

COMMENTARY

Teaching Advertising for the Public Good

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Evidence that citizens and consumers demand meaningful changes from brands and organisations in addressing urgent social and environmental challenges (Porter and Kramer, 2019) grows by the day. Even such traditionally conservative institutions as the Bank of England have warned that companies and industries which do not respond to the demand for environmental activism will be punished by investors and consumers (Carrington, 2019). As a result, brands and organisations – and the agencies charged with ensuring their continued relevance and viability – need employees able to respond creatively and effectively to these challenges.

This article outlines how these issues informed the recent fundamental redesign of an MA Advertising programme in order to ‘get out in front of’ three resulting important trends:

1. The demand by consumers that brands and organisations commit to meaningful changes to their practices in order to address our world’s urgent social and environmental challenges;
2. The demand by brands and agencies for graduates, educated and able to design strategies and materials that respond creatively and effectively to these challenges; and
3. The demand university applicants that programmes prepare them for careers in which they can ‘make a difference’.

This paper will explain how these factors informed the recent (2020) fundamental redesign of a UK MA Advertising programme that will prepare student practitioners to meet the needs of industry and to pursue a personally fulfilling career by engaging with the UN Sustainable Development Goals by promoting Quality Education (UNSG 4), contributing to sustainable Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure (UNSG 9), developing Responsible Consumption and Production (UNSDG 12) and most urgently addressing Climate Action (UNSDG 13).

Keywords: advertising; brands; climate crisis; higher education; UN Sustainable Development Goals

Introduction

This article was written just as the Coronavirus outbreak spread panic and disruption around the world. In addition to the impact of the virus on, and its implications for, our usual daily consumption-filled lives and lifestyles, the global pandemic is widely recognised as a powerful warning about the consequences of the ways in which we continue to exploit the natural world. According to the Executive Director of the UN Environment Programme, Inger Andersen, 'There are too many pressures at the same time on our natural systems and something has to give' (Carrington, 2020).

According to leading scientists, the Covid-19 outbreak is a 'clear warning shot' – a reminder that our current food and factory farming practices led to this and other serious diseases – including Ebola, bird flu and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (Mers) – leaping the species' barrier to infect humans. According to Prof Andrew Cunningham, of the Zoological Society of London, these diseases are the result of our treatment of animals – the risks of which will continue to increase unless we adopt more ethically and environmentally responsible means of production. Aaron Bernstein of the Harvard School of Public Health warns that, if we are to reduce further outbreaks, we must take decisive action to end global heating and the destruction of the natural world for farming, mining and housing as both practices drive wildlife into closer contact with people.

Lybeck, et al. (2020) argue that universities have a central role to play in our response to the coronavirus crisis:

[W]e need to reimagine how universities can best serve both our most immediate neighbours and the entire world. We have the potential to help cure the disease, and to mitigate its effects in so many ways. Nothing will be the same again, and we must begin to reimagine what we all must do moving forward.

Lybeck, et al. (25 March)

In addition, a large body of evidence is beginning to reveal the ways in which the combined effects of climate breakdown, global heating and the destruction of the natural world not only increase the risk of future pandemics, but undermine the food supply. A combination of the rising human population, the loss of water for irrigation, soil fertility and insect pollinators could push the world into famine (Monbiot, 2020a). Given its impact on our health and life on this planet, many now argue that we can no longer consider – or pursue – profitability as the primary measure of success.

In response to these and numerous other crises, citizens and consumers have begun to demand meaningful changes in the way in which brands, industries and organisations operate.

The challenges faced by brands

AdNews (2019) highlighted the pressure on brands for meaningful action from four sectors:

1. Consumers are increasingly vocal in their demands for meaningful action from brands and organisations to address the climate crisis and other pressing social challenges (Porter and Kramer, 2019, Giddings, 2020). Consumers want to see evidence of 'brand activism' and evidence that the brands they purchase are good global environmental citizens.
2. Investors are becoming increasingly vocal in their demands for ethical practices threatening to organisations with high carbon footprints (and by association, those who do business with them).

Concerned that shareholder investments could end up being worthless if companies fail to adapt their business models appropriately, the Investment Association, representing 250 members with £7.7tn under their management, set a three-year deadline for companies to detail in their annual reports how they plan to measure and manage the threat of global heating (Makortoff, 2020a). In response, several investment groups have now produced guides for investors, including *the Carbon Compass*,¹ developed by KeplerCheuvreux in cooperation with the Institutional Investors Group on Climate Change (IIGCC), the 2Degrees Investing Initiative and Deloitte, and *The Carbon Disclosure Project*:² to assist investors, companies, cities, states and regions in managing their environmental impacts.

In addition to the incentive provided by the scale of the climate crisis, Edward Mason, the head of responsible investment for the Church of England's investment arm which manages an £8.3bn ethical fund, expects that the sacrifices made to tackle the 2020 Coronavirus pandemic are likely to renew and re-energise calls for 'responsible capitalism' and fuel demands for those firms that received government support to consider what they could do in return. (Makortoff, 2020b).

3. Regulators increasingly demand that companies and industries conduct risk management assessments of the material impact of business on climate change, such as the new rules the *Financial Conduct Association* (the regulator for 58,000 financial services firms and financial markets in the UK) has developed³ to improve climate-related disclosures.
4. Employees and potential employees increasingly demand to know what their employing organisation is doing for the environment. This is an increasingly important factor influencing employees' choice of a place to work. Millennials, in particular, want to know they are working for a business that is a force for good (Meckler, 2014; edcom, 2019).

While some brands (such as The Body Shop and Ben & Jerry's) have long targeted what was previously considered the 'niche' market of socially and environmentally responsible consumers, research indicates that meaningful action on environmental and social issues is now demanded by a greater proportion of consumers. WARC reports that 'More than half of UK teenagers aged 16 and over have deliberately bought or deliberately stopped using a brand because of its ethics' and '54% of those aged over 16 had made purchasing or usage decisions based on a brand's ethics' (WARC, 2018). A majority of the public now accept that the climate is in crisis and that 'something must be done'; even such traditionally conservative institutions as the Bank of England have warned that companies and industries that do not respond to the demand for environmentally responsible practices will be punished by both investors and consumers (Carrington, 2019).

As a result, while some brands and organisations continue to hesitate, numerous major brands including Toyota, Sainsbury's, Tesco, Marks & Spencer, WalMart, DuPont, Unilever and General Electric have all committed to more environmental practices – and have realised significant economic benefits as a result (Zokaei, 2013). In the UK, *The Guardian* announced that it would no longer accept advertising for fossil fuels, and the UK Parliament's pension fund has likewise cut its exposure to fossil fuel companies and made record investments in renewable energy (Ambrose, 2020). Such developments not only enhance a brand's credentials as good corporate citizens, they are often even good for business. For example, when M&S launched its sustainability programme in 2007, it was expected to cost more than £200m in the first five years. According to the company's annual report however, by 2011/12 the programme had generated £105m (Zokaei, 2013).

At the same time that brands are reaping the rewards of ethical citizenship, consumers have shown a willingness to punish those brands and organisations which refuse to commit to meaningful changes to their practices. As Volkswagen demonstrated so clearly, attempts to mislead the public about one's 'green' credentials can have severe consequences for both a brand's image as well as its bottom line.

The response by brands

In response, in an expanding global movement using business as a force for good (Aziz and Jones, 2016), a growing number of companies across numerous industrial sectors have pledged to consider the impact of their decisions on their workers, customers, suppliers, community and the environment. Patagonia's 'Don't buy this jacket' brand activism challenges unthinking consumerism as represented by Black Friday events and Lush's 'Naked' campaign against packaging provides opportunities for consumers and employees alike to engage in activism, for example by supporting climate strikes.

Society's most challenging problems cannot be solved by government and non-profits alone. The B Corp community works toward reduced inequality, lower levels of poverty, a healthier environment, stronger communities, and the creation of more high quality jobs with dignity and purpose. Certified B Corporations are businesses that meet the highest standards of verified social and environmental performance, public transparency, and legal accountability to balance profit and purpose. B Corps are accelerating a global culture shift to redefine success in business and build a more inclusive and sustainable economy. (B Corp, 2020)

The pursuit of B Corp status by an increasing number of organisations (3,272 companies across 150 industries as of 20 March 2020),⁴ the adoption of socially and environmentally responsible practices which seek to balance purpose and profit – together with a preparedness to demonstrate this through transparency – is evidence of a seismic shift in the organisational mindset of western capitalism.

In this shifting landscape, the continued viability of many brands and organisations will increasingly depend on two equally important factors: the commitment of brands' corporate management to act as socially and environmentally constructive global citizens – and the ability of these brands to build and maintain public confidence in the authenticity of their commitments.

As Chris Arnold explains:

The Triple Bottom Line: People, Planet, Profit, was coined by CSR specialist John Elkington in 1994. Twenty-six years on, in the 'new normal', the well established Triple Bottom Line has now been replaced by The Triple Top Line: Purpose, People & Planet. Devising a communications strategy starts with the ethos – the corporate purpose. This then drives the brand towards a people or planet strategy (though usually a combination of both). Think of it as part of the 'new normal' and new thinking in marketing ethics. (Arnold, 2020)

The responsibility of advertising to support brand activism and protect the public from misinformation

We recognise that advertising has been a major factor in the promotion of unthinking consumerism – the consequences of which have contributed directly to carbon pollution, the reduction of biodiversity and the current climate crisis. However, many leading advertising practitioners – together with our colleagues in graphic, digital and product design – are now

committed to using our skills to challenge – and to change – attitudes and behaviours in order to address local, national and global challenges.

Central to our role in ensuring the continued viability of clients' business (which is, of course, what we get paid for), is our responsibility to work with our clients to ensure that their products and practices for which we devise strategies and craft messages, meet the demands of increasingly activist consumers.

In recognition of the influence of advertising to shape attitudes and behaviours, the Advertising Association has begun to coordinate industry efforts to take action against climate change (Bairstow, 2020). The global association for creative advertising, D&AD explicitly endorses the need for the advertising industry to use its:

power to make a positive change and that it is our duty to use our creative talents and resources to help mitigate the climate and ecological crisis. (D&AD, 2019)

This call to arms echoes the sentiment expressed by graphic designer, photographer, writer and educator Ken Garland who, in 1964, wrote in his manifesto *First Things First* that:

In common with an increasing number of the general public [...] we think that there are other things more worth using our skill and experience [to promote, such as] education, culture and a greater awareness of the world. (Garland, 1964)

In heeding this call, an increasing number of advertising professionals are committing themselves to applying their talents to socially valuable projects:

Creative Conscience is a global movement that improves the communities we live and work in, helping to transform the wider world. We promote socially valuable, human centred design that enables and inspires people to change their lives and the lives of those around them for the better. (Creative Conscience, 2020)

It is also important to note however that, hiding amongst the many brands committed to ethical and environmentally responsible practices, there are some which attempt to paint themselves 'green' and 'environmentally friendly' (for example, by the colour of their packaging or the redesign of their logos) in a cynical attempt to exploit consumers' desire to support meaningful action. While we may be inclined to dismiss this as just lazy 'badging', the effect of such efforts to intentionally confuse the public are more than 'green-wash' or 'ethical-wash' (Arnold, 2009); they represent a serious threat to all brands by undermining public confidence in the authenticity of even genuine commitments to sustainable options. As explained by Stephen Woodford, chief executive of the Advertising Association, 'If we want to be trusted, we must be more trustworthy. We need to be in the business of trust' (Derrick, 2020).

The advertising industry and its representative bodies thus have a vital role to play here in protecting the integrity of communications with the public. Consumers, regulators and pressure groups have issued a clear demand to brands, organisations and the advertising industry: that this is a time for a real change – and demand that we refocus our talent and energy on the challenge of the climate and ecological crises to lead this change. Having successfully led our clients to reinvent themselves for changing consumer tastes and preferences, if the advertising industry is to continue to serve the interests of our clients and the public, it must now reinvent itself as a part of the solution (**Figure 1**).

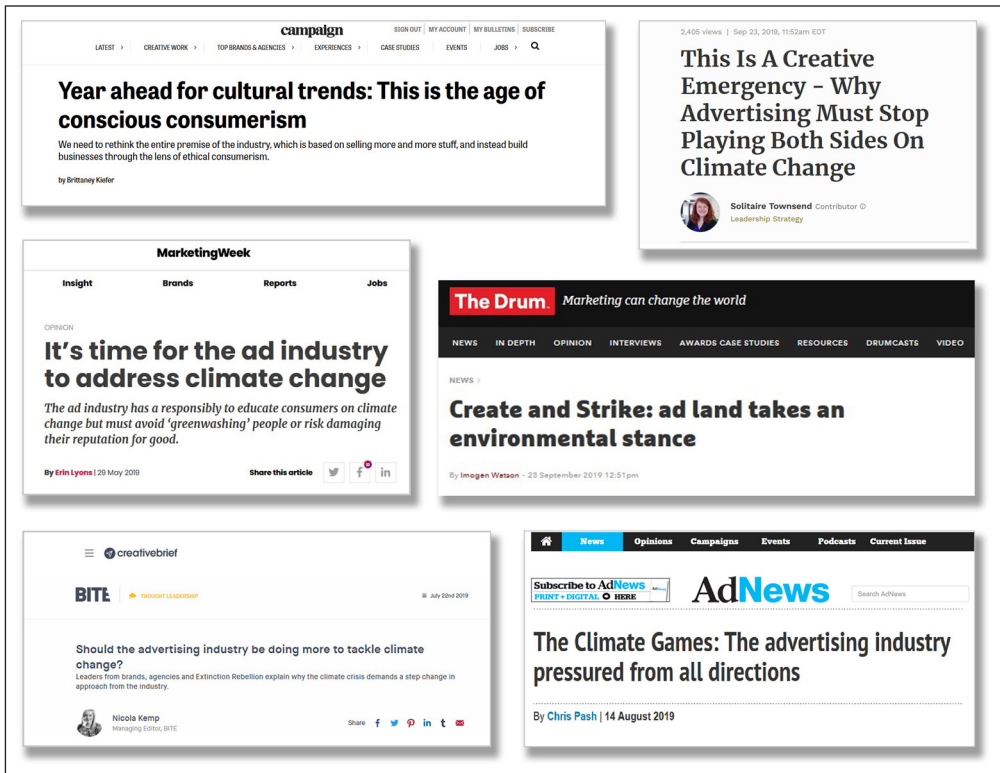


Figure 1: Recent headlines from advertising industry publications (image by Rutherford). The authors would like to thank the above publications for their kind permission to reproduce these headlines.

The search for a new kind of graduate

As a result of the fundamental changes demanded by consumers and the challenges these represent, both brands and agencies are looking afresh at the skills and abilities offered by university graduates – and by extension, at the ethos and content of programmes intended to prepare them to meet these challenges. Brands and agencies need – and are now actively recruiting – graduates who both understand the expectations of consumers and are able to devise strategies and design materials capable of engendering positive attitudes towards brands based on accurate claims that they are a force for good.

Those who design and deliver advertising programmes therefore have an important role to play in encouraging/preparing those who aspire to careers in advertising to create an environment in which our students can ‘make a difference’ by framing brands’ responses to our pressing environmental and societal challenges in effective (and affective) campaigns. To do so, we must redesign both the content and delivery of our programmes to address the intersection of three new trends:

1. The demand by consumers that brands and organisations commit to meaningful changes to their practices in order to address our world’s urgent social and environmental challenges;
2. The demand by brands and agencies for graduates, educated and able to design strategies and materials that respond creatively and effectively to these challenges; and

3. The demand by university applicants that programmes prepare them for careers in which they can 'make a difference'.

If the graduates of our programmes are to be capable of assisting the agencies and organisations for which they hope to work in recognising, understanding and meeting these challenges, we cannot continue to teach – and to frame – advertising as the means to engender yet more unthinking consumption. We must instead teach our students to use their understanding of the changing marketplace and changing consumer demands as a means to leverage new and creative ways of thinking about the role and responsibilities of corporate practices.

Graduates – and the agencies and organisations for whom they hope to work – are beginning to recognise the central importance of shared values and goals for many audiences. By exploring these shared values and goals and assisting our students in understanding their implications for brands, our graduates will be able to contribute to the development of socially and environmentally responsible brand images in the service of their employers. If we do not assist our students in understanding these issues – and how to parlay such understanding into the design of effective and affective campaigns and materials – our programmes will betray our students, the industries within which they hope to work, as well as the future that education is supposed to serve.

The marketplace for goods and services succeeds when it delivers what people want. By drawing on the market imperative of sustainability as part of the drive towards a new frame of reference for a 'successful' business, it may be possible to use this market demand to further extend the adoption of new practices and reinforce and reward consumers' demands for products and services, thus moving us further towards the UN Sustainable Development Goal 12: *Responsible Production and Consumption*. By enhancing the perceived value of owning such produced products, and thereby encouraging the market value of responsibly produced products (and just as importantly, diminishing the perceived value of purchasing and owning those products which are not responsibly produced), it is thus possible to create a 'virtuous cycle'. By equipping our students with the skills to assist brands and organisations in making meaningful changes to their practices, thereby enabling our graduates to 'make a difference', our programmes can join with – and enhance the power of – the broad coalition of forces driving the demand for meaningful brand activism.

We would argue that the understanding of the purposes and advantages of sustainability which informs the development of effective and affective strategies and campaigns must be shared by prospective employees of the advertising industry. Such values are not only essential to the ability to understand audiences, but also inform the ability to address and resolve the challenges in negotiations with clients regarding whether, and how, to promote a client's sustainable production and promotion.

Shared sustainable values and the worldview these foster therefore provide us with a natural ally in meeting the changing priorities of our students. University applicants – particularly members of Generations Y and Z – now expect and demand that their programmes of study will prepare them for careers in which they can 'make a difference' (Kay, 2019; Caraher, 2014) through their work (**Figure 2**).

A 2019 report by edcom (the European Institute for Commercial Communications Education) identified that:

[...] research indicates that, as a consequence of being resigned to earning considerably less than their parents, Generations Y & Z place a higher priority on finding a job that is intrinsically rewarding and which nourishes their sense of worth, allowing them to believe that what they do 'makes a difference' (edcom, 2019).

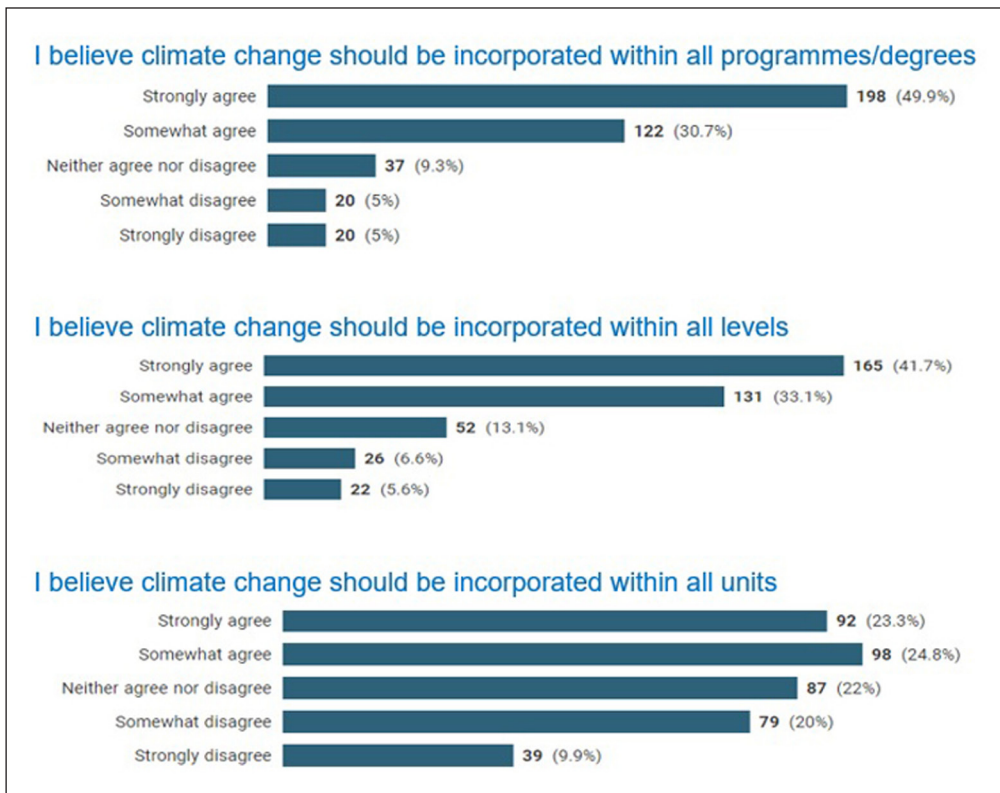


Figure 2: Results of SOS-UK Sustainability Skills Survey 2019–20 – Bournemouth University, UK.

Moreover, studies reveal that many of those now entering university from Generations Y and Z are even prepared to earn less in order to be part of an organisation that provides them with a sense of fulfilment (Meckler, 2014).

If shared sustainable values are an important part of our future advertising workforce as well as what applicants expect from their future careers, it follows that these same values must also be reflected within university recruitment strategies (of both students and staff) and embedded within the design and delivery of all programmes of study. Accordingly, we would argue that, just as a critical understanding of how to advance environmental and social change is central to graduates' feelings of achievement and self-worth, a consistent and tangible commitment by our institutions to providing our students with the means to achieve these goals will soon become fundamental to the relevance and continued viability of a university education.

The implications for programme design and delivery

We have seen that the continued viability of brands and organisations depends on two equally important factors: the commitment of corporate management to act as socially and environmentally constructive global citizens – and the ability of brands to engender public confidence in the authenticity of these decisions through advertising and other communications. It follows therefore, that just as advertising practitioners must lead and encourage their clients to redefine the nature of their value proposition (the benefit offered to consumers by buying their product or using its services), so, together with our students, we must engage with the work of leading advertising practitioners to redefine what it is that advertising is 'for'.

While corporate decisions are the domain of business management programmes, the ability to create and maintain public confidence in the integrity of the brand and the authenticity of its commitment to good corporate stewardship is the responsibility of communications programmes (advertising, branding and corporate communications). Our graduates must therefore have the confidence to challenge clients and colleagues who seek to make inauthentic or misrepresentative claims in this arena. Our students must clearly understand this if they are to demonstrate to clients how and why opportunistic behaviour undermines the most central currency in this new world – trust (Morgan and Hunt, 1994). Thus ‘green-washing’ or ‘ethical-washing’ – cynical attempts to exploit the profound desire for meaningful action – must be seen, not only as unproductive, but as potentially lethal brand strategies.

This new environment puts demands on us all as citizens and professionals to work towards the social and environmental good. As noted by Monbiot:

In an age in which we urgently need to cooperate, we are [currently] educated for individual success in competition with others. Governments tell us that the purpose of education is to get ahead of other people or, collectively, of other nations. The success of universities is measured partly by the starting salaries of their graduates. What we are encouraged to see as economic success ultimately means planetary ruin. (Monbiot, 2020b)

If HE advertising programmes are to adequately prepare our graduates to meet these challenges, *what* and *how* we teach must reflect – and embed a genuine commitment to – the needs of four groups:

1. **The industry** (including the brands and agencies) in which our graduates hope to work. We must ensure that our graduates have the ability to recognise, understand and meet the challenges of the new marketing paradigm – and then to devise and produce effective and affective campaigns and materials that will enhance their continued viability.
2. **Our graduates.** Given the expense and commitment required for university study, graduates reasonably expect us to provide them with the opportunity to acquire the conceptual, strategic, transferable and practical skills necessary to successfully pursue, not only an economically viable career, but one in which they are able to find personal fulfilment by ‘making a difference’.
3. **Our institutions.** HE (and FE) institutions depend for their reputations and continued viability on the quality, timeliness and relevance of our programmes, rather than teaching yesterday’s strategies and practices to tomorrow’s graduates. The opportunity to be involved with socially and environmentally constructive initiatives as part of the learning environment not only serves to attract students but reinforces their commitment to working with their institutions on such initiatives after graduation as alumni.
4. **Future citizens and professionals.** Those who will inherit the world – a world which will be created by our actions. We encourage and challenge our students to ‘see’ themselves as more than just consumers and aspiring professionals – but as citizens with a responsibility for considering critically the implications of the priorities by which they live, because these will determine not only the lives they will lead, but the shape of the world they will leave behind.

In this context, it is worth acknowledging that, while the focus of this article remains the need to prepare students for the changes to the objectives and practices of the advertising

industry resulting from the growing demand for social and environmental responsibility, the expansion of online teaching necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic provides a timely incentive to consider how new methods of delivery may enhance the quality of the learning environment.

Embedding UN SDGs in the design and delivery of an MA Advertising programme

Just as the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs) have implications for the future of all industries, ways in which students can be engaged with these can (and should) be embedded in all programmes. From design and engineering to economics and business management, as well as marketing and advertising, this engagement should manifest in ways that inform and reinforce the learning objectives of each programme.

76% of students said that by creating a purposeful project while studying, they were more likely to do so after graduating. (Creative Conscience 2020)

In what might be described as their own version of 'brand activism', many universities have sought to embed these goals (or variations of these) into their programmes of study – and as part of their commitment to sustainability and the common good. In doing so, academics are demonstrating leadership which 'envisions a better future and exemplifies the changes they hope to see in the world' (Shiel 2013, 128). We argue that it is essential to drive these changes by providing students with practical, 'hands-on' ways in which to apply their knowledge, skills and commitment to make a difference.

The authors have recently comprehensively redesigned an MA Advertising programme in an effort to provide students with the conceptual, strategic and practical skills necessary to ensure the continued viability of the brands, agencies and organisations for which they will work by assisting them in making meaningful changes to their practices in response to consumer demands – and in a form that will enhance our graduates' career prospects. By the end of the programme, graduates will possess – and will be able to demonstrate – the knowledge, skills, commitment and sensitivities to enable them to support agencies, industries and brands to anticipate, recognise, understand and respond effectively to the challenges of increased consumer demand for meaningful corporate social and environmental responsibility.

To achieve this objective, we have embedded four of the UN Sustainable Development Goals throughout the content, structure and delivery of the programme: contributing to sustainable *Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure* (UNSG 9), encouraging *Responsible Consumption and Production* (UNSG 12, addressing *Climate Action* (UNSDG 13) and promoting *Quality Education* (UNSG 4).

Students will also be provided with opportunities to recognise and avoid 'conceptual traps' (such as the danger of untested assumptions and the conceptual 'blinkers' imposed by the conventional definitions of 'effectiveness' and outmoded conceptions of 'success') and explore new ways (such as behavioural economics and creative disruption) to apply the tools of advertising, branding, campaign planning, media planning/buying. Students will be encouraged to test (and, where appropriate, to challenge) the conception of 'the problem' within a client brief – and it is here that we will expect students to explore and identify ways in which the solution to 'the problem' can contribute to Climate Action, innovative and sustainable industry practice and sustainable patterns of production and consumption.

To this end, we are fortunate in being supported by a number of agencies who recognise the value of working with our (predominantly international) students to shape

the experiences and abilities of future practitioners – collaborations which will only be enhanced by our commitment to the use of an increasingly inclusive blended learning environment.

These agencies have agreed to provide briefs – and work with our students in developing solutions that encourage Responsible Production and Consumption (UNSDG 12) and address Climate Action (UNSDG 13). We will also provide opportunities for students to engage with client briefs which do not address issues of sustainability and/or social justice. In recognition of the increasingly important role of advertising and branding specialists to assist clients in recognising more accurately the nature of ‘the problem’ or the particular form that a more constructive solution might take, such opportunities will provide students with the opportunity to learn to challenge such briefs and, in doing so, develop the ability to articulate – and advocate for – strategies which better serve the public good and ultimately, we argue, the client’s long term success.

Central to our efforts to foster the ability to recognise, challenge and avoid the pitfalls of ‘conceptual traps’ is the interrogation of underlying assumptions about the nature of ‘creativity’. The redesigned MA Advertising programme will offer – and regularly reinforce – an alternative definition of ‘creativity’: not as a measure of *what* we produce, but *how we work*. Instead, the redesigned MA Advertising programme has adopted a central focus on ‘Creative Ideation’ in which activities not typically considered to be ‘creative’ (for example, the design, execution, interpretation and analysis of audience research) will be framed and taught as equally ‘creative’ as the conception and production of a poster or a video. By doing so, we will equip students with the skills of creative and effective persuasion central to the practice of corporate communication, enhancing their ability to advance the cause of sustainability-focussed solutions as they progress within the advertising industry.

The redesigned programme also provides students with the opportunity to gain – and demonstrate – the knowledge, skills and sensibilities necessary to manage an advertising, branding or corporate communication agency or department within a contemporary global setting. Again, we recognise that, in addition to the interpersonal and organisational skills, the perspectives with which graduates emerge from their studies will be essential to the successful adoption of strategies which address the UNSDGs.

Students will reflect critically on the implications of practices intended to shape the perceptions, attitudes and behaviours of a wide range of publics in light of the demands of contemporary consumers and citizens, including the tensions between the promotion of consumerism and its consequences for the natural environment in alignment with UNSDGs. Students will also engage with, reflect critically on, and be expected to demonstrate competency in the challenges and opportunities involved in managing creative processes and organisations in a context of increasing expectations of corporate environmental and social responsibility.

Further, we have devised and embedded valuable opportunities for cross-faculty innovative co-creation with MA students in media production and computer animation in which the MA Advertising students will act as ‘agency client’ in working with/supervising production ‘subcontractors’ in the production of media materials in accordance with the creative brief developed in the previous semester. These collaborative skills will further the production of creative artefacts which inspire new ways of living in a sustainable manner. Indeed, our media degrees have ‘Albert’ certification demonstrating sustainable production practices. Thus, these opportunities also provide advertising students with direct experience of the carbon impact of artefact production so that this can be taken into account within graduates’ responses to briefs within the industry.

Central to our efforts to encourage our students to 'see' higher education as more than just job training – but as preparation for their responsibilities as informed and engaged citizens and to promote the value of lifelong learning (which we accept is a broader interpretation of UNSDG 4: Quality Education) – is our commitment to identify and embed opportunities to foster *transferable skills*. As our graduates are likely to change careers as many as five times during their working lives (Barrett, 2017) in search of fulfilment, we must ensure that our programmes provide them with the ability to recognise and make the most of the transferable skills necessary to successfully pursue an economically viable self-directed career. Doing so means that we must conscientiously design and deliver a learning environment intended, not just for the aspiring advertiser seated before us, but the person they may be in five or even ten years.

This has significant implications not only for the content of our units or modules, but our assessment regime. While there has been, for a variety of reasons, a trend towards task-based assessment (Rutherford, 2015), the use of more demanding constructively-aligned cognitive challenges are more likely to assist students in developing, not only the skills required for the future of the industry (the ability to recognise, understand and make meaning), but those our graduates will need in becoming reflective, self-aware individuals, capable of lifelong learning.

The revised MA Advertising programme will provide our students with the means and the incentive to become:

- i. Competent professionals, in conscious and confident possession of both the subject-specific and transferable skills necessary to appropriately determine, and successfully pursue, a professionally rewarding, economically viable and personally fulfilling self-directed career;
- ii. Informed and engaged citizens, capable of and committed to making informed and constructive contributions to their respective communities; and
- iii. Reflective, self-aware individuals and capable and committed lifelong learners, able to make informed and appropriate decisions in the creation of a fulfilling and self-directed life.

To achieve the first, the redesigned programme has adopted a central focus on 'Creative Ideation' in which 'creativity' is not seen as a measure of *what we produce*, but *how we work*.

To achieve the second, the programme will present advertising as an invaluable part of the solution to social and environmental crises. Together, our students and academics will work to redefine what advertising is 'for'. This will require precisely the kind of interrogation of our assumptions on our part as academics and programme designers (leading by example) that we must both encourage and require of our students.

To lead our students to adopt a new, socially constructive conception of what advertising can do and what it is 'for', academics and curriculum designers must be prepared to recognise and consider the implications of the ways in which we conceive of ('mentally picture') the purpose and practice of advertising – as well as how we live – as this will inform the success of our effort to shape our students' attitudes.

While we recognise that not all clients and agencies with whom our graduates will work will be committed to corporate social and environmental responsibility, by framing the practice of advertising as a form of cultural and social capital, we will ensure that graduates are able and prepared to promote good corporate citizenship. To this end, even in client briefs which do not include responsible corporate stewardship, the programme will challenge students to 'make a difference' by devising ways to meet the objectives of the brief in a manner that serves the client's and society's long term success.

To achieve the third, in all assessments (both strategic and practical) the programme will emphasise the importance of transferable skills, including the ability to solve 'problems' by questioning, interrogating and challenging implicit assumptions. Such skills will be central to graduates' work in shaping unsustainable clients' output into strategies which work towards rather than against the UNSDGs.

Conclusion

We are at a point at which we must face the environmental and ecological problems we have created as a result of the impact of our actions on planetary ecosystems. Projections demonstrate the need to move to a net zero carbon economy by 2030. All our energies must be focused on this task. It is essential therefore that higher education programmes put this at the heart of their planning and practice. As academics, we must demonstrate transformational leadership characterised by 'inspirational motivation, developing appealing visions and uniting collective effort' (Shiel 2013: 127). Our graduates must leave their undergraduate or postgraduate programmes grounded in both an understanding of the challenges articulated by the UNSDGs, a commitment to address these challenges, and the knowledge and skills that will enable their particular discipline to contribute to their achievement.

With its history of promoting consumerism, this may seem a radical, even unlikely change for the advertising sector. We have sought to show why and how advertising education can address these challenges, creatively and productively and in a manner than allows it to continue to serve the interests of its clients – by helping the interests of its clients serve the future of all.

Our MA Advertising programme responds to the three demands:

1. the demand by consumers that brands and organisations commit to meaningful changes to their practices in order to address our world's urgent social and environmental challenges;
2. the demand by brands and agencies for graduates able to design strategies and materials that respond creatively and effectively to these challenges; and
3. the demand by university applicants that programmes prepare them for careers in which they can 'make a difference'.

We have chosen to focus on four key UNSDGs but HEIs and curriculum developers will have to decide whether this is an appropriate strategy or which of the 17 UNSDGs should be addressed within which programme.

We know that 'champions for sustainability have to challenge the system' (Shiel and Williams 2015, 443). Together as a sector, we will need to carefully consider possible 'sustainability fatigue' and how we can address this within our students and amongst consumers and practitioners as a whole. Finally, HEIs must be prepared to live the UNSDGs themselves, adopting meaningful changes to their practices in support of these goals – the most pressing of which are Climate Action and its associated inequalities. Critically aware students and applicants are highly attentive to how the university of their choice operates. These students and applicants are demanding that HEIs lead the charge for change, role modelling practices for others to follow.

The range and creativity of responses to the threat of coronavirus demonstrated by advertising practitioners suggest what is possible when we deem the circumstances to be an emergency. Just as the Second World War led to the UK's National Health Service (NHS), as educators and industry professionals, we call for the same scale of response to the climate emergency.

We have no choice but to rise to these challenges.

Notes

- ¹ <https://www.iigcc.org/resource/carbon-compass-investor-guide-to-carbon-footprinting>.
- ² <https://www.cdp.net/en>.
- ³ <https://www.fca.org.uk/news/press-releases/fca-announces-proposals-improve-climate-related-disclosures-listed-companies>.
- ⁴ <https://bcorporation.net>.

Competing Interests

The authors have no competing interests to declare.

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