

The whole purpose of advertising is to spread dissatisfaction

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Suzanne Moore [wrote a piece](#) in the Guardian recently on the power of advertising and the crass claims from some that they are immune to its influence. The article included this intensely personal, yet powerful, argument:

[T]his I do know: advertising works. I believe minds can be changed — why, otherwise, would I write?

Precisely.

I have long been intrigued by the power of advertising, which I see as almost universally harmful. I wrote this on the subject in my book, [The Courageous State](#) (page 172):

The nature of advertising has to be understood. Advertising is not the neutral act of informing market participants of the qualities of the products that might be available to them, as economists would like to think it is. Instead advertising and its related activities of marketing and market research create the opportunity to sell those things for which need (let alone desire) does not exist. As such advertising is not a response to the market; advertising is instead the force that creates markets.

In this case advertising provides biased information that is in very many cases targeted very specifically at audiences whose vulnerability has been profoundly understood by the advertiser. The whole purpose of advertising (small ads and maybe job recruitment apart) is not to inform, but is to spread dissatisfaction. Its intention is to make the person who is the target of the advertising campaign feel that their current consumption is inadequate and that they must have the item being promoted to achieve a proper sense of well-being. Advertising, therefore, is not an action designed to promote the benefits of ownership of the product it refers to; instead advertising is deliberately designed to make a person feel their current position is inadequate but that this current state would be remedied if only they consumed more of a particular item.

Nothing has made me change my mind. But in that context what is the whole Facebook / Cambridge Analytica issue about? And can anyone argue that it has added to the net sum of human well-being? And if not, isn't that the reason for taking action?