

The 1950s

TV and the Consumer Society



Although experiments had been conducted with televised broadcasting before the Second World War, the service was not developed until after the war. Licences were introduced in 1946 and in 1947 just 15,000 were issued. This figure rose to 4.5 million by 1955 when the BBC's monopoly was broken with the launch of the commercial channel ITV on 22 September 1955.

The impact of ITV was immediate. Brash, confident and entertaining, the new channel fascinated viewers right from the start with its prize-winning quiz shows, American programmes and the commercials fuelling increasing consumer spending.

Before ITV, advertising on film had been confined to the commercial break at the cinema. Now products could be recommended within the privacy of the home, with the message repeated every quarter of an hour until the image of the product was firmly planted in the viewers' minds. People were persuaded to want bigger, better and different goods. The first commercial shown on ITV was for Gibbs SR Toothpaste which was transmitted on opening night.