

"the persuaders": a reflection as a marketing major assignment

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" The Persuaders": A reflection as a Marketing Major The Persuaders (2004, directed by Douglass Rushcoff) is a documentary with a hard eye on the multi-billion dollar advertising and marketing industry. They examine the subconscious and psychological techniques behind advertising and marketing developments. The documentary also determines how these new methods of marketing influence us, our desires and our self-image, finally theorizing on the future implications or repercussions of the influential forces that are constantly at work.

I was very excited when we began watching this film in class, I'm a marketing major myself, with little to go on with what my future will hold, so the film was fascinating to me, it had me reflecting on many other advertisements I saw and how much they've influenced me without even realizing it. One of my more prominent memories was me and my family visiting the united states for the first time (that I could recall), I was watching TV in the living room of my grandmother's house when a commercial came on for flare jeans.

I felt my eyes go wide as the girls on the screen danced around sporting jeans that covered their feet almost entirely, I grew fascinated as they yelled and sang running around the screen having amazing fun, because they all had the same jeans on! I was young, didn't care at all about fashion in the least bit, but the second the commercial was over I ran to my mother saying " I want flare jeans! I want flare jeans! " still not ENTIRELY sure as to what exactly they were. I find even now, perhaps more than ever, I am influenced by advertising in ways that I never even stopped to think about before seeing this film.

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The way Rushcoff presented the information was excellent; he was, for the most part, unbiased (though it's near impossible to stay unbiased about anything, we're only human after all) and extremely informative. I have to admit, however, that I grew more and more disheartened as the film wore on, " Breaking through the clutter" is a major theme of advertisement, will I be spending my entire career just trying to claw my way out of the clutter? Watching consumer's trapped between me and other marketers as we bounce them back and forth like a pinball?

Naomi Klein (Author of ' No Logo' 2000) says that " Consumers are like roaches. You spray them and spray them, and after a while, it doesn't work anymore. We develop immunities. " Is it all just a hollow game with no real winner? The film's middle consisted of how marketer's do their research, which is the most fascinating part to me, how do marketers do what they do? Where do they get the base data to build upon? Bringing in regular consumers like you or I, asking questions and running psychological experiments.

This part almost terrified me honestly, studying cults and why people followed them, seeking to create " Loyalty to a brand beyond reason" it almost seemed like brainwashing to me. I remember when I was in high school, working in retail at my favorite mall, when the new iPhone came out, the line to the apple store wrapped around the entire second floor of the mall, blocking patrons from entering our own store. And a few months later, when apple came out with something new, it would happen all over again, and I was always in disbelief.

The film covered popular companies like Saturn, Volkswagen and Apple, all with intensely strong followings. They call this Psuedo-Spiritual Marketing, making the individual feel as if they belong to a greater whole, something bigger than just themselves. Advertising simply isn't about having the better, shinier product anymore, it's about transcending the product and making it part of everyday life, a support beam, almost. " I can't live without my iPhone" or " I don't know what I'd do without [Insert your favorite product here]" admit it, we all feel that way about certain products.

The last section of the film overviewed marketing found in politics, which was my least favorite part of the entire documentary to be perfectly honest. I already have a deep distrust of politics and politicians in general, how could I forget that marketing is EVERYWHERE, including (almost especially) in politics. Despite my previous feelings towards the subject, what Rushcoff had to say about the marriage of marketing and politics was legitimate and sustained with evidence.

Rushcoff talks about how easily they can manipulate the image of a candidate, everything from the cut of his hair, to the scuff on his shoes, so that the public sees what they (the marketers) want them to see, so they may be elected into office and then keep that power. Just like the way they would sell a product, marketing can also sell a man (or woman) and put him in power. But of course, what is advertised may not be what you really get and the population is coddled and pacified with other media to keep them occupied.

The film has certainly changed my perspective on marketing, I wanted to use my creativity and ideas on the world and still get paid for it, I was also told by several people I revere that I'd be 'really good at it', whatever that may mean. I used to think that people were telling me I was very creative, and could use it towards business. But now I'm not sure if marketers are just people with degrees in manipulation, I don't want to be like that, a bitter old business woman with only an eye for profits, regarding the consumer masses as sheep.

But nothing bothered me so much as Bob Garfield's (Columnist 'Advertising Age') response to Rushcoff's classic question of advertising "Should the pitch be aimed at the head or the heart? How creative can an ad get and still be an ad?". Garfield retorted that "Someone once wrote a book called?? Advertisements for Myself. That's what advertising is, it's advertising for the guys who are creating it far more than it is for the guys who are paying for it. They're trying to win awards. They're trying to make more money. They're trying to build their own portfolio. They're trying to get a better job.

They're trying to make up for the fact that they're in advertising and not directing films or doing stand-up comedy or painting paintings of whatever they would prefer to do, I guarantee you. And the consequence is a lot of advertising that's quite extravagant in its look or very clever and entertaining and funny but which doesn't do the thing that advertising is supposed to do, which is make you want to buy the good or service that's nominally being advertised.". Does this mean I'll be reduced to spewing out

mindless jingles and taglines for companies? I won't get to use my creativity at all?

I must admit, I originally wanted to go to film, but switched to advertising because I want a steady job. I felt like Garfield was pointing a finger directly at me in my back seat of the classroom, and I felt ashamed and embarrassed. " Maybe this industry isn't for me" I thought to myself as I walked out of the classroom and into the sunshine, maybe I just wasn't cut out for it, maybe it wasn't all that I thought it was going to be. I've seen marketing used irresponsibly, and cause people to turn a blind eye towards the major faults of a politician, viciously defend brand because of the culture the consumer has been absorbed into.

This documentary opened my eyes to the faults of advertising, and it disheartened me until I remembered why I wanted to go into advertising in the first place. It was a few years ago, when I was still piddling around unhappily in the nursing major unsure of what to do with my life, or the direction I was going. I was feeling all kinds of down, I guess it's something all young adults go through, growing pains, but in the heart and mind. For the last few weeks I had not been feeling beautiful, looking at models in magazines and on the TV I felt rather plain, almost ugly.

I was plagued with this odd feeling for a few days when I happened upon the first commercial Dove put out for its ' Campaign for Real Beauty'. They showed a plain ordinary woman like me, in a sped up video of her being put through rigorous hair and makeup applications, under the perfect lighting she looked beautiful. But it doesn't stop there, they take her image and fix

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all her flaws on Photoshop, elongating her neck, plumping her lips, setting her cheekbones higher, even making her eyes much wider before they put it on a billboard, and fade to black with the simple message " No wonder our perception of beauty is so distorted".

And for the first time in weeks I looked in a mirror and I felt beautiful, no makeup on, my hair undone, It was because I was natural, because I was real. Dove ran this brilliant marketing campaign for " Real Beauty" worldwide in 2004, it included workshops, easily accessible videos online, advertisements, sleepover events and eventually the publishing of a book which led to a production of a play. The idea behind " Real Beauty" was to celebrate the natural psychical differences and variations embodied by all women, across the world, to inspire them to have the confidence to be comfortable with themselves (as they quote on their website).

The campaign launch featured every-day women of all different kinds of sizes and shapes, displaying their character and personality as highlights rather than their physical appearance. This eventually spurred a phenomenon where the phrase " Dove Beauty" referred to attractive women, who's bodies reflected that of a the every-day woman rather than stick-skinny models, in an attempt to change the standard and definition of what society accepts as beauty. This is an example of the good that advertising can do for the world, because when it all comes down to it in the end, it's how we feel about ourselves that makes us want to buy a product.

Instead of advertising with Sex (If you wear this cologne, you'll attract beautiful women) Fear (is your family safe?) or Guilt (did you buy your mom

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flower's this mother's day?), Instead, we should celebrate the self with "Because you deserve it". Because maybe in this modern world, where we are not struggling from day to day to just simply survive, we are a society of leisure and self, our materialism almost defines us. The Products we choose to fill our lives, the logos we wear on our shirts, the emblems of the cars that we drive, even the smell of that particular detergent all helps to define us as an individual.

With no official initiation into adulthood, we find ourselves buying our first car and feeling like a grown up, with no perfect bible for parenting, we're comforted by a baby formula that is scientifically proven to help a child grow strong. Perhaps by displaying these brands proudly, we're able to find like-minded people, and grow happier because of it. Rushkoff's final line in the Documentary is a powerful one " It was near the end of my tour through the landscape of persuasion that I came to realize how the problem of clutter finally gets solved.

Marketers find a way so deep inside each one of us that it no longer feels like persuasion at all. Maybe we are in control. Once the market becomes the lens through which we choose to see the world, then there's no " us" and " them" anymore. We're all persuaders. " So I will pursue my marketing career with new vigor, keep a sense of ' good' that I want to try to impart on my work (and never let go of that), find a way for consumer's to teach me and what I can learn from them, and give them what they need in return, because after all... " The secret of it all, the secret of all persuasion, is to induce the person to persuade himself. "