

Comicalités

Études de culture graphique

Histoire et influence des pratiques bédéphiliques

Négocier la bédéphilie, entre lecteurs et éditeurs

From Mass Medium to Niche Medium: Advertising in American Comic Books, 1934–2014

D'un média de masse à un média de niche : les publicités dans les comic books, 1934-2014

BART BEATY ET BENJAMIN WOO

Résumés

Français English

Cet article s'appuie sur l'étude de 4248 publicités provenant du corpus du projet "What Were Comics?" pour analyser la transformation du statut des comic books nord-américains entre 1934 et 2014. Nous montrons que l'examen précis des tendances publicitaires amène à remettre en cause l'historiographie dominante de ce format de publication. Nous avançons que l'histoire des comic books nord-américains peut ainsi être divisée en quatre grandes périodes : 1) une période de domestication, durant laquelle les enfants étaient vus comme le lectorat privilégié des comic books; 2) une période de crise à la fin des années cinquante, causée par la perte de ce lectorat enfantin; 3) une période de transition, marquée par des publicités plus petites et moins coûteuses, visant un public mixte d'enfants et d'adultes; et enfin 4) une période d'équilibre, durant laquelle les publicités se divisent entre des marques d'envergure nationale et des publicités internes à l'éditeur.

This paper draws on the study of 42,248 advertisements contained in the What Were Comics? corpus to analyze the transformation of the status of the American comic book between 1934 and 2014. We argue that sustained attention to patterns of advertising in American comic books challenges the dominant historiography of the publishing format. We suggest that the history of the American comic book can be understood in terms of four general periods: 1) a period of domestication during which time it was understood that the primary audience for comic books was children; 2) a period of crisis in the industry in the late-1950s brought on by the loss of the child reader; 3) a period of transition marked by smaller and lower-value advertising targeting a mixed readership of children and adults; and, 4) a period of equilibrium in which advertising is split between national brands and in-house advertisements.

Entrées d'index

Mots-clés : comic books, presse, publicité, histoire, historiographie, lectorat

Keywords : comic books, periodicals, advertising, history, historiography, readership

Éditeurs et profession : Archie Comics, Audit Bureau of Circulations, Capital Comics, Charlton Comics, Columbia (bicycles), Columbia Record House, Comic Magazine Association of America, Dark Horse Comics, DC Comics, Defiant Comics, Dell Comics, Disney, EC Comics, Fiction House, First Comics, Gilberton Comics, Harvey Comics, Image Comics, Marvel, Mattel, N.W. Ayer and Sons's American Newspaper Annual, Pacific Comics, Stravon Publications, Tekno Comics, Topps Comics, United States Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency, Valiant Comics, Vertigo Comics, Western Publishing, What Were Comics?

Noms cités : Chet Atkins, Peter Bart, Herbert Beaser, Robert Coard, Johnny Craig, Valentine De Landro, Kelly Sue DeConnick, David Finn, Bill Gaines, Jenette Kahn, Konrad Leitner, Jacob Liebowitz, Morton S. Malter, Helen Meyer, Alan Moore, Matthew Murphy, George A. Pflaum, Alex Segal, Mort Weisinger, Fredric Wertham

Texte intégral

Introduction

- 1 As an individual disposition, bédéphilie – or what we, in a North American context, would call “comics fandom” – has probably existed for as long as there have been comics. But bédéphiles and comics fans were not originally conceived of as the primary audience for comic books in the United States. A number of recent histories of the American comic book have charted the passage of comic books from a print medium oriented to a mass audience of children to one that addresses a dedicated subculture of adult collectors and aficionados (see, e.g., HATFIELD, 2020; KIDMAN, 2019; WILLIAMS, 2020). Importantly, this transition from mass to niche medium has both an industrial logic as well as an aesthetic one.
- 2 Following the analysis advanced by Jean-Paul Gabilliet (2009, pp. 71-84), scholars have tended to focus on aesthetic and formal changes in comic book storytelling during the 1970s and later to explain the shift in readership. Gabilliet identifies the rising importance of line-wide continuity in the superhero comic books published by Marvel Comics and National Periodicals / DC Comics, the recruitment of new creative personnel from organized fandom, and the development of “fan favourite” artists, all of which which contributed to an increasingly connoisseurist orientation to the material as among the powerful forces acting on the industry during this period. Similarly, Paul Williams has recently demonstrated how alternative comics publishers “recapitulated moves made more than fifty years earlier in the field of literature,” “separating out a discerning niche readership from an indiscriminate mass market [and] artistically motivated works from commercially driven products” to give birth to the idea of the graphic novel (WILLIAMS, 2020, p. 123). We concur with analyses of bédéphilia that emphasize the growing importance of an ever-narrower target market of dedicated readers over time, but only insofar as we remember that these processes are not the inherent tendencies of an art form struggling to realize its potential (PIZZINO, 2016). Rather, as Shawna Kidman (2019) suggests in her recent *Comic Books Incorporated*, attempts by a range of comic book producers to construct “quality” audiences were industrially useful to the extent that they not only made up for flagging sales but also boosted the status of comics-related properties within a conglomerating media sector. Moving beyond the issues of aesthetics and rhetoric, this article seeks to demonstrate how the editorial changes that drove the construction of niche readerships were paralleled by shifts in the political economy of the comic book industry through an examination of comic book advertising.
- 3 Given advertising’s prevalence in comic book history, it is surprising that ads have been so little addressed by comics scholars. This is not simply a result of the field’s literary bias (BEATY AND WOO, 2016) but also perhaps a consequence of the “overreliance on

published and available texts” that, as Margaret Galvan observes, “skews the visible reality of what we analyze” (2018, p. 409). To the extent that scholars work from reprint collections and, increasingly, digital scans, advertising will fall out of view because ads are typically removed from these sources. In order to avoid this “skew,” we turned to the What Were Comics? (WWC) corpus housed at the University of Calgary. The WWC corpus is made up of 3,563 comic books, representing a random sample of two per cent of the comic books published in the United States each year between 1934 and 2014.¹ The 42,248 advertisements contained within their pages provide a new viewpoint onto the American comic book industry’s transformation from a mass-producer of print ephemera to an essentially subcultural medium in greater detail.

Ads and Audiences in American Comic Books

- 4 Communication and media scholars have long pointed to the role that texts play in a capitalist media system: not simply products that are bought and sold, they are a means to organize, construct, and even “conquer” audiences who are themselves sold as commodities to advertisers (SMYTHE 1977; ANG 1991; TUROW, 1997; MEEHAN 2005). As Dallas Smythe (1977, p. 5) famously put it, in advertiser-supported media, the content itself is nothing more than the “free lunch” that induces people to belly up to the bar for some ads. While this argument holds true for commercial television, terrestrial radio, and free commuter newspapers, the business model of periodicals – including comic books – is somewhat more complicated.
- 5 A comic book publisher has three main revenue streams available to them. The first is licensing their intellectual property, whether for republication in other markets or for adaptation and merchandising. There is a compelling argument to be made that what we think of as comic book companies are and always have been licensing companies (ROGERS 1999; GORDON 2017; KIDMAN 2019), but, insofar as they *are* publishers, they mostly produce what Havens and Lotz (2016, p. 98) term a “continuous media good” – that is, a comic book *series* – using a hybrid business model that sells both the comic books themselves (stream two) and advertising space within them (stream three). Ideally, this model allows advertising to subsidize production costs and lower the purchase price, enabling more people to afford it and boosting circulation, thereby putting the ads in front of more readers. This conventional wisdom was challenged in the 1980s by studies arguing that no such subsidy exists in the magazine industry (NORRIS 1983; SOLEY AND KRISHNAN, 1987), but more nuanced work has highlighted the complex relationship between pricing, circulation, demographics, and advertising rates. Jukti Kumar Kalita and Robert H. Ducoffe’s (1995) findings demonstrate that price and circulation are inversely related, that periodicals attractive to high-income readers often have relatively small circulations, and that those publications earn more per-copy revenue from advertising than from sales. In an age of targeted, niche advertising, certain audiences are more *desirable* – and therefore *valuable* – to advertisers, even if they are smaller.
- 6 Estimating the readership of comic books is notoriously difficult due to secrecy on the part of publishers and distributors (WOO, 2020). We regard comic book advertisements as artifacts of the “critical industrial practices” (CALDWELL 2008, p. 5) through which publishers and advertisers negotiate understandings of who is reading comic books and what those readers are worth. These understandings have obvious knock-on effects when it comes to editorial decision-making. While a great deal of scholarly work in the domain of advertising studies has been concerned with the content of advertising, we seek to read ads at a distance – as indicators of the state of the comic book industry and clues to how comics and their readers were being understood by publishers and advertisers, rather than as messages per se.

7 As we were collecting the data on comic book advertisements in the WWC corpus, we had naively presumed that we would find a significant rise in the number of comic books that contained no advertising beginning in the mid-1980s. This is the period that gave rise to “prestige format” comics and the so-called “graphic novel,” and it is generally viewed as a crucial moment in comics’ transition from mass to niche medium. However, our presumption was only partially correct.

8 In the United States, adless comic books have always been anomalous, representing only about five per cent of total production. As indicated in Figure 1, there was indeed significant growth in the proportion of comics books without ads in the 1980s relative to the 1970s, but we also found similar (and even higher) percentages of ad-free comic books published between 1940 and 1970.

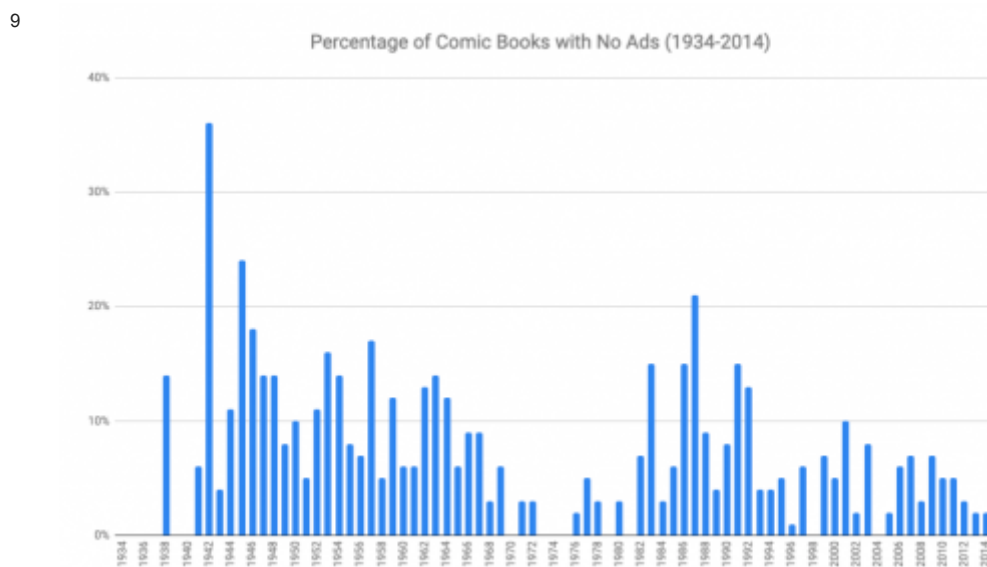


Figure 1. Percentage of Comics Books with No Ads (1934-2014)

© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo

10 What accounted for the presence of comic books without ads in these two eras? When a magazine has no advertisements, consumers must bear all the costs of its production. Consequently, comics without ads are generally more expensive than comics with ads published at the same time. In the 1980s, it is connoisseurs, collectors, and avid fans who are most willing to pay for more expensive comics offered in deluxe packages. Here, adlessness signifies a premium product intended for “discerning” audiences, as we surmised, but we failed to anticipate another, earlier meaning of the adless comic book. Setting aside those mid-century comics that contained no ads because they themselves *were* ads (in-store retailer give-aways), it was the most wholesome, most parent-friendly publishers who most frequently forsook advertising. During the period that Dell was the market leader in the comic book industry, they produced vast numbers of ad-free comic books (indeed, the preponderance of the books on the left-hand side of fig. 1 were published by Dell); other publishers that eschewed advertising included George A. Pflaum, whose *Treasure Chest of Fun and Fact* was circulated to Catholic parochial schools from 1946 to 1972, and Gilberton, whose *Classics Illustrated* often contained no advertising (notably, both of these titles ended in the early 1970s). In the post-war period, the buyers who would pay a premium for an ad-free comic book are concerned parents (cf. HOLIDAY, 2018). The absence of ads in the early decades of the comic book industry represented a different definition of “quality,” where adlessness was a firebreak between the marketplace and children.

11 These two, competing understandings of comic book readers – as a mass audience of children or a niche audience of adults – define the entire history of the American comic book industry. Returning to comic books with ads, we can track the shifting balance between them with more precision.

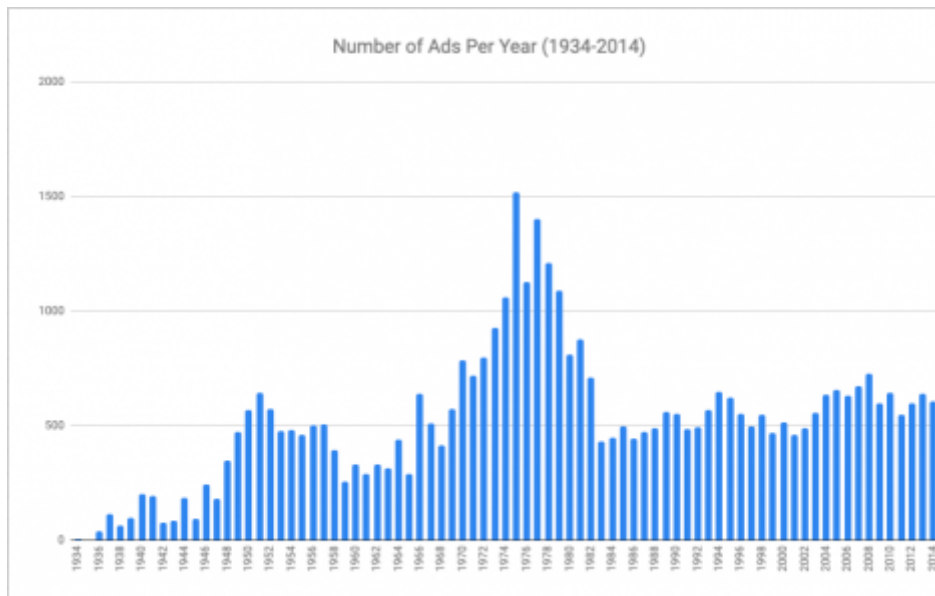


Figure 2. Number of Ads Per Year (1934-2014)

© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo

- 12 Figure 2 displays the number of advertisements that appear in the WWC corpus each year. There were relatively few ads during the industry's first decade or so, in part because there were still relatively few comic books being produced. There is a notable increase beginning in about 1946, peaking around 1951 (roughly coinciding with a historic sales peak in 1952; GABILLIET 2009, pp. 29–30), and then plateauing for the remainder of the 1950s. We can also observe three periods of general decline in the number of ads published: the late 1950s, late 1970s, and late 1990s, coinciding with industry contractions due to competition with television, the collapse of the newsstand market, and the bursting of the speculator bubble, respectively.

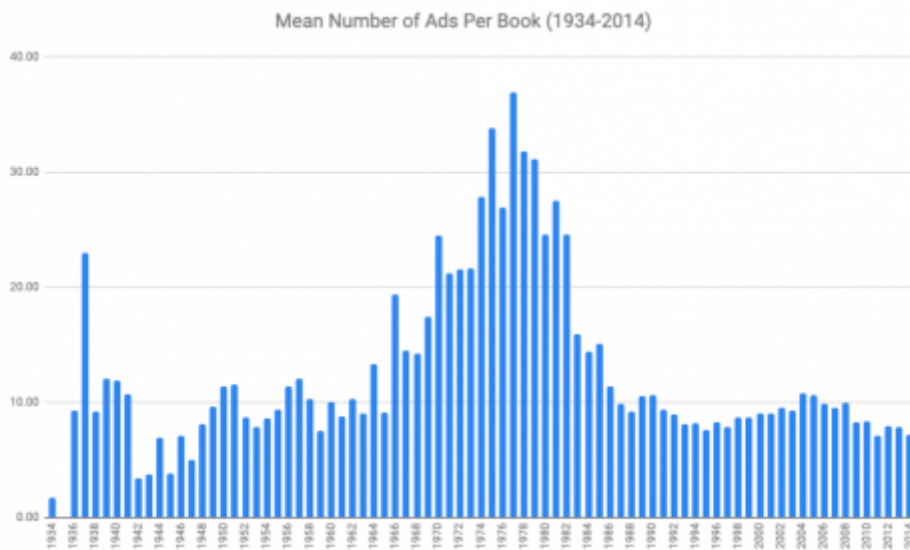


Figure 3. Mean Number of Ads Per Book (1934-2014)

© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo

- 13 Looking at the average number of ads per book rather than the absolute number smooths over two of the periods of decline (Figure 3) and indicates that the typical comic book has usually contained around 10 advertisements.² However, the period from roughly 1966 to 1985 – the “long 1970s” when the average number of ads doubled for more than a decade and actually tripled from the norm for a short period – stands out all the more. Reading across both graphs, we identify four main phases: (1) a period of *domestication*

during which an industrial consensus that children compose the primary audience for comic books is constructed; (2) a *crisis* precipitated by declines in both the number of comics published and their circulation in the late 1950s; (3) a period of *transition* where surviving publishers respond by running more, smaller, and lower-value advertising to a mixed audience of children and adult fans during the 1970s; and (4) a period of *equilibrium* that develops a balance between national brand advertising and in-house advertisements that promote other works from the publisher.

Domestication

- 14 Every medium starts out wild and must be tamed; during this process of “house breaking,” a new technology is given meaning, and the strange is gradually made familiar (BERKER ET AL., 2009, p. 3). Some trial and error is typically involved as people figure out how it fits into their everyday life; telephones, for example, were conceptualized first as office equipment and then as a broadcast medium before becoming a means for interpersonal communication. The first decades of comic book publishing were experimental in many ways, as creators and publishers tried out formats, genres, and narrative strategies in an effort to determine what was most saleable. Presumably, they were also figuring out who would read comic books and what products could be sold to them.
- 15 In contrast to children’s *books*, Stephen Kline (1993, p. 104) sees the comic book as a milestone in the organization of children into a market. As the first medium cheap enough to be purchased – and also, therefore, *selected* – by children themselves, rather than parental gatekeepers, it made children’s tastes consequential in the cultural marketplace. In fact, this corresponds with a broader discovery of the child as consumer:

It was in the 1930s, despite depressed economic conditions (or perhaps because of them), when merchants, manufacturers, and advertisers began to target children directly as consumers. Prior to this time..., marketers believed that children’s economic influence was limited mainly to the candy counter and toy department. (COOK, 2000, pp. 487–88)

- 16 According to Cook, where merchandisers and merchants had previously relied on their personal experience to understand children as individual customers, new ways of “knowing” children identified key traits that supposedly characterized the child consumers in general at different stages in their development (pp. 492, 489).
- 17 Yet, this is not the whole story. Although contemporary market research demonstrated that virtually all American children were regular readers of comic books, they also found significant adult readerships – of adults between the ages of 18 and 30, as many as 41 per cent of men and 28 per cent of women regularly read comic books (ZORBAUGH, 1944, pp. 197–98). It appears that advertisers knew this, too. On the basis of a content analysis of comic books, Morton S. Malter expressed concern about ads that were “directed to adolescents or adults, even in magazines featuring animal antics, a type of magazine presumably intended for children” (MALTER, 1952, p. 507), and the WWC corpus demonstrates that he was correct about the presence of ads that seemed incongruous with the editorial content. Three years later, an article in the *Peabody Journal of Education* by Robert Coard observed that “strenuous objections can be made to the quality of advertising in the comic books” (COARD, 1955, p. 20). We know from Ayer’s Directory³ that at least some publishers, such as Fiction House, bundled their comic books with other magazines for the purposes of ad sales, meaning that a single ad buy for a mail-order auto repair manual would result in the same ad appearing in both *Fight Comics* and *All-American Football*. Other publishers, like Dell and Fawcett, were more careful about isolating their comic books from other parts of their publishing lines, so this is not sufficient to explain the juxtapositions that troubled Malter and Coard.

18 The issue of the appropriateness of advertising in comic books was amplified in April 1954 by the hearings of the Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Delinquency. These hearings are all-too frequently positioned as a proxy debate between Dr. Fredric Wertham, critical of the industry for its promotion of racism and violence, and EC Comics publisher Bill Gaines, whose failed defense of Johnny Craig's cover for *Crime SuspensStories* #22 is widely regarded as a turning point in the anti-comic book movement (HAJDU, 2009). This narrow focus neglects the interventions of more than twenty additional witnesses and occludes two entire days of additional testimony. In fact, in the afternoon session of the second day of the hearings (Thursday April 22, 1954), the senators turned their attention specifically to the subject of advertising in comic books. Alex Segal, president of Stravon Publications, was called to testify in his role as a mail-order retailer of Konradi Leitner's *How to Hypnotize* (1950; see picture 2), which he regularly advertised in comic books. Over the course of his testimony, subcommittee chief counsel Herbert Beaser elicited the fact that Stravon compiled mailing lists of readers returning their coupons and leased them to other publishers, including at least one that marketed sex manuals to children (U. S. SENATE, 1954, pp. 193-194), suggesting that comic book advertising was a front for obscenity. Efforts to expand this line of inquiry were thwarted when publisher Samuel Roth, thrice imprisoned on obscenity charges and facing a new trial at the time of the hearing, refused to provide substantive testimony unless granted immunity. When Helen Meyer, vice-president of Dell Publications, and Matthew Murphy, Dell's editor, took the stand immediately following Roth, they maintained the subcommittee's focus on ads in comic books, drawing a sharp distinction between their company and others who accepted Stravon's mail-order business. Meyer was forceful on this point:

We will only take ads in ten monthly magazines. We will take only [back] cover ads. We censor the ads. We take ads from General Foods and Mars. We are running an ad for Mars chocolates. They are all national advertising. We don't take anything but national advertising – no mail-order advertising whatsoever (U.S. SENATE, 1954, p. 199).

19 Meyer's framing, reliant as it was on her company's assertion that "Dell Comics are Good Comics," reified a connection between good comics and good advertisements, which implied a limited number of ads for national brands that were widely known, widely distributed and presumptively beyond reproach.

20

HOW TO HYPNOTIZE

IT'S EASY TO HYPNOTIZE...
when you know how!

WANT the thrill of imposing your will over someone? Of making someone do exactly what you order? Try hypnotism! This amazing technique gives full personal satisfaction. You'll find it entertaining and gratifying.

The Master KEY TO HYPNOTISM shows all you need to know. It is put so simply, anyone can follow it. And there are 24 revealing photographs for your guidance.

SEND NO MONEY
FREE ten days' examination of this system is offered to you if you send the coupon today. We will ship you our copy by return mail, in plain wrapper. If not delighted with results, return it in 10 days and your money will be refunded. Stravon Publishers, Dept. H-315, 112 West 37th Street, New York 19, N. Y.

Mail Coupon Today

STRAVON PUBLISHERS, Dept. H-315
112 West 37th St., N. Y. 19, N. Y.

Send MASTER KEY TO HYPNOTISM in plain wrapper

Send C.O.D. I will pay postman \$1.98 plus postage

I enclose \$1.98. Send postpaid.

If not delighted, I may return it in 10 days and get my money back.

Name The Retroist

Address _____

City _____ State _____

Canada & Foreign—\$2.50 with order

Picture 1. Ad for Konradi Leitner's book *How to Hypnotise*, Stravon Publishers, 1950, in *Tomb of Terror* #2 (Harvey Comics, July 1952)

© Stravon Publishers

- 21 The anti-comics movement of the 1950s, then, is not only a moral panic over the content of crime comics and their putative behavioral effects but was also an attempt to finally domesticate the comic book by imposing a definition on the still emerging medium. It would not be a medium that *just so happened* to be consumed by children (as newspaper comic strips, radio, and television were) but a medium that was *essentially* for children. If the clean-up of comic books could not be accomplished through (self-)censorship of stories, it might be done by limiting what comic books could sell. On October 26, 1954, the Comics Magazine Association of America (CMAA), founded as a public relations gambit following the subcommittee hearings, adopted a nine-point "Code for Advertising Matter" alongside its more infamous content restrictions. Authored with the professional advice of David Finn, a public relations expert hired by the comic book industry to deal with the

crisis sparked by the hearings and by Wertham's *Seduction of the Innocent* (published the same week as his testimony, and whose eighth chapter argued that "advertisements in comics books have caused decent boys and girls many tears" [WERTHAM, 1954, p. 197]), this section of the Code indicated that ads in comic books should be guided by the principle of "good taste" and specifically forbade advertising for alcohol, tobacco, sexually explicit material, knives, realistic gun facsimiles, fireworks, gambling equipment, and "medical, health, or toiletry products of questionable nature" (SABIN, 1993, pp. 251–53). In fact, the CMAA was outlawing activities that had yet to occur: while ads for fireworks and gun facsimiles can sometimes be found in pre-Code comic books in the WWC corpus, the same cannot be said about many of the other categories addressed in the regulations. In a classic public-relations move, publishers were demonstrating their commitment by publicly forsaking forms of advertising that weren't even available to them. The symbolic value of very publicly drawing a cordon sanitaire around child readers was more important than regulating publishers' actual activities. Advertising, as much as story content, cemented the understanding of comic books as a medium for children in the post-Code era.

Crisis

- 22 In a September 1962 article in *The New York Times*, media analyst Peter Bart outlined the declining fortunes of the American comic book industry in the post-Code environment through the lens of a feature on National Periodical Publications' publisher Jacob Liebowitz and editor Mort Weisinger (BART, 1962, p. 166). Annual sales of comic books had fallen from approximately 800 million copies to 350 million in the space of a decade, and the number of publishers in the field had declined during the same span from more than fifty to fewer than a dozen. One of the most telling statistics reported by Bart is that National "presently derives only about \$176,000 a year from advertising, compared with nearly \$1,000,000 a decade or so ago." Bart's qualifiers make precise analysis difficult, but we do know that National sold 6,049,602 comic books in 1962 according to the Audit Bureau of Circulations.⁴ While these numbers were down from their peaks more than a decade prior (National reported sales of 8,437,504 comic books in 1948), the drop is not nearly as severe as it was for the industry as a whole. While the industry fell by more than half in Bart's estimation, National's average sales for the first three years of the 1960s were only 15 per cent lower than the first three years of the 1950s. However, their revenue from advertising fell by more than 80 per cent during that same timeframe, a decline out of all proportion with the drop in sales. This is particularly troubling given that advertising expenditures across all media were increasing in this period. It seems that it is not only the case that fewer comic books are being published *and* that those comics are selling fewer copies *but also* that the valuation of their readers' attention had been drastically downgraded. Gabilliet (2010) has persuasively argued that competition with television, and not the anti-comics movement nor the Comics Code per se, explains the comics industry's mid-century contraction. Partnerships between Mattel and Disney to sponsor *Disneyland* and *The Mickey Mouse Club* proved that TV was a viable way of reaching the child consumer (MITTEL, 2003, pp. 39–40), and television programmers used children to recuperate lower-value time slots such as Saturday mornings (MITROFF AND HERR STEPHENSON, 2007, p. 13). In essence, comic book publishers had, by the mid- and late-1950s accepted the definition of their product as a children's medium, just in time to hand that audience off to television:

From the start of the 1950s onward, the most determinant factor for the purchase of a television set was not the household's revenue or social class but the presence of children, who had so far been the largest segment of comic book readers (GABILLIET, 2010, p. 47).

23 The WWC corpus contains nine comic books published by National in 1962, the period of concern for Bart, and six from 1952, which we can take as a stand-in for his “a decade or so ago.” In 1952, we routinely find half-page ads for Tootsie Rolls, Necco Wafers, Wildroot hair tonic and Double Bubble chewing gum, and full-page ads for Wheaties cereal, Daisy air rifles and bicycles by Schwinn (See Picture 2), Roadmaster, and Columbia. A decade later, national consumer goods brands had all but disappeared from the company’s pages (Tootsie Rolls were the only regularly appearing national sponsor), replaced by low quality mail-order businesses: a Chet Atkins learn-to-play guitar correspondence course, coin and stamp dealers, and inexpensive plastic toys. The shift exemplifies not only a loss of revenue but also of relevance. The ads themselves point to a consensus between National and their advertisers that their audience was children, mostly boys.⁵ While a greater proportion of young people’s money is discretionary, they do not typically have a great deal of spending power, and children’s “pester power” (i.e., their ability to influence household spending) was not yet widely recognized by marketers beyond certain product categories, such as breakfast cereals, that were seen as salient to children. Consequently, the real target for most children’s products and services was their parents, and children were a marginal market. As the first medium that directly appealed to children as consumers (KLINE 1993, p. 104), comic books represented something of an exception, rendering them an ideal venue for promoting sweets and toys – until they were eclipsed by television as a more efficient means to reach a mass audience of young people.

24

ADVERTISEMENT

Now's the time to ask
for a **SCHWINN**



SCHWINN BLACK PHANTOM!
Super bike of them all! • Sparkling with chrome!
Equipped with terrific features!

America's favorite Bike 9 to 1!

Kids everywhere know Schwinn bikes . . . for keen looks, easy handling, and smooth riding. Schwinn bikes are built to pedal easier, to take hard riding and come through good as new!

There are Schwinn Bicycles for both boys and girls in every price class. And every one is *Guaranteed For As Long As You Own It*. Start telling Mom and Dad now why a Schwinn is the bike you want, too, this Christmas.



**Schwinn Exclusive
Quality Features**

- **THE SCHWINN "LOOK"**— Sparkling beauty makes Schwinn stand out from all others. Best-looking bicycles anywhere!
- **ELECTRO-FORGED FRAME**— Strongest bicycle frame built! Schwinn makes it . . . like one continuous piece of steel.
- **DUR-A-ROLL BEARINGS**— Roll better by actual test. There's a smoother ride, easier pedaling. Triple-hard for longer wear.
- **TUBULAR RIMS**— 5 times stronger than ordinary rims—yet lots lighter. They take the bumps without twisting. Only on Schwinn.
- **LONG-LIFE FRONT HUB**— Extra-hard replaceable bearing cups offered only by Schwinn give smoother ride.

Look for your local Schwinn dealer in the classified section of your telephone book

ARNOLD, SCHWINN & COMPANY
1718 N. KILDARE AVE. CHICAGO 39, ILLINOIS

Picture 2. Ad for a Schwinn bicycle in *Strange Adventures* #15 (DC Comics, January 1952)

© Schwinn Bicycle Company

Transition

25 If the decline in advertising in the late 1950s marks the onset of this crisis, why do we suggest that the rising number of ads beginning around 1966 is a sign of its retrenchment rather than its resolution? Readers familiar with this period in American comic books can probably already imagine the trajectory here. Not only do comics of the 1970s have a greater number of mail-order ads (often including a centre-page spread for Columbia Record House), but they also feature a growing number of extremely small ads akin to those found in the Yellow Pages. *Strange Adventures* #234, for example, includes – in addition to ads for plastic toy soldiers and “people patches” – one and half pages of inexpensive Yellow Pages-style ads, including five for dealers of comic book back-issues.

This type of small-scale advertising for what are essentially mom-and-pop operations was even more common in Marvel comics, where many comic books contained more than seventy distinct advertisements. Although all these advertisements suggest a continued slide in the value of ad space in comic books, we can also observe a growing awareness that casual child readers are no longer the only audience for comics: ads for back-issue dealers imply collectors.

- 26 The rapid expansion into inexpensive ads did nothing to arrest the industry’s economic freefall. Surveying the field at the end of the decade, Judith S. Duke politely noted “comic book publishing is not a high growth field” (DUKE, 1979, p. 120). This was a major understatement. Monthly sales of *Superman* fell by one-third from 1970 to 1975 (TUCKER, 2017, p. 74) as newsstand distribution became increasingly inefficient, and sales of all comic books slid during the decade. To counter this trajectory, comic book publishers raised their prices repeatedly, shifted page counts, altered the ratio of new content to reprint material, and created new titles. In an effort to counter diminishing returns, Marvel Comics nearly doubled their monthly output of comic books from 1971 to 1973, and DC Comics (as National became in 1977) launched a remarkable fifty-seven new titles during the so-called “DC Explosion.” The combination of publisher desperation, declining sales, and the expansion into low-rent advertising is suggestive of the downward spiral that most comic book publishers were on at the time. Louis Ha and Barry R. Litman (1997) have demonstrated that advertising clutter beyond historical averages yields both negative circulation returns and diminishing advertising revenue, and this is precisely the phenomenon that is apparent as large numbers of tiny ads became the norm across the American comic book industry in the 1970s. Given these findings, it is particularly significant that, of the six major comic book publishers of the 1970s (Archie Comics, Charlton Comics, DC Comics, Harvey Comics, Marvel Comics, and Western Publishing), three would be out of business by the early 1980s as the newsstand ceased to be a viable sales outlet for new comic books. Clearly, something would have to be done to stop this death spiral.

Equilibrium

- 27 As part of a series of articles about comic book distribution on his blog, former Marvel Comics editor-in-chief Jim Shooter reveals that the company’s ad sales department was given a directive to clean up their pages of tiny ads during the decade that he ran the company beginning in 1978:

“National ads only” was the mantra. They got rid of mail order ads like the ones for X-Ray Specs and Broken Finger Key Chains. They made a concerted effort to go after movie ads, bicycles, sneakers and other national products. We creative types did our part by building the total number of copies sold substantially (SHOOTER, 2011, under “Comic Books”).

- 28 Shooter points to his efforts on the editorial side to make the comics more appealing to national advertisers by boosting Marvel’s circulation but does not explicitly mention attempts to alter *who* they were reaching. A similar effort from DC, as reported in *The Comics Journal* under the headline “DC Seeks Upscale Ads,” was more direct:

DC Comics will open its “New Format” publications in early 1989 to advertising directed at 18- to 24-year-old males, a market traditionally beyond standard comic books... According to DC Publisher Jenette Kahn, “Our readers are overwhelmingly male... and their median age is 23.9” (BOYD, 1989, p. 22).

- 29 Within a few years, DC would produce a television spot for some of these “New Format” books, assuring viewers that DC Comics had changed, they weren’t for kids anymore, and their readers were sophisticated young professionals – with girlfriends.

30 As noted above, comic book advertisements in the 1970s evidence a mixed address to both children and adult fans, and as late as 1980, Marvel was still touting their reach among American children to potential advertisers. Two changes – paradigm shifts, really – enabled Marvel, DC, and other publishers to reverse the trends of the long 1970s. First, the new direct market distribution system enabled publishers to reach dedicated adult comic book readers through a growing network of specialty stores (CLARKE 2014; GEARINO 2017; WOO AND RAJANI 2019). Direct marketing provided the infrastructure to move the centre of gravity in comic book publishing to a market of adult aficionados. Marvel and DC, as the remaining establishment publishers, could float more expensive comics targeted to the smaller audience of dedicated fans, while new publishers could enter the market without having to scale up for newsstand distribution. Newsstand sales, and sales to children more broadly, would henceforth be little more than a rump market before finally disappearing in the 2010s. Second, processes of segmentation and targeting that had long been used in the less-prestigious sector of direct marketing (e.g., promotional mailers and catalogue sales) became central to thinking about how advertising could effectively and efficiently reach valued consumers in a demassifying media environment (TUROW, 1997, pp. 127–28). Joseph Turow dates this shift to the late 1970s and early 1980s. Split-run magazines, cable television channels, and eventually digital and social media have produced a hyper- and microtargeted world in which marketers can select audiences and customize messages based on vast arrays of personal data (TUROW, 1997; TUROW, 2005; ARONCZYK ET AL., 2017). While comic books do not participate in the extreme ends of these practices, they were an obvious beneficiary of advertisers' increased awareness that a small audience may nonetheless be the right audience for a particular campaign – which was the case for DC's "new format" comics of 1989, most of which would be folded into the Vertigo imprint a few years later. The redefinition of comic books as a niche medium takes place against this backdrop.

31 It would seem, at first glance, to have worked. According to Ayer's Directory, Marvel was only charging \$7,500 for a full-page, four-colour ad in 1972. By 2014 (the year in which the WWC corpus currently ends), Marvel was one of the biggest names in Hollywood. In addition to soliciting proposals for custom activations and product placement in comic books and movies, a Marvel Comics media kit gives the 2014 rate for a single, full-page, colour ad in one of their comic books as \$95,900. In real terms, this is a six-fold increase over the 1972 rates. Note, however, that in 1972's mass media period the company promised that an ad would be in a range of titles selling 6.5 million copies, while in 2014 that rate base promise had fallen to only 2.5 million copies in a niche market. Since sales revenue is shared with retailers and distributors but advertising is not and given the large amount of space devoted to advertising in mainstream comics, Jerry Hionis and YoungHa Ki's (2019) conclude that advertising is "a vital revenue component to comic sales" (pp. 574, 576). There is, however, one important feature of contemporary comic book advertising that complicates this picture.

32 We want to distinguish between external advertising (ads purchased by outside firms like candy or bicycle manufacturers) and internal, or in-house, advertising that promotes the publisher's own products. Typically, in-house ads fall into a few broad categories, including ads for subscription sales (extremely common in Archie Comics but also widely adopted throughout the industry through the end of the 1970s) and ads for forthcoming comic books (increasingly common from the 1960s onward). Hionis and Ki (2019, p. 575–76) and Woo (2018) both point to the prevalence of ads for other comics, for media adaptations and licensed merchandise featuring the publisher's own intellectual property, as well as for the products of other wings of the same media conglomerates. Without access to corporate balance sheets, it is impossible to ascertain whether, for example, an ad for a Marvel Studios movie in Marvel comic book is a paid external advertisement, an in-kind donation, or simply a house ad for a corporation conceived on a different scale. In-house advertising, of course, does not contribute directly to the publisher's profitability in the same way that external advertising does, although ideally the promotional aspect

should be expected to boost awareness for, and the sales of, related comic books, yet it raises questions about the sustainability of this new equilibrium.

33

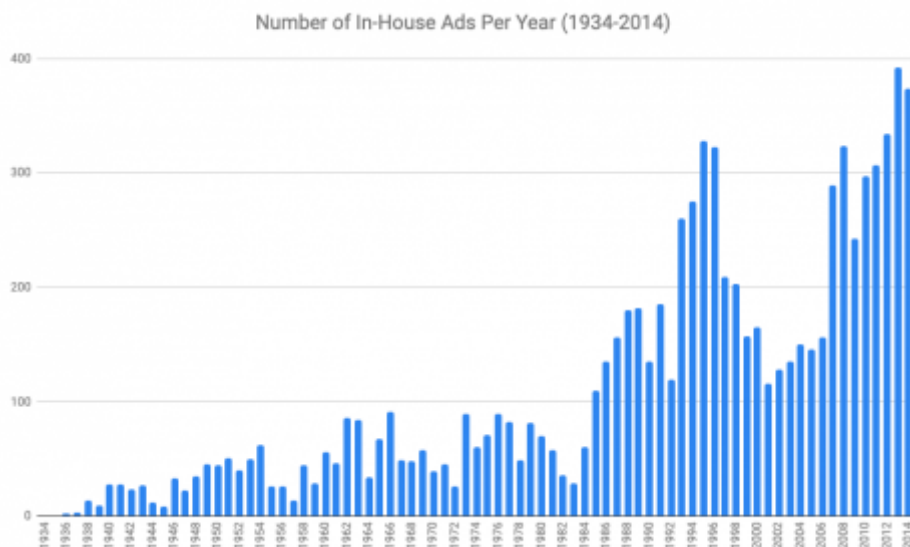


Figure 4. Number of In-House Ads Per Year (1934-2014)

© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo

34 Figure 4 charts the absolute number of in-house ads found in the WWC corpus over time.⁶ There is an obvious rise in the prevalence of internal advertising from the mid-1980s to the late 1990s, followed by a lull in the early 2000s, and then another spike beginning in 2008. (The mean number of in-house ads per book also supports this interpretation.) On the one hand, this can be partially explained by turnover in the industry. Three long-established publishers (Charlton Comics, Harvey Comics, and Western Publishing) ceased operations in the mid-1980s, giving way to new entities that produced work exclusively for the direct market: Capital Comics (established in 1981 as a subsidiary of Capital City Distribution), Dark Horse Comics (founded in 1986), First Comics (1983), and Pacific Comics (1981), among others. While the older companies were, to varying extents, reliant on external advertising that increasingly disappeared over the course of the 1970s, the newer publishers rarely featured external advertising. While they maintained the tradition of publishing 36-page magazines (including covers), they tended to fill pages with extensive editorial content, multipage letters columns, and in-house advertising for forthcoming issues and other titles, not with external ads. A second growth period in the 1990s essentially repeats the exact same phenomenon with another set of new publishers, including Defiant Comics (1993), Image Comics (1992), Tekno Comix (1995), Topps Comics (1992), and Valiant Comics (1991). The rapid disappearance of most of these publishers following the collapse of the speculation bubble in the late-1990s accounts for much of the decline visible in Figure 4.

35 The renewed acceleration in the late-2000s, on the other hand, coincides with the economic crisis of 2008. It appears that external advertising collapsed, and publishers filled books with in-house ads to maintain their page counts. This is starkly illustrated in Figure 5, which shows in-house advertising as a proportion of all advertising.

36

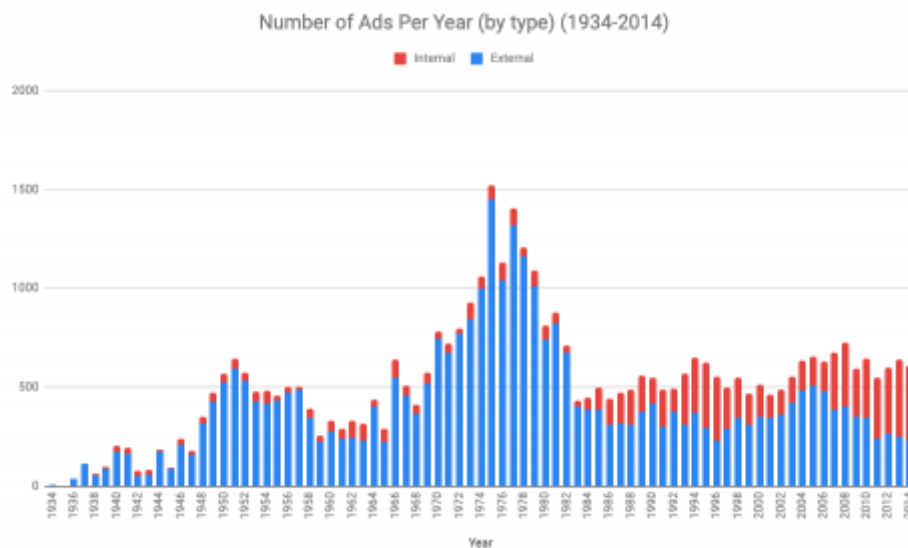


Figure 5. Number of Ads Per Year and by Type (1934-2014)

© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo

37 Up to 1984, in-house advertising is always a small subset of total advertising. As we have suggested, that relationship begins to change around 1985, as the direct market takes over as the dominant sales outlet for American comic books (notably, Dan Gearino [2017] titled his chapter about comic book shops in the early-1980s “Heyday”). The percentage of in-house ads grows steadily as a function of all advertising through the 1990s before exploding after 2008, rapidly becoming more than half of all advertising in comic books. That this occurs at precisely the moment when comic book characters emerge as the anchors of the largest, most profitable transmedia franchises seems paradoxical. Commenting on the national brands advertising in contemporary comic books, Hionis and Ki (2019, p. 576) observe that readers still seem to be understood in niche terms: ads for cars, credit cards, shaving products imply an adult, male readership. More importantly, these campaigns are a relatively minor feature of all advertising in comics. The main thing comic books promote is themselves and their own intellectual property, and their audiences are apparently of limited value to those outside of this subcultural ecosystem. The industry’s growing reliance on in-house advertising is an empirical demonstration of the ‘niche-ification’ of the industry that has heretofore been described only impressionistically. It signals a change from a comic book industry pursuing readers as a means to generate revenue akin to other ad-supported media, towards an industry catering to a smaller, more dedicated readership of hardcore fans that cannot be counted on as consumers of anything but comics and related “geeky” media properties.

Conclusion

38 Comic book advertising is indelibly associated with low-quality ads for mail-order products like Sea Monkeys, x-ray glasses, and physical culture courses largely aimed at gullible children with a few dollars of pocket money to spend. Ads of this sort have disappeared from the pages of contemporary comics. When they are thought of today, it is almost always through the lens of nostalgia or kitsch. They have been memorialized in collections like *Hey Skinny!: Great Advertisements from the Golden Age of Comic Books* (BELLER AND LEIBOWITZ, 1995) and *Mail-Order Mysteries: Real Stuff from Old Comic Book Ads* (DEMARAIS 2011), and they live on as parodies in Alan Moore et al.’s *1963*, Kelly Sue DeConnick and Valentine De Landro’s *Bitch Planet*, and others. In the main, however, they have been replaced by glossy, full-page ads that target adult fans who can

afford AAA video games, deluxe action figures, statuettes, and dozens of comic books every month.

39 In *Dreaming the Graphic Novel*, Paul Williams recounts how one common response to fears about the comic book industry's imminent demise in the 1970s was a call to diversify the audience of comic books. "The most desirable new consumers," he writes, "were supposedly adults, because of their greater spending power" (WILLIAMS, 2020, p. 32). The search for what Kidman terms "a high-quality demographic" rooted in an increasingly narrow but affluent readership would arrive only in fits and starts, and with a mix of consequences (KIDMAN, 2019, p. 138). Coupled with the creation of the direct market, these efforts to gain adult readers were undoubtedly a lifeline for the imperiled comic book industry. From the vantage point of 2020, however, what was framed by fans and professionals as "diversification" appears to have actually been replacement, gradually swapping one audience for another. Ironically, some of the brightest spots in comic book publishing in the United States over the last 20 years have been manga and young-adult graphic novels. Both have embraced readers outside of the "mainstream" comic book industry's narrow demographic focus, and both have largely taken place in bookstores, where they are bought and sold as discrete commodities without advertising.

40 Our purpose in this article has been two-fold. First, we have sought to better understand how the niching of the comic book industry unfolded. While the general trajectory from the so-called "Golden Age" to today is clear, our examination of advertising in the WWC corpus pointed to a series of shifts between the mass audience of child readers and a niche audience of adult fans over four distinct periods, each marking a change in the ways that advertisers and publishers constructed the comic book reader and their value: a period of domestication, during which the sometimes confusing and contradictory ads found in comic books were replaced with those targeting children in the wake of the introduction of the Comics Code Authority; a period of crisis representing the flight of national brand advertisers from comics as the influence of television rises; a transitional period in which a high number of low-quality mail-order advertisers signals a growing proportion of adult readers; and, finally, a period of equilibrium where the number of advertisements diminished generally and, specifically, external advertisements were curtailed in favour of in-house ads.⁷ Second, we have sought to further the dialogue between comics studies, media industries studies, and fan studies (PERREN AND FELSCHOW 2018) and to advocate for greater attention to advertising as both an object of inquiry and a source of evidence at the intersection of these three fields. Viewed without the filter of nostalgia, advertising is a window not only into the political-economic realities faced by publishers at various points in the history of American comic books but also an index of how those publishers conceptualized their audiences.

Bibliographie

ANG, Ien. *Desperately Seeking the Audience*, New York: Routledge, 1991.

DOI : 10.4324/9780203133347

ARONCZYK, Melissa, Adam ASTON, Patrick LAFFERTY, Louis MALDONADO, William O'BARR, Michael SERAZIO, Edward TIMKE, and Jing WANG. "Roundtable on New Mediascapes and the Futures of Advertising". *Advertising & Society Quarterly*, [en ligne], 18:3, 2017, DOI: <http://doi.org/10.1353/asr.2017.0023>.

DOI : 10.1353/asr.2017.0023

BART, Peter. "Advertising: Superman Faces New Hurdles". *New York Times*, 23 September 1962, 166.

BEATY, Bart, and Benjamin WOO. *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time: Symbolic Capital and the Field of American Comic Books*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016.

BEATY, Bart, Nick SOUSANIS, and Benjamin WOO. "Two Per Cent of What?: Constructing a Corpus of Typical American Comic Books". In WILDFEUER, Janina and Alexander DUNST and Jochen LAUBROCK (ed.). *Empirical Comics Research: Digital, Multimodal, and Cognitive Methods*. Routledge, 2018, pp. 27-42.

BELLER, Miles, and Jerry LEIBOWITZ. *Hey Skinny! Great Advertisements from the Golden Age of Comic Books*. San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 1995.

BERKER, Thomas, Maren HARTMANN, Yves PUNIE, and Katie WARD. *Domestication of Media and Technology*, Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2006.

BOYD, Robert. “DC Seeks Upscale Ads”. *The Comics Journal*, 127, March 1989, 22.

CLARKE, M. J. “The Production of the Marvel Graphic Novel Series: The Business and Culture of the Early Direct Market”. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 5:2, 2014, 192–210.

COARD, Robert L. “The Comic Book in Perspective”. *Peabody Journal of Education*, 33:1, (July 1955), pp.18-22

DOI : 10.1080/01619565509536617

COOK, Daniel Thomas. “The Other ‘Child Study’: Figuring Children as Consumers in Market Research, 1910s–1990s”. *The Sociological Quarterly*, 41, 2000, pp.487–507.

DEMARAIS, Kirk. *Mail-Order Mysteries: Real Stuff from Old Comic Book Ads*. San Rafael: Insight Editions, 2011.

DUKE, Judith S. *Children’s Books and Magazines: A Market Study*. White Plains, NY: White Plains Knowledge Industry Publications, 1979.

GABILLIET, Jean-Paul. *Of Comics and Men: A Cultural History of American Comic Books*. translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen, Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009.

GALVAN, Margaret. “‘The Lesbian Norman Rockwell’: Alison Bechdel and Queer Grassroots Networks”. *American Literature*, 90:2 (June 2018), pp. 407–38.

DOI : 10.1215/00029831-4564358

GEARINO, Dan. *Comic Shop: The Retail Mavericks Who Gave Us a New Geek Culture*. Athens, OH: Swallow Press, 2017.

HA, Louisa and Barry R. LITMAN, “Does Advertising Clutter Have Diminishing and Negative Returns?” *Journal of Advertising*, XXVI:1, Spring 1997, pp.31-42.

DOI : 10.1080/00913367.1997.10673516

HACKNER, Jonas and Sten NYBERG. “Advertising and Media Market Concentration”. *Journal of Media Economics*, 21:2, 2008, pp.79-96

DOI : 10.1080/08997760802069861

HAJDU, David. *The Ten-Cent Plague: The Great Comic-Book Scare and How It Changed America*. New York: Picador, 2009

HATFIELD, Charles. “Comic Books”. In BEATY, Bart and Charles HATFIELD (ed.). *Comics Studies: A Guidebook*. Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2020, pp.25-39

HAVENS, Timothy, and Amanda D. LOTZ. *Understanding Media Industries*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2016.

HIONIS, Jerry and YoungHa KI. “The Economics of the Modern American Comic Book Market”. *Journal of Cultural Economics*, 43, 2019, pp.545-578.

DOI : 10.1007/s10824-018-9333-5

HOLIDAY, Steven. “Jack and Jill Be Nimble: A Historical Analysis of an ‘Adless’ Children’s Magazine”. *Journal of Advertising* 47, 2018, pp.412–28.

KALITA, Jukti Kumar and Robert H. DUCOFFE. “A Simultaneous-Equation Analysis of Pricing, Circulation, and Advertising Revenue for Leading Consumer Magazines”. *Journal of Media Economics* 8:4, 1995, pp.1-16.

DOI : 10.1207/s15327736me0804_1

KIDMAN, Shawna. *Comic Books Incorporated: How the Business of Comics Became the Business of Hollywood*. Oakland: University of California Press, 2019.

KLINE, Stephen. *Out of the Garden: Toys and Children’s Culture in the Age of TV Marketing*. London: Verso, 1993.

MALTER, Morton S., “The Content of Current Comic Magazines”. *The Elementary School Journal*, 52:9 (May 1952), 505-510.

DOI : 10.1086/459389

MEEHAN, Eileen R. *Why TV Is Not Our Fault: Television Programming, Viewers, and Who’s Really in Control*. Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005.

MITROFF, Donna, and Rebecca Herr STEPHENSON. “The Television Tug-og-War: A Brief History of Children’s Television Programming in the United States”. In BRYANT, J. Alison (ed.), *The Children’s Television Community*, New York: Routledge, 2007, pp.3–34.

MITTEL, Jason. “The Great Saturday Morning Exile: Scheduling Cartoons on Television’s Periphery in the 1960s.”. In STABILE, Carol A. and Mark HARRISON (ed.). *Prime Time Animation: Television*

- Animation and American Culture*, New York: Routledge, 2003, pp.33–54.
- NORRIS, Vincent P. “Consumer Magazine Prices and the Mythical Advertising Subsidy”. *Journalism Quarterly*, 59, 1983, pp.205–211, p.239.
DOI : 10.1177/107769908205900202
- PERREN, Alisa, and Laura FELSCHOW. “The Bigger Picture: Drawing Intersections between Comics, Fan, and Industry Studies.”. In CLICK, Melissa A. and Suzanne SCOTT (ed.). *The Routledge Companion to Media Fandom*, New York: Routledge, 2018, pp.309–18.
- PIZZINO, Christopher. *Arresting Development: Comics at the Boundaries of Literature*. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016.
- ROGERS, Mark C. “License farming and the American comic book industry.”. *International Journal of Comic Art* 1:2, 1999, pp.132–42.
- SABIN, Roger. *Adult Comics: An Introduction*. London: Routledge, 1993.
- SHOOTER, Jim. “Comic Book Distribution – Part 2.”. *JimShooter.com* [online], November 16, 2011. URL <<http://jimshooter.com/2011/11/comic-book-distribution-part-2.html>>.
- SMYTHE, Dallas W. “Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism”. *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory* 1:3, 1977, pp.1–27.
- SOLEY, Lawrence and R. KRISHNAN (1987). “Does Advertising Subsidize Consumer magazine prices?” *Journal of Advertising*, 16, pp.4–9.
DOI : 10.1080/00913367.1987.10673071
- TUCKER, Reed. *Slugfest: Inside the Epic 50-Year Battle Between Marvel and DC*. New York: DaCapo Press, 2017.
- TUROW, Joseph. *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- TUROW, Joseph. “Audience Construction and Culture Production: Marketing Surveillance in the Digital Age.”. *The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, 597, 2005, pp.103–121.
- UNITED STATES SENATE. *Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate Juvenile Delinquency of the Committee on the Judiciary, United States Senate, Eighty-Third Congress, Second Session*, Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 1954.
- WERTHAM, Fredric. *Seduction of the Innocent*. New York: Henry Holt & Co., 1954.
- WILLIAMS, Paul. *Dreaming the Graphic Novel: The Novelization of Comics*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020.
- WOO, Benjamin. “What’s a Comic Book Fan Worth?” *Flow: A Critical Forum on Media and Culture* [online], April 30, 2018. URL <<https://www.flowjournal.org/2018/04/whats-a-comic-book-fan-worth/>>
- WOO, Benjamin. “Readers, Audiences, and Fans”. In BEATY, Bart and Charles HATFIELD (ed.). *Comics Studies: A Guidebook*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2020, pp.113–25.
- WOO, Benjamin, and Nasreen RAJANI. “Comic Book Stores as Sites of Struggle”. In JOHNSON, Derek and Daniel HERBERT (ed.). *Point of Sale: Analyzing Media Retail*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2019.
- ZORBAUGH, Harvey. “The Comics – There They Stand!” *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 18:4, 1944, pp.196–203.
DOI : 10.2307/2262692

Notes

1 For a description of the process used to create this randomized sampling see BEATY, SOUSANIS, and WOO (2018).

2 The anomalous spike in 1937 is the result a single comic book within a sample just five comic books (of the 238 published that year). Had *Tip Top Comics* #15, which includes sixty-eight distinct ads, not been sampled, the numbers for 1937 would be in line with the years that immediately follow.

3 N.W. Ayer & Son’s *American Newspaper Annual*, or the Ayer’s Directory, as it is colloquially known, was published annually from 1880 to 1986 when it continued, in expanded form, as the Gale Directory of Publications and Broadcast Media. The Ayer’s Directory listed all newspapers and many periodicals published in the United States and Canada, arranged geographically, and provided circulation and later ad-rate data. It was used by advertisers to determine the cost of advertising in a diverse range of markets. The Ayer’s Directory classified some comic book publishers as General publishers and others as Humour publishers until a “Comics” category was created in 1951 – a

development that itself suggests something about the changing position of the comic book in the eyes of potential advertisers in the post-War period.

4 The Audit Bureau of Circulations reports sworn statements of circulation. In the case of National Periodicals, the audits were reports annually on March 31 and June 30. The figures used in this article are net paid circulation.

5 Whether or how far this was true is an altogether different matter.

6 For the purposes of this discussion, in-house ads refer to advertisements for products from the publisher itself, rather than from a larger corporate ownership group. It is therefore a conservative estimate.

7 Our periodization broadly coincides with Kidman's (2019, pp. 24–45), though we subdivide her period of "crisis and experimentation" into two.

Table des illustrations

	Légende Figure 1. Percentage of Comics Books with No Ads (1934-2014)
Crédits	© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-1.png
Fichier	image/png, 53k
	Légende Figure 2. Number of Ads Per Year (1934-2014)
Crédits	© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-2.png
Fichier	image/png, 52k
	Légende Figure 3. Mean Number of Ads Per Book (1934-2014)
Crédits	© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-3.png
Fichier	image/png, 54k
	Légende Picture 1. Ad for Konradi Leitner's book <i>How to Hypnotize</i> , Stravon Publishers, 1950, in <i>Tomb of Terror</i> #2 (Harvey Comics, July 1952)
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-4.jpg
Fichier	image/jpeg, 112k
	Légende Picture 2. Ad for a Schwinn bicycle in <i>Strange Adventures</i> #15 (DC Comics, January 1952)
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-5.png
Fichier	image/png, 4,1M
	Légende Figure 4. Number of In-House Ads Per Year (1934-2014)
Crédits	© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-6.png
Fichier	image/png, 32k
	Légende Figure 5. Number of Ads Per Year and by Type (1934-2014)
Crédits	© By Bart Beaty and Benjamin Woo
URL	http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/docannexe/image/6468/img-7.png
Fichier	image/png, 35k

Pour citer cet article

Référence électronique

Bart Beaty et Benjamin Woo, « From Mass Medium to Niche Medium: Advertising in American Comic Books, 1934–2014 », *Comicalités* [En ligne], Histoire et influence des pratiques bédéphiliques, mis en ligne le 01 avril 2021, consulté le 25 mai 2021. URL : <http://journals.openedition.org/comicalites/6468>

Auteurs

Bart Beaty

Bart Beaty is professor of English at the University of Calgary (Alberta, Canada) and the principal investigator of the SSHRC-funded What Were Comics? project. He is the author, editor, and translator of more than a dozen books including *Comics Studies: A Guidebook* (with Charles Hatfield), *Twelve-Cent Archie*, and *Comics Versus Art*. He is the general editor of the *Critical Survey of Graphic Novels*.

Benjamin Woo

Benjamin Woo is associate professor in the School of Journalism and Communication at Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada) and director of the Research on Comics, Con Events, and Transmedia Laboratory. He is the author of *Getting a Life: The Social Worlds of Geek Culture*, co-author (with Bart Beaty) of *The Greatest Comic Book of All Time: Symbolic Capital and the Field of American Comic Books*, and co-editor of *Scene Thinking: Cultural Studies from the Scenes Perspective* (with Stuart R. Poyntz and Jamie Rennie) and *The Comics World: Comics, Graphic Novels, and Their Publics* (with Jeremy Stoll).

Droits d'auteur



Comicalités est mis à disposition selon les termes de la licence Creative Commons Attribution - Pas d'Utilisation Commerciale - Pas de Modification 4.0 International.