

# THE ART OF PERSUASION: ANALYZING ADVERTISING HINTS IN CLASSIC LITERARY WORKS

## Abstract

**Aims:** Current study aims to uncover hints and signals for advertising and consumption in classic literature and how these hints and signals managed to give an indication regarding the current reality of marketing and consumption patterns among individuals.

**Study Design:** The study was descriptive design

**Place and Duration of Study:** Study was conducted in Jordan through the academic year 2022-2023 between August 2023 and December 2023.

**Methodology:** qualitative methodology was adopted and open-ended interviews were held with a group of professors within literature faculty of university of Jordan.

**Findings:** Results of theme analysis indicated the appearance of numerous brands and marketing hints including consumption patterns of the society at the time of creating the novel and numerous appearance of brands which indicated that marketing at that time was based on branding and owning luxurious brands.

**Conclusion:** Study concluded that classical literature had a contribution to shaping the current image of marketing, as marketing and many of its signals and hints appeared within classic novels and were expressed in different ways depending on the authors, their orientations, and their literary interests

**Significance:** The current study may appear as an approach to connect between past and future of marketing from a literal perspective

**Keywords:** Classic Literature, Hints, Future, Novel, Coincidence, Persuasion, Advertising, Marketing, Insights

## 1. Introduction

Classical literature is considered a repository of profound ideas and concepts that have extended throughout the ages, so much so that classical literature is actually the reason behind the currently existing knowledge about ancient civilizations and societies, and how man knew the enormous amount of details related to ancient societies [1].

Classical literature, through references and hints, contributed to helping humanity write history and enhancing individuals' knowledge of their ancient cultures and civilizations. It even provided a lot of information about societies and ancient times, through which societies were divided into different categories and spectrums that served history and increased public libraries on these topics [15].

[17] argues that these hints, signs or coincidences may be clear and interpretable, or they may be ambiguous and need in-depth analysis and understanding through the study of symbols and signals that could lead to a possible future or a set of predictions about future humans or societies.

[9] points out that there are many ancient classical novels that presented many concepts and phenomena that have recently been perceived as hints and signals of the future. According to [2] these hints were made by the author, perhaps by pure coincidence, as he included elements, ideas, or developments within the novel/ story that actually occurred at the present time.

The current study launches from the idea of a lack in the previous literature regarding classic literature and its connection to possibilities in the future. There appeared no related literature that supported the fact that some classic literature model managed to through some hints and predictions regarding the future of marketing. From that point, the current study aims to uncover hints and signals for advertising in classic literature and the degree of these hints matching the current reality of advertising and marketing.

The aim of study was formulated in order to answer the following question:

**What kind of hints and signals of marketing and advertising appeared in classic literature and to what degree do these hints match the reality of marketing nowadays?**

According to [4], marketing, in its simple sense, stems from the idea of commercial exchange of products or services, and it has existed since ancient historical times, where marketing was linked to the idea of exchanging goods between tribes, and there was no concept of currency. Rather, currency itself was the products and raw materials such as grains, natural materials, or even Livestock. Marketing in that period was based on direct communication. In the middle Ages, the concept of markets appeared, through which goods and services were exchanged, high-value coins appeared, and systems and laws began to appear to protect the rights of merchants and buyers.

In modern times, marketing appeared in many aspects, and the Industrial Revolution represented a strong impetus for radical changes in marketing processes, as advertisements, commercial situations, and markets appeared and products began to meet the needs of consumers[10]. With time and the emergence of technology, marketing began to take a new and advanced form that included many methods and means to reach the consumer wherever he was [19].

At the level of classic literary works, many areas and points of marketing hints have appeared in various literary works, which were adopted for the purposes of either marketing specific products indirectly, or to explain the nature of the products and the mechanism for obtaining them at that time [11]. [14] points out that the appearance of marketing hints in some literary and fictional works is an interesting matter, considering that it is a type of hidden marketing that may not be intentional, but it has been considered a type of marketing.

One of the most famous examples of unintended marketing, but it refers to the nature of the popular and well-known products at that time, appeared in the novel *The Great Gatsby*, in which marketing hints appeared for many brands such as Rolls Royce cars, and the well-known perfume brand, Brooks Brothers. As for Henry James's novel, *The Ambassador*, it used a promotional method in which it lavishly described the richness of products in Paris at that time[5; 13].

George Orwell's novel (1984), which was published in 1949, is considered one of the examples of classic literature that presented a vision of the future. Orwell presented his novel by synthesizing a dark picture of

the human future based on controlling individuals through an advanced and complex surveillance system. This led literary analysts and specialists in the field of literature to look at and compare the novel and its hints to the current era, where there is electronic monitoring of individuals all the time, in addition to problems related to the privacy and individual protection of people on the Internet [7].

Among the future hints and signs that appeared in classic novels is what appeared in Aldous Huxley's novel "The New World" published in 1932; the novel provided many hints about technical and technological development in the world. In addition to signs about the central social system based on production and consumption. Huxley's novel alluded heavily to advanced technology as a mechanism to control the human element, such as employing genetic engineering to manipulate human genetics and develop individuals with abilities superior to existing individuals[8].

Jules Verne's novel "Twenty Thousand Leagues under the Sea" published in (1870) and played a role in providing future hints and various signals that contributed to directing the thoughts and opinions of individuals towards the future and its developments. These hints and references are used to arouse curiosity and guide the reader to think about the future and its possible developments. Verne's novel dealt with many of the ideas surrounding advanced submarines, radio communications, and practical under-ocean discoveries[21].

The world now is controlled by many thoughts and ideas that included continuous monitoring, mass consumption and lack of individual freedom. [12]noted to some of the most famous classic literary works like:

- The novel "Fahrenheit 451" by Ray Bradbury, published in 1953, referred to the transition of societies to mass consumption based on the obsession with obtaining material possessions, in addition to the constant surveillance of individuals and the suppression of individuals' freedom of expression.
- Franks Kafka's famous novel "The Trial" by Franz Kafka, which was later, published after his death in 1925. The novel contained many hints and references that dealt with the concepts of lack of freedom through the hero who was arrested and tried without knowing the crime. The novel showed the oppressive nature that societies will reach and the arbitrary exercise of powers in managing the affairs of individuals without identifying their issues and the reasons for their oppression.

### **Prediction of Marketing in Classic Literature**

According to [3], marketing and advertising have also appeared in many classic literary works. The allusion may not be direct or reflect the reality of the matter and match it with the current reality, but many novels alluded in one way or another about marketing, advertising, or one of their elements. The biggest example of this idea is Jonathan Swift's series of novels, Gulliver's Travels, where many marketing and advertising hints appeared, such as the first part of the novel, which described the world as domineering, directing, and controlling the public, "the world of Lilliputia." In the fourth part, Gulliver arrived in the land of Hunheim, where the Hunheims lived only to work and showed great interest in consumption and encouragement of mass consumption. As for the last part of the novel, Gulliver arrived in the land of the Jews, who are characterized by the ability to read minds and know the desires and needs of others, including referring to advertisements and their ability to direct people's thoughts and control their consumer behavior.

Paul Auster's novel City of Glass was published in 1985 and most of its ideas were directed towards mass marketing. The novel is based on the idea of an ideal "glass" world in which people live and whose thoughts are always directed towards material consumption through marketing and advertising companies. Many hints appeared in this novel regarding marketing's control over the public through the concept of identity and the desire to mislead, which has appeared in marketing companies today and their attempts to mislead the consumer and distort facts for the sake of financial gain. The concept of desire and lust that controls individuals and drives them towards consumption in order to enhance sales also appeared in the novel[20].

Isabel Allende's novel "The House of the Spirits", published in 1982, tells the story of a wealthy family in India and depicts its main characters as thirsty for revolution and luxury items as a form of mass consumption. The novel expressed the social status of individuals through an in-depth study of the employment of advertising and marketing directed towards wealthy individuals[18].

John Milton and his novel "Lost Paradise" in 1667, in which he referred to the story of Adam and Eve and how Satan tempted them to pursue forbidden things and material desires. This novel had a hint of marketing companies, how they push individuals towards the constant pursuit of their desires, materialism, and the constant desire for possession. This matter constitutes the first and basic task of marketing strategies today[16].

In addition to that, "The country of the blind" novel by Portuguese writer José Saramago appeared to have many hints and references in the novels to the individual's consumption and marketing patterns in light of social chaos and societal collapse[6].

## 2. Material and Methods

Qualitative methodology was adopted in current study through interviewing respondents with open-ended questions. Researcher have adopted a group of classic literary works that have an embedded orientation in them regarding marketing, mass consumption and materialism. These literary works included (*Jonathan Swift's series/ Gulliver's Travels, Paul Auster/ City of Glass, Babbitt/ Sinclair Lewis and The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit/ Sloan Wilson, Isabel Allende/ The House of the Spirits, and John Milton/ The Lost Paradise*).

Basically, researcher have chosen to identify hints and signals of advertising and marketing within classic literature. The researcher has chosen two main classic literary work including "Babbitt" by Sinclair Lewis (1922) and "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" by Sloan Wilson (1955).

A sample of (6) English literature professors from Jordanian universities were exposed to an interview that included questions regarding marketing and advertising hints in these two literary works see *Appendix A*. The interview mainly revolved around highlighting possible hints and remarks of marketing, advertising and comparing it to the current trend of marketing in the meantime.

The interview mainly consisted of four main questions, for "Babbitt" researcher have chosen questions including:

- How does the portrayal of consumerism and conformity in 'Babbitt' shed light on the power of marketing and advertising in shaping societal values and individuals' behavior during the 1920s?
- In the novel "Babbitt" by Sinclair Lewis, there are several marketing-related hints that shed light on the influence of marketing and advertising during the 1920s: which one of the following was the most apparent:
  - o Branding
  - o Sales
  - o Advertising
  - o Media

As for "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" the questions were:

- How did the portrayal of advertising and consumer culture in 'The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit' impact readers' perceptions of marketing strategies during the 1950s and beyond?
- In the novel "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" by Sloan Wilson, there are several marketing-related hints that shed light on the influence of marketing and advertising during the 1950s. Here are a few examples:
  - o Consumption
  - o Advertising
  - o Media
  - o Segmentation

The questions were uploaded online through Google Forms, and was directed to professors and lecturers in the field of English Literature. The sample was random through directing the link to the interviews to platforms of university of Jordan which minimized the responses of non-related individuals to the interviews. Interviews were withdrawn from Google Forms and analyzed as according the themes of marketing advertising. Themes included signals and hints related to branding, consumptions, sales and segmentation. The themes taken into perspective were mainly (branding, consumptions, sales and segmentation). Authors have depended on the experience of prior knowledge of professors in the field of analyzing the novel taken into perspective.

Themes were matched in accordance with the appearance of any time of consuming behavior, or mentioning any specific brands that were or still famous in the current time. After classifying the themes, validity of these themes were arbitrated by the same sample given that they were experts in the field. The arbitration of the sample agreed with these themes and analysis took place in accordance with the arbitration results.

### 3. Results and Discussion

Through analysis of the responses of the sample members, the main and only hypothesis of the study was accepted, which is that *“classical literature contains many marketing hints, whether intentionally or unintentionally”*. In general, the results of the analysis of the current study indicated that the hints of classical literature stemmed from the idea that they reflected the culture of society during the period in which these works were written.

#### **Embedded Marketing Segmentation in Literature**

Even if it was unintentionally, responses of the sample members who were specialists in the field of classical literature stated that novels and literary works were an effective means for the various organizations and brands that existed at that time to promote and market their products. This took place through their appearance as a distinguishing mark for one of the heroes of the novels or part of the setting of the novel.

In addition, the marketing hints that appeared in classical literature were not direct, as indicated in the responses of the sample members, but rather they were hints that reflected the style of society in that period. This was confirmed by the responses of the sample about “Babbitt” by Sinclair Lewis, which made many references to different brands and confirmed on the concept of branding. On another level, the sample answers also confirmed that there are many hints related to the consumer society style, as in “The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit” by Sloan Wilson.

#### **Consumption Behavior**

The consumption pattern of societies in that period appeared through the sample members’ answer, which confirmed in ‘The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit,’ *“the portrayal of marketing and advertising during the 1950s is evident through the theme of consumption. The protagonist, Tom Rath, grapples with the pressure to consume and conform to societal expectations, highlighting the pervasive influence of advertising on people’s desires and choices.”*

When respondents were asked (How does the portrayal of consumerism and conformity in ‘Babbitt’ shed light on the power of marketing and advertising in shaping societal values and individuals’ behavior during the 1920s?), their responses came in the clarity of the fact that in ‘Babbitt,’ the portrayal of consumerism highlights the power of marketing and advertising in shaping societal values and individual behavior during the 1920s. It shows how advertising influenced people to conform to a certain lifestyle and prioritize material possessions, reflecting the societal emphasis on status and wealth. on another level, when respondents were asked “How did the portrayal of advertising and consumer culture in ‘The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit’ impact readers’ perceptions of marketing strategies during the 1950s and beyond?”; their answers agreed on the idea that the novel explored the impact of advertising and consumer culture on readers’ perceptions of marketing strategies during the 1950s and beyond. It delves into the pressures of conforming to societal expectations and the influence of advertising in shaping desires, choices, and aspirations.

### 4. Conclusion

Current research sought to uncover hints and signals for advertising and consumption in classic literature and how these hints and signals managed to give an indication regarding the current reality of marketing and consumption patterns among individuals.

Results of study indicated that that classical literature had a contribution to shaping the current image of marketing, as marketing and many of its signals and hints appeared within classic novels and were expressed in different ways depending on the authors, their orientations, and their literary interests.

The study also proved that classical literature contributed significantly to strengthening the brand through its appearance in various works in form and name, or even by printing a positive image of it. It also influenced the pattern of consumption in that period through readers being influenced by the brands of heroes in novels and their seeking to imitate in connection with the positive values and feelings presented by the literary work.

Carrying out the current study was based on theoretical and practical implications. From a theoretical perspective, from a practical perspective, the current study may appear as an approach to connect between past and future of marketing from a literal perspective. How did marketing appear in the past, and was the concepts of consuming, branding and promoting appeared.

On a theoretical level, the current study may enrich the previous literature on the idea of connecting between literature and marketing. As far as the author is aware of there were no single study that examined that same idea that appeared in current study.

## 5. Limitations of Study

The narratives selected in the current work did not focus primarily and directly on marketing, advertising or any other marketing element. However, through literary and intellectual analysis, hints were reached that may reflect interest in consuming society and the comprehensive power of advertisements.

## 6. Future Research

Launching from results and conclusion of study, researcher encourages the following:

- Explore mass consumption and materialism in classic literary works
- Dissect and analyze the reality of high end brands and luxury possessions in classic literary novels

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UNDER PEER REVIEW

## Appendences

### Appendix 1. Interview Questions

#### Dear respondent:

The purpose of current study is to locate and analyze advertising hints within classic literary works. In other words, it aims to explore a fine line between the realities of advertising today compared to advertising that was adopted back in the days. In this document, you will encounter two literary famous works that I am positive you have read and enjoyed. The first is "*Babbitt*" by **Sinclair Lewis** (1922), the other literary work is "*The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*" by **Sloan Wilson** (1955). Given that you have either read or encountered these literary works, kindly answer the following:

- A. How does the portrayal of consumerism and conformity in 'Babbitt' shed light on the power of marketing and advertising in shaping societal values and individuals' behavior during the 1920s?**
- B. How did the portrayal of advertising and consumer culture in 'The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit' impact readers' perceptions of marketing strategies during the 1950s and beyond?**
- C. In the novel "Babbitt" by Sinclair Lewis, there are several marketing-related hints that shed light on the influence of marketing and advertising during the 1920s: which one of the following was the most apparent:**
- Branding
  - Sales
  - Advertising
  - Media
- D. In the novel "The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit" by Sloan Wilson, there are several marketing-related hints that shed light on the influence of marketing and advertising during the 1950s. Here are a few examples:**
- Consumption
  - Advertising
  - Media
  - Segmentation

***Thank You for Taking Part in the Study***