

Lawrence R. Samuel, **Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America**, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010, 232 pp., \$26.50 (paperback).

Reviewed by  
Hannah Block  
Simon Fraser University

An approachable and engaging historical account of marketing as an industry, practice, profession, and social phenomenon, Lawrence R. Samuel's ***Freud on Madison Avenue: Motivation Research and Subliminal Advertising in America*** is a must-read for any marketing/public relations (PR) student or practicing professional. The modern-day consumer would find this relatively short, jargon-free text to be of equal interest. The author's thoughts, perspective, and personality shine through each page of the book by way of compelling anecdotes, offering the reader context and insightful backstory.

Remaining concise, without providing a full history lesson, Samuel thoughtfully and effectively ensures that the reader has the knowledge necessary to fully understand, appreciate, and consider the points he sets forth and the discussion that ensues, further supporting the text's accessibility and broad audience appeal.

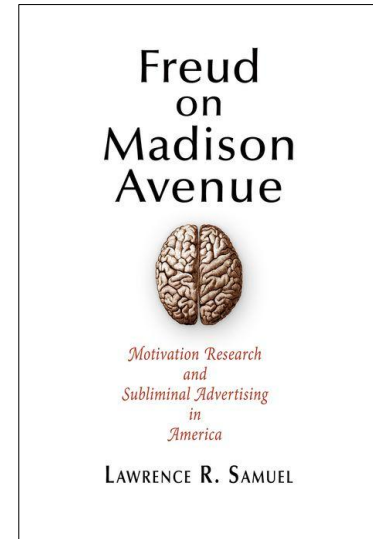
Given the rapid and significant technological advances in the field of marketing/advertising over the past decade, with the increased reliance on algorithms, Samuel's text could be considered outdated. Nevertheless, his book remains relevant for a contemporary audience insofar as it offers insight into persuadability at the unconscious level and the power of well-designed marketing campaigns—emphasizing the deep rootedness of traditional marketing/advertising techniques in the modern-day marketplace, and the role psychoanalysis has played in the development of today's marketing and PR industry.

The book's five succinct chapters

[tell] the story of motivation research chronologically, from its birth in Vienna in the early 1930s through its decline in the early 1960s, its revival in the 1970s and 1980s, and its ultimate transformation into the consumer insights and account planning research methodologies of today. (p. 19)

Samuel travels through these formative decades relying on case examples including consumer attitudes toward prunes and the contradictory findings presented by researchers James Vicary and Ernest Dichter—demonstrating the possibility of variance in motivation research findings (based on the analyst and methodology employed). This structure forms the framework of his book while simultaneously alluding to modern-day marketing/advertising tools and tactics. Such strategic insight creates an opportunity for connection and relation, maintaining the reader's interest.

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This core objective is effectively accomplished starting in chapter 1: "The Psychology of Everyday Living." Here, the reader is introduced to key figures and the psychology-based marketing practice of motivation research (MR). Acting as a launchpad for the book's retelling of marketing and motivation research, Samuel begins with the well-known story of Paul Lazarsfeld, who helped Vienna laundromat owners increase their business by capitalizing on citizens' needs.

Building on the discussion in the opening chapter, chapter 2, "The Sophisticated Sell," continues this example-based historical portrayal of motivation research—exploring the development and widespread adoption of the marketing tactic in further detail, while highlighting additional industry icons and case studies. As revolutionary as it was, motivation research was equally controversial—fundamentally criticized and viewed as a threat—with the ability to go beyond exploiting citizens' anxieties by actually creating them; a reverse approach to encourage purchasing the advertised product/service (p. 42).

Bearing an appropriate name for the chapter's focus, chapter 3, "The Secret Pitch," tackles the rise of subliminal advertising and subliminal perception. Coined "motivation research on steroids" (p. 89), subliminal perception existed as a comparatively short fad; its year-long stint nevertheless representative of a critical state of postwar hyperparanoia in America (p. 89).

Denser than the preceding three chapters, chapter 4, "The Fertile Moment," endeavors to continue the discussion and exploration of motivation research and marketing techniques during the 1950s through further case examples. The chapter begins with the 1956 story of Ford's E-Car—"the Edsel," which ultimately tanked; here, entering an examination of market research, motivation research, target audience, brand image, and brand identity. These marketing elements are equally important and increasingly prevalent in the modern-day marketplace. Facebook's recent (October 28, 2021) rebrand to Meta Platforms Inc. exists as a prime example of the significance of brand image and brand identity. The global technology conglomerate rebranded to reclaim its positive brand image and brand identity by way of dissociation from outstanding obligations, unaddressed responsibilities, and negative brand associations, while concurrently delineating more clearly its social subsidiaries from its parent organization (Muzellec & Lambkin, 2006).

Although suspicion began to rise, motivation research continued to flourish in the late 1950s with "its generally perceived ability to go where market research had not gone before" (p. 131). This dichotomous progression prompted instances of dual market research. State Farm Insurance and its combining of traditional and nontraditional research findings is used as the case study here. The company conducted both a standard market survey and a motivation research study—merging the findings to inform the creation of its new ad campaign (p. 131).

In keeping with the style of the book, additional case studies are used to advance the dialogue of marketing's perpetual growth and development. Examples such as Greyhound's advertising campaign are used to illustrate the development of consumer profiles, "image building" (p. 136), and targeted advertisements—now commonly used tactics for "positioning products and services in the marketplace that half a century before was considered a rather revolutionary idea" (p. 136). The latter portion of the chapter elaborates on Ernest Dichter and his work, "perception research" (p. 150), and "operations research" (p. 151).

The concluding chapter, chapter 5, "The Psychology of the World of Objects," draws back the curtain on marketing in the 1960s—investigating the continuation of motivation research as a key marketing strategy, seeing that "you cannot buy a car, prefer a certain cigarette, or join a club without a researcher trying to type your personality and generalize on your hopes and dreams" (pp. 154–155). Topics including dynamic research (p. 156), market generations, and threats to motivation research are also discussed.

Samuel details Dichter's mining safety case, "My name is Betsy," to exemplify these ongoing developments and evolution within the industry and marketplace, subconsciously introducing concepts of feminization and fetishization (of products), while indirectly foreshadowing modern-day technologies (i.e., voice control and automation). Such deliberately selected case studies keep the reader engaged.

Ever more relevant today, word-of-mouth advertising, the increased focus on the consumer, and the role of influencers are also examined in this final chapter.

The integration of psychology within the field is reintroduced and emphasized here through case examples including why one requires so many towels when traveling, the (now ubiquitous) hotel mini bar/fridge, and home buying patterns (looking at the role of subconscious desires).

The chapter progresses to a review of motivation research and marketing in the 1970s and 1980s—considering the role of packaging in the buying process, the anticipation of bulk buying, an increased "emphasis on values and lifestyles" (p. 179), and the importance of brand association—insofar as "brands are not just commercial products we buy and use; they're our companions in life as well" (p. 180).

In his introduction, Samuel shares: "I love hearing personal anecdotes about the glory days of Madison Avenue but . . . I tend to take fifty-year-old reminiscences with a large, and perhaps Freudian, grain of salt" (p. 20). This opening anecdote suggests the impetus for his book, and more specifically, introduces its unique stylistic composition.

In a saturated field, Samuel's book is well situated—thriving in a realm of its own as a piece of timeless literature.

Critically, *Freud on Madison Avenue* can be considered light reading. This level of writing, however, makes the text highly approachable, sharing an overview of marketing's transformations throughout the bulk of the 1900s while unintentionally, simultaneously making a strong case for the practice's responsiveness to cultural and societal trends (demonstrated via case study examples).

Samuel presents the responsiveness of the industry in an enticing manner, and, in doing so, his voice and viewpoints are clear and well-articulated. As a result, this historical account of marketing throughout the 1900s is not written from a neutral perspective; it is Samuel's honest and anecdotal historical presentation—encouraging an engaged and active reading of the text—a challenge common to historical literature that he navigates well.

### Reference

Muzellec, L., & Lambkin, M. (2006). Corporate rebranding: Destroying, transferring or creating brand equity? *European Journal of Marketing*, 40(7/8), 803–824. <https://doi-org.proxy.lib.sfu.ca/10.1108/03090560610670007>