seen as magical just like a wine with a story can be seen as being better.

That is what marketers aim to achieve, and what Adorno & Horkheimer might have failed to see in their dissection of capitalist culture. Weber accuses this world of being devoid of meaning, of being mechanistic.¹⁹ Yet the capitalist machine has generated, through marketing, more meaning than they could have foreseen.

This becomes particularly salient in brands which generate value beyond their products and which have become cultural staples in themselves: Apple, Ferrari, Rolex, Chanel and many like them. They have the power to make their products enchanting to such an extent that they become the subject of myths, that people aspire towards them no matter where they come from. As stated earlier, the aspirational, dream-like value given to a Ferrari car which is the subject of dreams for many young boys is testament to its power of enchantment. If consumers were rational beings, then advertisements would arguably never be about feelings, they would focus on features. Yet, the average Apple promotional video focuses almost entirely on design, on tactile, sensorial aspects which do not increase the object's functionality, but are solely there to appeal to human senses, to trigger an emotional reaction. They transcend their functionality as objects of need and become objects of desire which is what remains when need is subtracted from demand, as per Lacan's view.²⁰

This is the essence of great marketing, as per existing marketing literature: creating a story that customers wish to believe in, which enriches their world and their enjoyment of the product they are acquiring.²¹ It is the purpose of the marketer to craft the stories that their customers wish to hear, and to tell them in an authentic, consistent manner such that they consolidate that desirable worldview.²² In this sense, the ideal marketing strategy is inherently enchanting, and exists for that purpose only. Great marketing is not about fooling a customer into buying your product once, but about mystifying them into becoming your loyal customers, believing in your brand, the ideas it espouses, and the values embedded in your products and services. One of the oldest, most agreed upon marketing theories is that

¹⁹ Max Weber, Peter Lassman, and Ronald Speirs, *Weber : Political Writings* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

²⁰ Lewis A. Kirshner, "Rethinking Desire: The *Objet Petit a* in Lacanian Theory," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 53, no. 1 (March 2005): 83–102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/00030651050530010901>.

²¹ Seth Godin, *This Is Marketing : You Can't Be Seen until You Learn to See* (London: Portfolio Penguin, Cop, 2018).

²² Seth Godin, *All Marketers Are Liars : The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World* (New York: Portfolio, 2009).

it is more profitable and sustainable for a business to have loyal customers which consistently return rather than acquiring new ones for every purchase.²³

Hence, it can be said that, when marketing is done right, as per the values espoused by the most acclaimed marketers, it does the opposite of what Weber expected capitalism to do: it enchants the world, and customers' lives.

Enchantment or Lie?

The main caveat of this approach in marketing, and the main ethical dilemma arising from the wine experiment is delimiting the lies from the stories. That study shows that customers can easily be deceived: they can be served a low-quality liquid, tricked into believing it is expensive, and they would enjoy it nonetheless simply because of its story. When does marketing stop enchanting and begin lying, or vice-versa? Is selling a low-quality product for a high amount of money through a pompous and false story not market deception?

One way of approaching this question is by looking at what customers aim to achieve when acquiring a certain product. As long as the product satisfies that goal, then it can be considered to be truthful. In the wine example, one could say that it is a form of deception as customers spend their money on a good-quality wine with premium traits. However, that would be a shortsighted way of looking at it, given that a wine drinker does not buy an expensive wine, but rather the feeling of pleasure experienced when drinking it. Similarly, when people buy an iPhone, they do not look for the most feature-rich tool, but rather for the feeling of connectedness that it gives them as well as the pleasure of owning a highly complex tool that they actually understand. They then buy simplicity, design, tactility just like they buy a wine that, to them, tastes like they wish it to taste. The wine drinker who is heavily influenced by the story around their wine is in no way deceived as long as that wine, through whichever means, enables them to achieve the feeling of pleasure sought when acquiring it. This would not be the same for a product that is promoted as being highly reliable and long lasting but which is, in fact, badly built and malfunctions before it would be expected for it to. In that case, the customer has been deceived into buying a product by a list of characteristics that they do not experience.

Of course there are many potential criticisms to such an approach given its hedonic nature. It essentially transforms the product into an experience machine, whereby no matter its relation to reality, as long as it provides pleasure it is ethically acceptable. However, research shows that while people are empirically unlikely to accept the experience machine, they are interested in a pill that would enhance their overall experience of the world, as long as it doesn't cost them anything in terms of their health and it does not pull them out of the reality they are currently experiencing.²⁴ They are not willing to accept a different reality, but they would like this one to be positively distorted, the study shows. In this sense, a pragmatic approach could be suitable: a product is meant to satisfy customers' needs. As long as it does so in their perspective, no matter its means, it is truthful to its promise. With a small detour towards the world of pragmatic truth, it could be said that a product's marketing is true as long as it serves its purpose.²⁵

²³ Amy Gallo, "The Value of Keeping the Right Customers," *Harvard Business Review*, November 5, 2014, <https://hbr.org/2014/10/the-value-of-keeping-the-right-customers>.

²⁴ Frank Hindriks and Igor Douven, "Nozick's Experience Machine: An Empirical Study," *Philosophical Psychology* 31, no. 2 (December 2017): 278–98, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09515089.2017.1406600>.

²⁵ Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam, "Pragmatism: An Open Question.," *The Philosophical Review* 105, no. 4 (October 1996): 560, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2998436>.

Moreover, few products are mere objects of utility, and this can be observed through the amount of thought put into their aesthetic design which is justified by actual consumer preferences.²⁶ It would be fallacious to discuss aesthetics, subjective experiences of taste in objective terms. In that light, the consumer's intimate, subjective experience of the product cannot be judged as 'wrong' solely based on the fact that the product itself does not correspond to its description. There is no objectively good wine. As long as the marketer, through the tool of storytelling, enchants the product in such a way that the customer subjectively experiences it as better, they have arguably done nothing that is ethically questionable.

To conclude this ethical parenthesis on enchantment and lying, it could be said that a product's marketing is ethically questionable only when it deceives the customer by making promises which it does not deliver upon. Conversely, as previously shown, the customer's physiological enjoyment of a story-based wine is as true and as objective as the fact that it has nothing inherently special. A customer purchases wine to enjoy taste, and if that experience can be obtained and potentiated with a story, then the producer is bound to offer their customer what they desire. When a story enables the customer to get what they seek from the product, and more, it is enchanting.

Chapter 2: Marketing as a Source of Identity

A key issue discussed by Adorno and Horkheimer, that has also been espoused by multiple critics of the capitalist, consumerist culture, such as Marx or Weber is alienation as the evening out of individual differences²⁷ and the transformation of people into 'statistical material'²⁸. Moreover, Lacan describes desire as defined by its circularity, by the fact that it is inherently interminable.²⁹ Zizek furthers his theories in describing consumerism as a never-ending quest for an 'IT' which does not exist, but which the consumer society incessantly promises to the individual. Hence, as long as the person is a good consumer and keeps acquiring more and more of anything, they will at some point (that will never materialise) reach that 'IT'.³⁰

In many ways, this could be true, and a powerful example is an anecdotal experience from a Stradivarius store: a rack with fifteen hats, and on each one of them you read 'I am unique'. The fact that the same hat is sold in all stores across the world is ironic. In this situation, uniqueness and authenticity themselves are being commoditized, replicated and marketed in thousands of copies. The fact that customers are willing to buy a piece of attire which communicates their uniqueness, knowing that hundreds of others will do the exact same thing is arguably absurd. It is difficult, though, to ascribe this absurdity to the marketing team given that the consumer is the ultimate judge regarding a product's desirability.

If one is to look out on the street, they are bound to see people who in many ways are similar in their product choices (attire, phone, car, bicycle, etc.) and in many ways are different. The inability to build **the** car, or **the** bicycle, or **the** phone, and the existence of variety among product categories despite the

²⁶ M Yamamoto, "The Impact of Product Aesthetics on the Evaluation of Industrial Products," *Journal of Product Innovation Management* 11, no. 4 (September 1994): 309–24, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0737-6782\(94\)90086-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/0737-6782(94)90086-8).

²⁷ Melvin Seeman, "On the Meaning of Alienation," *American Sociological Review* 24, no. 6 (December 1959): 783, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2088565>.

²⁸ Max Horkheimer et al., *Dialectic of Enlightenment : Philosophical Fragments*, 96.

²⁹ Lewis A. Kirshner, "Rethinking Desire: The *Objet Petit a* in Lacanian Theory," 83–102.

³⁰ Yannis Stavrakakis, "On the Critique of Advertising Discourse," *Third Text* 14, no. 51 (June 2000): 85–90, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09528820008576856>.

consumer-needs research capabilities of modern companies is a testimony to the differences among individuals as manifested through their purchasing decisions. Most products are ultimately mass-manufactured, and that means that many people are manifesting their personalities using the same goods. Yet, they have the choice, and when accounting for the large number of combinations of different products, it can be said that individual differences can be espoused to a great extent through this buying choice. Furthermore, the apparition of factions around certain brands or products which actively promote their chosen products without any compensation might enforce this idea. There are multiple famous ongoing brand-loyalty debates such as ‘Apple vs. Samsung’, ‘Xbox vs. PS4’ or ‘Mercedes vs. BMW vs. Audi’ which outline this strong sense of identification between a customer and their brand of choice.

According to marketing theory, the champion is the customer who holds such a strong belief in your brand and enjoys your products to such an extent that they feel the need to promote them in their social circles.³¹ If customers were to acquire products solely for practical purposes, they would likely tell their close ones about it simply because they feel like the product could also benefit them. Yet, the brand ambassadors described above go beyond that. They engage in fights, they stick to their brands no matter if a generation of the product is sub-par, and will find excuses for their companies’ mistakes as if they were their own.³² Research shows that people belonging to brand communities often see that community as being an integral part of their identities.³³

Human communities have evolved to be definitive for the subject’s identity: nationality, religion, political affiliation, philosophical beliefs. This need for belonging has extended towards brands, in that customers choose certain products because they feel like they reflect their personalities, and therefore identify with them. That is a result of successful marketing. As espoused in the first paragraphs of this paper, one key component of successful marketing is segmentation and targeting, which, when done properly, results in a perfect product-customer match. However, contrary to Adorno and Horkheimer’s view of this issue, this segmentation is not based on mere socio-economic factors, but on deeply ingrained traits, beliefs, values and needs. Marketing scholars repeat the fact that successful segmentation is about dividing the population along meaningful lines such that products can truly specifically address a particular type of person.³⁴ This is the reason for which companies like P&G or Unilever have several brands of shampoo, for instance, with similar prices, but very different brand identities, for people to have the illusion of a shampoo that resonates with who they believe they are.

The Enlightenment has freed us from our self-imposed chains, it has transformed the subject into a free-thinking, free-acting individual who is no longer constrained by any metaphysical rules.³⁵ In this Godless world where we are the owners of our destiny and the determinants of our fates, our sense of identity becomes a sensitive subject. We live, according to Heidegger and Kierkegaard under the sign of possibility: we can be whatever we wish to be, however we wish to be, and hence everything is

³¹ V. Kumar, J. Andrew Petersen, and Robert P. Leone, “How Valuable Is Word of Mouth?,” *Harvard Business Review*, October 1, 2007, <https://hbr.org/2007/10/how-valuable-is-word-of-mouth>.

³² Arnaldo Coelho, Cristela Bairrada, and Filipa Peres, “Brand Communities’ Relational Outcomes, through Brand Love,” *Journal of Product & Brand Management* 28, no. 2 (February 15, 2019), <https://doi.org/10.1108/jpbm-09-2017-1593>.

³³ Susan Fournier and Lara Lee, “Getting Brand Communities Right,” *Harvard Business Review*, July 16, 2015, <https://hbr.org/2009/04/getting-brand-communities-right>.

³⁴ Al Ries and Jack Trout, *Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind: [the Marketing Classic]: [How to Be Seen and Heard in the Overcrowded Marketplace]*.

³⁵ Immanuel Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What Is Enlightenment?” *What Is Enlightenment?*.

possible.³⁶ Sartre and Nietzsche talk of the possible in terms of what could be and is not, as Nietzsche's entire philosophy of nihilism is arguably based on this idea in light of the responsibility it entails.³⁷ One key element in this freedom is the possibility of being anything and anyone which for many is likely to be an uncomfortable thought. The subject accepting the fact that they could be anything entails accepting that whatever they are can be different. It could be said that, as a 'dasein', identity becomes deliberate and its persistence in time relies on a systematic effort of maintenance from the subject.³⁸ Identity is not given, it is not fixed, it can be deliberately maintained or overhauled for the subject chooses to be and how to be. Yet, people throughout history have manifested their need for identity be it through their clothing, through the communities they chose to belong to and fight for, through their attachment to their families or to various ideological and religious causes. It can then be affirmed that people wish to know who they are, they wish to sense what they belong to and will often find highly creative ways of reaching that. On a controversial note, there is a tendency to think of the subject as a philosopher questioning every aspect of their existence and incessantly striving for truth. Yet, the proportion of philosophers to general citizens that has persisted throughout history is a testament to the rarity of this breed, and hence of this method of experiencing the world. It could be assumed that the subject is uncomfortable because it questions their identity. Even in today's world in which identity is an intensely debated topic, one can see that this is mostly as a result of individuals' needs to consolidate it rather than to question it. It could be argued that a transgender individual wishes to feel good in their body, to show to themselves and to the world who they are particularly because the transition caused by a doubt regarding a fundamental aspect of identity has been so distressing. That is because gender dysphoria, the state of doubt regarding one's gender identity, is not famous for being a desirable experience, most often coming alongside depression. It might be that most people conversely wish to simplify their lives such that they can go about their daily routines, tackle their daily issues and enjoy their daily moments of happiness. Evidence indeed shows that people are uncomfortable with the thought of being something other than they see themselves as being given that they need a sense of 'mineness'.³⁹ The difficulty of having conflicting beliefs regarding our identities and, by extension, our actions is outlined by Kahenman in his study of cognitive dissonance, which is the state of discomfort caused by the awareness of facts which contradict our behaviors or previously held beliefs.⁴⁰

Identity or Commodity?

This brings the following question: is the fact that consumers enforce and communicate their identities through products and their marketing a negative occurrence? There are multiple ways of seeing this as problematic. The first one is that, by finding their need for identity in products, the subject ceases to try and define themselves through more meaningful manners. If, to define myself as an athletic person, I only have to buy a pair of Nike sneakers, then I have no individual incentive to actually be athletic, to actually do sports, supposedly. Similarly, I do not need to be adventurous as long as I can use Old Spice deodorant and I do not need to be refined as long as I can drink Moët & Chandon champagne. Products end up becoming labels, and customers willingly espouse them believing that thus they will figure out

³⁶ George J. Stack, "The Language of Possibility and Existential Possibility," *The Modern Schoolman* 50, no. 2 (1973): 159–82, <https://doi.org/10.5840/schoolman19735026>.

³⁷ Christine Daigle, "Sartre and Nietzsche," *Sartre Studies International* 10, no. 2 (January 1, 2004), <https://doi.org/10.3167/135715504780955294>.

³⁸ John Haugeland, "Heidegger on Being a Person," *Noûs* 16, no. 1 (March 1982): 15, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2215406>.

³⁹ S. B. Klein and S. Nichols, "Memory and the Sense of Personal Identity," *Mind* 121, no. 483 (July 1, 2012): 677–702, <https://doi.org/10.1093/mind/fzs080>.

⁴⁰ Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow*.

who they are and what defines them. A second problem is the inherent injustice associated with using goods as tools for gaining a sense of identity: if Nike is what communicates dedication to sports and a systematic focus on self-actualisation, those who do not afford a pair of Nike shoes are essentially deprived from communicating this, or must find a different way of doing so. One can't supposedly be a refined gentleman and drink cheap whiskey just like one can't be creative and unique when buying clothes from Lidl. When products contribute to our sense of identity, identity itself can become commoditized and subject to the world's injustices. The subject cannot afford something and therefore cannot be whatever that product represents. Similarly, the subject can be anything they want just by spending money. Both examples show the danger of identity being for sale.

The Gap Between I and Ideal

A second serious caveat of people cementing their identity through products relates to the pettiness of companies exploiting people's deepest insecurities and doubts to generate financial profits. Marketing brilliantly addresses people's deeply ingrained desires, and often these are profoundly related to individuals' existential anxieties. Exploiting these complex negative sentiments by promising customers a sense of identity while having them face the gap between who they are and who they wish to be is a sustainable, long-term marketing strategy for many companies. One such example is the social media platform which promises users a sense of belonging and social worth when in turn often leaves them feeling less connected and less valuable. Another such example regards cosmetic surgery which leverages the subjects' insecurities regarding their bodies. This is where another philosophical concept chimes in: hyperreality. The characters presented in advertisements do not really exist, yet the advertisements present them as being the norm. This character which could be called the homo advertus is truly happy and fulfilled. Depending on the nature of the product, homo advertus can be the woman that makes all men follow her and all friends envy her, it can be the true rich man whose boat and watch collections are the objects of admiration or the real manly man who, by simply winking, gets women in bed with him. The homo advertus can be anything the product's customer wishes to be, by being more than what one can and should realistically be. Thus, marketing creates hyperreal versions of the human. The result is subjects being frustrated over their inadequacy, over their inability to be like the homo advertus, as happy, as fulfilled, as surrounded by friends and family, as attractive, as charismatic, as interesting, as fascinating, as authentic... It is a case of hyperreality because it is an image of a reality that does not exist, but which has become so convincing, that those exposed to it have begun doubting their own reality's degree of realism, for simply not living up to the standards set by that image.⁴¹ It is a lie, so convincing, that it leads the individual to question their lives' deficiencies.

Is it Marketing or is it Us?

One possible answer to this problem is the fact that, inherent in humans' differences, lies a certain degree of comparison. It is then up to the subject to manage this intersubjective concern of envy and jealousy, or simple weighing of one's shortcomings in light of the other's qualities. Pragmatically, it can be stated that most individuals who aspire towards improving themselves in a different way will have idealised versions of who they wish to be, no matter if it is a fictional advertisement character or an elite in that field (performance athlete, achieved philanthropist, successful businessman, fulfilled familist). At the same time, the fact that companies try to convince customers that their product will bring them closer to that idealised version of themselves, hence becoming an integral step in the

⁴¹ Anthony King, "A Critique of Baudrillard's Hyperreality: Towards a Sociology of Postmodernism," *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 24, no. 6 (November 1998): 47–66, <https://doi.org/10.1177/019145379802400603>.

subject's path for self-actualisation, remains a controversial strategy. Mothers who wish to care for their children should strive to care for their children better instead of buying a certain brand of diapers. By extension, this idea that a product can bring the subject closer to where they wish to be is similar to how charity often exists to take away the burden of altruism from individuals, commoditizing care and inner peace. Just as an individual makes a donation just to alleviate their feeling of guilt, without giving a thought to the 'other', to the one they are theoretically helping, the subject can acquire a product which alleviates their guilt for not being who they wish to be. It is a form of inter-passivity, whereby the subject is no longer responsible for self-actualisation, and can experience it through the products they are acquiring.⁴² It might be then that marketing alleviates individuals' sense of duty towards themselves and those around them. Because of this, people in a capitalist society are less caring, less considerate, and less focused on those around them and themselves for they are simply distracted by the abundance of products that promise to solve their issues, instead of on the issues themselves.

It might be said that a mother hoping to define her motherhood solely based on the products she buys for her children is the mother's problem rather than marketing's. It is customers who decide which stories to believe in and products to buy. This does not, however, diminish the issue: marketing can create illusory ideals and convince customers to follow them, leading them towards passivity and disappointment. Marketing can leverage these societal issues, taking advantage of individuals' ignorance and weaknesses, and hence accentuating them.

The Freedom to Buy Whatever We Choose to Be

The key takeaways from this chapter are that marketing has the power to consolidate people's sense of identity by providing products which correspond to the subjects' defining identity characteristics beyond socio-economic factors. In this sense, through marketing, companies create just another way for subjects to find their sense of self and belonging, which they so dearly seem to seek. In a world in which God is dead, in which we are free to be whoever we want, the subject can choose who they want to be, and they have a wide palette of products suiting whichever choices they make. This is in many ways in line with the ideals of the enlightened, free individual, and contradicts the ideas regarding the uniformisation of the subject. Subjects are not only freer than they were centuries ago in terms of being whoever they wish to be, with differing styles, passions, interests, but they are also freer than they were in manifesting these differences, communicating them and hence finding communities of like-minded individuals to belong to. The hidden benefit of marketing segmentation and targeting is that it is the force which builds these communities. It does not smooth out authenticity, but rather empowers it in many ways. Yet, it could be argued that nowadays consumers make identical choices, wear the same shoes, use the same phones, and listen to the same music. Yet, it is doubtful that marketing is at fault for this: every individual has a choice, and people's preponderance towards choosing what everybody else is choosing at a certain point in time, of blindly following trends is more an issue of intersubjectivity and normativity than marketing. Capitalism has created a world in which the choices are endless, and it is a pity that the subject does not leverage this to the fullest. However, a recent surge in locally-sourced products and non-standardized artisanal goods which is strongly powered by marketing could be seen as a capitalist countermove to the uniformization ascribed to global corporations. Unfortunately, humans' tendency to follow the crowd and seek homogeneity is beyond the scope of this paper.

⁴² Slavoj Žižek, "The Interpassive Subject," , March 1998, 7–8, <http://timothyquigley.net/vcs/interpassive.pdf>.

Chapter 3: Marketing as a Source of Meaning

The third and last chapter of this work addresses marketing's capacity to give humans meaning. This is different from identity, as described in the previous chapter, in that it is not about a state of being, but rather about a state of desire, it is aspirational instead of defining. Throughout the past paragraphs, the idea that marketing can give people existential meaning has emerged, given that it enchants the world, transforming meaningless goods into objects of fascination, and that it helps the subject communicate to themselves and to the world who they are and wish to be. The fact that marketing has the power to give people meaning and purpose is a heavy burden with several worrying implications.

Describe Your Heaven

As a student in a business university, the similarity between peers' goals in life and the Christian idea that life is just a step towards Heaven is difficult to ignore. Many, nowadays, especially those diving into the field of consulting or finance, live by the philosophy that if they work hard enough for the first years of their lives, they will obtain true freedom later, they will be rich, afford anything they could possibly think about, and have the time to enjoy the fruits of their labor. Hence, the modern subject is perfectly willing to sacrifice half of their days on Earth, to see them as nothing more than a passage towards their goal. There is no issue in working eleven hours every day from the fifteen the subject spends awake, knowing that in many years they will be able to live freely. This willingness to become subjugated by corporations, to sell one's time, one's relationships, potential friendships, passions, and hobbies for jobs which promise high pay and with the hope of an ascension along what is ultimately an imaginary career ladder are items of particular interest to any respectable critic of capitalism. Diving into this discussion is, unfortunately, beyond the topic of this paper. However, discussing the role marketing plays in this capitalist ideal is.

It is likely that, if one were to ask the average Western individual what their ideal life looked like, they would see a significant proportion of the answers referring to objects. People's ideal lives are often defined by the cars they would drive, the homes they would own, the watches they would wear and bags they would carry. There would be, of course, a significant proportion of the answers referring to family, relationships, friendships, positions and skills, too. It is the first part that this study will focus on.

The most important hyperreality of the capitalist world, arguably, is the idea that richness brings fulfillment. Product marketing is about making customers believe that whatever product is being sold will make their lives better, a tad happier and richer. It is beyond doubt that, taken at face value, this statement is untrue.⁴³ Misery does not segment its market in terms of wealth, it affects people of all economic backgrounds, and it surely does not ignore the rich. Existential dread, emptiness, they are likely uniformly distributed. Despite this fact, the modern subject often sees wealth and the accumulation of luxury aspirational goods as a goal in life.⁴⁴ The modern subject can spend hours describing their next aspirational acquisition, explaining why and how it will somehow bring them more happiness than whatever they already have.

⁴³ Kostadin Kushlev, Elizabeth W. Dunn, and Richard E. Lucas, "Higher Income Is Associated with Less Daily Sadness but Not More Daily Happiness," *Social Psychological and Personality Science* 6, no. 5 (January 9, 2015): 483–89, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1948550614568161>.

⁴⁴ Tim Kasser and Kennon M. Sheldon, "Of Wealth and Death: Materialism, Mortality Salience, and Consumption Behavior," *Psychological Science* 11, no. 4 (July 2000): 348–51, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-9280.00269>.

This, again, might be the subject's way of escaping the misery caused by the freedom Enlightenment has caused them. There is no supreme voice telling them what to do, who to be, helping them evaluate their performance. In such a world, the subjects are now both free to find their own purpose, but also feel themselves responsible for doing so. They find a myriad of paths, many relating to relationships with those around them or even lives of learning and enlightenment. However, many likely focus a significant part of their existential mission on goods which, through marketing, have become symbolic for their potential happiness.

When the Box Opens, the Sky Breaks

One of the interesting ways through which marketing creates and stimulates this desire is through the libidinal design of product packaging. Buy an expensive watch and you will be awed by the three-four layers of boxes each opening to unravel another box, each made of a material that is more tactile, more premium than the previous. Marketing has given the moment of unboxing an almost sacred valence. At that instant, right before the box is opened and the product is first touched, it is as if time itself stops, as if, for one second, everything is in harmony. And what better way to observe the modern subject's obsession with that moment than through the abundance of unboxing videos on YouTube.⁴⁵ There is an almost pornographic dimension to these videos, which hundreds of thousands of people watch every day, most often for objects they have no intention of acquiring in the following years. These videos outline the sexuality involved, the feeling, the sound, the touch of every piece of plastic film which is slowly removed from the smartphone's screen, in silence, right next to the microphone, for the watcher to hear and experience with maximum intensity.

Another interesting capitalist cultural artefact is the ritual of the product launch. Walter Isaacson explains Apple's product launches in the following manner: '*Steve Jobs launched products messianically, showing them as if the sky breaks in two and light shines through the cracks onto the new product*'.⁴⁶ If one were to watch Steve Jobs' product launch conferences, one would be astonished by the crowd's reaction. There would be cheers, clapping, shouts of passion from a crowd of individuals being shown the new gadget they can spend their hard-earned money on. They were not given anything for free, just shown what they can buy, and they are in awe. This can be observed at product launches for a variety of products, ranging from gaming consoles to smartphones and motor-vehicles, watches, clothing and such. The subjects await these product launches because they know that their beloved brand will give them something new to desire. They clap and cheer because at that particular moment, when the product is unveiled, the company arguably gives them something more valuable than the product itself: purpose.

These are testaments to the aspirational value of products given by marketing techniques. The marketers design products in such a way that they give the free subject purpose, products to dream of owning before they go to sleep. That moment of absolute fulfillment is transformed into an entire sacred ritual through the unboxing experience, while the idea that a company can create a new desire out of thin air mystifies and fascinates consumers to a point of fanaticism. When the product becomes an answer to a consumers' everyday existential dilemmas, the marketer can be said to have been successful.

⁴⁵ Sharif Mowlabocus, "'Let's Get This Thing Open': The Pleasures of Unboxing Videos," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 23, no. 4 (December 12, 2018): 136754941881009, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1367549418810098>.

⁴⁶ Walter Isaacson, *Steve Jobs*. (S.L.: Simon & Schuster, 2021), 326.

The Noble Art of Desire

In marketing terms there is nothing unethical about creating products which, through the story, become the objects of dreams to consumers. As long as the marketer can enhance the buyers' lives through the story and thoughtful design of that given good there is no harm done, from a marketing perspective.⁴⁷ Yet, a philosopher might have some objections.

The nihilistic perspective of a Godless world entails assuming one's ontological freedom and actively engaging in the act of being.⁴⁸ Heidegger would argue for the idea of 'dasein' which deliberately is.⁴⁹ Is not a failure of the Enlightenment ideal of the free, rational human the fact that the subject defines his/her freedom in many ways in terms of the goods he/she can purchase? Out of all the humane acts of loving, creating, crafting, ideating, and questioning, is buying the act the subject chooses in order to define him/herself? Marketing, in this sense, can be accused of establishing the act of being through buying, which in many ways seems like a waste of the human mind's capabilities. Should the subject not be defined by his/her actions, as Sartre would propose⁵⁰, rather than by acquisitions?

Marketing hence fits as a beating heart of the immanent system of desiring production defining our society. As per Deleuze and Guattari's views, these desires shall not be analysed as abstract entities, but rather as embedded in the system and acknowledged for their productive force characterizing human existence.⁵¹ Humans desire as a form of existence, living under the imperative of wanting, and thus finding themselves hanging in-between threads of wants, and trying to navigate through them, to go above and below them, ultimately seeing that they are part of who they are. This way, marketing might in many ways alter the subject's place in the web of systems that comprise our society, existence, and world, and thus alter the web itself in a radical manner.

Yet, humans have shown an unrelenting desire for desire throughout their existence, rarely manifesting themselves as settlers. This desire has driven our culture and minds to change in time, and it is what in many ways sets the human apart from other living beings. If one were to look at a monkey's life two thousand years ago and compare it to that of a monkey today, they would scarcely see a difference. Yet, the same cannot be said about 'human'. 'The human' is in a constant search for something it does not need, but that it desires. It is this desire driven by possibility which, one could argue, determines the subject. Plessner would describe this as the subject's eccentric positionality which differentiates 'the human' through their ability to be both within and outside of themselves, perceiving what is and what was as well as what could be, staring at themselves externally.⁵² Husserl would see this as parenthesizing the world, freeing one's mind of what is in order to open themselves up to the possibility of what could be, and hence truly experiencing existence.⁵³ Heidegger defines it as 'dasein', in being deliberately and acknowledging this beingness by systematically choosing to be in light of the possibilities of being,⁵⁴ while Kierkegaard espouses the inherent 'angst' lying tacitly entangled within this possibility.⁵⁵ They

⁴⁷ Seth Godin, *All Marketers Are Liars : The Power of Telling Authentic Stories in a Low-Trust World*.

⁴⁸ Christine Daigle, "Sartre and Nietzsche".

⁴⁹ John Haugeland, "Heidegger on Being a Person," 15.

⁵⁰ Christine Daigle, "Sartre and Nietzsche".

⁵¹ Philip Goodchild, *Deleuze and Guattari : An Introduction to the Politics of Desire* (London: Sage, 1996), 40–42.

⁵² Marjorie Grene, "Positionality in the Philosophy of Helmuth Plessner," *The Review of Metaphysics* 20, no. 2 (1966): 250–77, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/20124229>.

⁵³ J N Mohanty, *Logic, Truth and the Modalities* (Dordrecht Springer Netherlands, 1999), 152–55.

⁵⁴ John Haugeland, "Heidegger on Being a Person," 15.

⁵⁵ George J. Stack, "The Language of Possibility and Existential Possibility," 159–82.

all arguably refer in many ways to the same idea: that the human has no predisposition, no objective fate ascribed by a third abstract entity. 'The human' is born purposeless and chooses to find purpose wherever they wish. Yet, when looking at the subject one shall not look at the philosopher, but at the average individual who does not spend their lives explicitly pondering the great questions of existence. Rather, they intuitively and unconsciously navigate them by loving, purchasing, working, interacting, crafting and whatever else they choose to live through.

In this, the variety of ways of being, of actions and decisions, the intersubjectivity and pluralism inherent in today's society is furthered and leveraged through this boundary between desire and world that marketing in many ways is. In this sense, it might be said that marketing is the outcome of millennia of human desire and a cultural output of this humane system of desire-production.

Ultimately, it could be concluded that marketing, through a careful identification of human needs and a skillful generation of goods and services to address them, manages to become a creator of existential purpose for the subject.

Conclusion

It might be said that marketing can only exist in a world which produces more than people need, for when people need something, they do not have to be convinced about it. This world, in which we can make more in terms of quantity and variety than we need, is driven by desire.

In this, marketing takes the capitalist world of abundance and strives to selectively enchant the items within it in a personal way such that whatever mystifies one shall not necessarily mystify the other. Marketing is, likely, a key outcome of the Enlightenment, of a world in which the subject is free and is hence faced with a world cluttered by decisions, many of which existential. Marketing tries to create the illusion that these decisions are easier to make, and that identity and purpose can be either bought or at least supplemented by purchases. It is a tool that manages to bring both fulfillment and a constant feeling of inadequacy through the cycle of unending desire it locks the subject in. Every product tells a story and can be more than what it seems to be, and every desire and characteristic can have a matching product fulfilling it. In this, marketing seduces and makes the act of purchasing more than just acquiring a physical object, transforming it into a transformational moment of apparent fulfillment and sanctity. It creates that libidinal moment of pleasure relating to the present point in time uniting desire with the desired.

It is likely that marketing does enchant the modern world, just like it contributes to the subject's sense of identity as well as experience of meaning and purpose. For the consumer, the business is not a profit-hungry mastodon, but a desire-fulfilling machine which consistently solves existential possibilities by reminding the subject, to a certain extent, who they are, what they want and who they wish to be, often before they get to ask it. Marketing is the interface between this machine and the subjects, it understands them and materializes their possibilities. It has become in many ways a means of experiencing the world through the products that we desire and which supposedly define us. It translates our existential speech into simple goals: acquire this, acquire that, consume this, consume that and existential angst will fade into the purchase, it says.

It can be concluded, then, that marketing can be interpreted as the zenith of the 'desiring human'. If the subject has been defined by its systematic exploration of the possible, marketing comes like a summoner and evokes objects of mystical valence to address all envisioned possibilities. It plays a key role in the capitalist world. Hence, it can enhance people's experience of their lives, giving them meaning and

purpose beyond what are assumed to be the pitfalls of a consumerist society. It often accentuates society's issues and creates false hope as well as pushes the subject towards acts that are plain. It can make the individual unique, or assist humanity in becoming a uniform, homogeneous mass of blind buyers. Ultimately, it responds to what consumers desire: if they desire conformity, it will offer conformity. If they desire art, it will provide art. If they desire desire, it will provide desire.

It might be a manifestation of existential freedom, and yet at the same time the hyperreal prison we might have willingly locked ourselves into.

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