

Ten very good things: Advertising [1]

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Some things that are good and beneficial are frequently disparaged because they are misunderstood. I have selected a few such things to put the case in favour, pointing out the good that they do. These points will be familiar to many of our readers, of course, but they might equip other people with arguments that can defend these ideas against critics.

1. Advertising

Some suggest that advertising is wasteful, diverting resources into promoting goods that might otherwise be used to lower the price. It has even been claimed that advertising is coercive, tricking a gullible public into buying goods and services by bombarding them with positive images instead of trying to sell on the basis of quality.

In fact advertising is informative. It tells the public what goods are available, in what varieties and at what prices. It is a very competitive industry, with creative minds vying with each other to find new and attractive ways of appealing to what the public is looking for, and of emphasizing the merits that people seek in the goods they buy.

Advertising is often used to promote new or improved products by announcing the edge they have over their rivals. It is self-regulated, not permitting ads that try to sell goods by making people feel inadequate or inferior without them. Instead they have to stress the positive aspects of their products.

Some intangible associations add value to products by creating an image for the product that enhances the enjoyment of it. Malt whisky in India is promoted as an aspirational product, so the young Indians who sip it enjoy not only the whisky, but the feeling that they are headed for success. And long after the whisky has gone, the memory of that feeling might endure. When some products are bought, the purchaser buys into a lifestyle linked to them by advertising, and enjoys the intangible associations they bring.

Sports companies are sometimes criticized for promoting expensive brands that young people are encouraged to buy into. But the fact is that many teenagers are still discovering who they are, and the brands help them to assert an identity linked to their associations.

Far from being wasteful, advertising promotes competition, and that keeps prices keen and quality high;

and the images created for products enhance the value of those goods to the purchaser.

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