

Psychological strategies used in advertising



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Why are people influenced by commercials?

Psychology has been implemented into Business ever since Vance Packard introduced the concept in his 1957 novel, “ The Hidden Persuaders,” sharing the process of how advertising firms use psychologists to grab consumers on a more profound level and ultimately persuade and articulate their products in the most effective way which was thought to be a psychological approach (Packard, 1957). And the question that must be answered in order to find out the psychological implications of why ads work on the human mind, is how. In this essay I will be exploring the different ways in which ads work on the human psyche as well as the aesthetics and demonstrations of the field that is known as advertising psychology. According to “ The Television and Political Advertising: Volume I: Psychological Processes,” commercials out of all forms of advertising, are the most influential (Biocca, 2013). The reason behind this discovery is believed to be caused by deception, it is institutionally apart of the field of psychology. When it comes to the term influence the approach that will be used to interpret it will be through psychology because it is the field that concerns the most with how humans interpret stimuli, in this case the stimuli will be advertisements, in fact psyche translates to the Greek word for soul of mind (Montanari, Goh, Schroeder, Nagy, Muellner & Center for Hellenic Studies, 2015). However psychology is a broad and vast field so to narrow the search, there will be mainly a discussion with advertising psychology and deception of advertisements from a psychological point of view. From an advertising perspective, commercials are used to influence people by altering purchasing decisions through the incorporation of adding a deeper context so that consumers will be as mentally involved in their product as possible

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(Berland & Ouellette, 2014). People are influenced by commercials and to begin this voyage of why this phenomenon happens the logistics and analytics of the field that concerns psychological deception in commercials is a good place to start. I will be demonstrating this by showing advertising's influence in the subconscious, emotion, and behaviour modification facets.

Advertising Psychology is the field that concerns why people are influenced by commercials and all types of advertising so obviously there is a scientific reason behind the effect of commercials on the human mind thus legitimizing the repercussions of commercials. Advertising psychology was presumed to have been discovered in 1896 by experimental psychologist, Walter Dill Scott, who was one of the researchers on the earliest advertising psychology theory that consumers were nothing more than brainwashed aberrant mammals when it came to their perception of commercials (Kuna, 1976). Advertising psychology is basically the scientific study of how to persuade and communicate a product in the most effective manner (Scott, 1902). The way this field is utilized in the advertising industry, is that copywriters would use the statistics and theoretical concepts established and gathered by psychologist to strengthen or create their marketing approach to equip their promoting campaigns (Scott, 1902). Deception also plays a part in advertising and is one of the most used tactics. It was first implemented in 1905 from "The great American Fraud," which was an exposé on how the pharmaceutical industry was advertising over the counter medicine that was stronger than advertised (Gardner, 1975). Deception in advertising has become such a widespread approach that it has arisen a slang term known as "false advertising" (Hausman, 2016). False advertising

is the practice of having misleading facts in advertisements to hide or make the product being advertised seem more appealing than it is in actuality and can possibly create or reinforce unethical behavior (Millstein, 1964). False advertising, unlike deception, is a concept that is not an open subject to discuss when advertisers create a campaign because it is illegal thanks to the enforcement of specific legislation act (Millstein, 1964). However, corporations are no strangers to buying their way out of problems. This was demonstrated by Philip Morris, a cigarette company, in 2006, they settled their way out of a potentially high stakes lawsuit that would have led to ending the very existence of their company if they didn't pay a massive settlement (Hylton, 2007). These discoveries are proving that advertisers are aware of the influence that their commercial, posters and sponsorships have on humans because they create their campaigns with that being their end goal.

Subconscious persuasion is one of the strongest influence that advertisements utilize (Heath, 2012). Advertising firms try to emotionally entice their presumed audience by selecting the most effective subliminal memories that might be linked to their product and that results in higher selling rates (Heath, 2012). This theory was demonstrated through a study done by Dr. Grove in (1984), the study was about subliminal arousal that was in alcohol commercials. There were two groups who looked at the same alcohol ad except group 1 was the controlled group who watched an ad that didn't contain subliminal sexual content and group 2 watched an ad containing subliminal sexual content (Grove, 1984). The results were that the experimental group responded more emotionally to the erotic influences than

the controlled group (Grove, 1984). This finding established a concept that sex sells in advertising. So even though an ad maybe for a beverage or a lawnmower, copywriters would include sexual undertones so that the audience would seem more aroused and that would translate into more of an interest in their product. Obviously, sex has to be implied subconsciously due to the fact that it isn't the product being sold and also it would be unethical and in some more serious cases illegal to blatantly show it in a mass marketing commercial. With that said, the target audience doesn't necessarily need to have a major in psychology to understand that sex is being symbolized through the products due to the fact that most ads that feature this type of concept usually involve well known stereotypes of what most people would define as sexually attractive. Bringing it back to Dr. Grove's research, advertisers would use data collected in the study to pitch in campaign meetings so much so that the years 1985-2006 had an overabundance of commercials that had sexual subliminal messages from almost every industry's commercial (Heath, 2012). Another emotion that advertisers exploit is humor which can be utilized more than sex because of the ability to use it in family friendly commercials thus allowing advertisers to make a more prominent link between emotion and product.

Humor is an emotion that not only signifies positivity but also be used as a release valve. Advertisers recreate and foster these two attributions of humor as a backdrop of their products to give a subtle sign of pleasantness that said product might cause for the consumers. The psychological aspects of humor, is to achieve an enhanced memory and attitude towards the product (Chung & Zhao, 2003). A study done by Chung and Zhao in (2003),

examined the reactions of super bowl audiences from the years 1992-1997, the results showed that funny ads made about frivolous low-cost products had a higher level of memory and happiness linked to them compared to straight forward ads that focused more on the products features (Chung & Zhao, 2003). This finding shows that humor can trick consumers into using a product that they might not even need let alone want due to fact that the audience can be reminded of positivity when looking at the product on a store shelve or in their home which creates a positive feedback mechanism that makes them want to buy the product again or recommend it to a colleague. When it comes to a consumer recommending the product to their colleagues in the humorous commercial, they wouldn't necessarily discuss the benefits of owning the product but rather refer to what the ad was and how funny it is and that spike their colleagues interest to purchase the product, not particularly because of its purpose but instead to be a part of the " positivity movement" that said product created (Spotts, Weinberger & Parsons, 1997). Another attribute that humor is linked to is a release valve and male hygiene products have been linked to release valves, marketing campaigns exploit these two similarities by combining them together which has resulted in a slew of humorous advertisements directed at stereotypical male interests such as cars, candy bars and fast food commercials (Spotts, Weinberger&Parsons, 1997). So far the discuss has been based on universally known feelings but there are theoretical attributions that advertising agencies utilize when finding the most effective way to influence consumers, this conceptual approach also culminates all facets of the emotional spectrum.

A theoretical approach that Advertisers have utilized in their commercial strategies is affective conditioning. David Ogilvy, an advertising businessman, first introduced the idea of using behavior modification techniques into advertising in 1982 (Baker, 1999). The concept was to find a way to transfer a person's attention from one item to another, this works for commercials because say someone is trying to cook dinner while having the television on in the background but due to affective conditioning that person is so invested in what's the television that their attention gets shifted from cooking to the commercial. Affective conditioning is a type of behavior modification technique that allows a person to associate positivity to an inanimate object that is reminiscent of positive memories (Dawson, Rissling, Schell & Wilcox, 2007). This concept has been demonstrated through for instance a chewing gum advertisement that involves an intimate couple kissing, now in the majority of the public's eye, this is thought to be positive and brings a sense of joy that they might have or might aspire to have and this has shown to generate higher selling rates. A study done by Melanie Dempsey and Andrew Mitchell in (2010), had shown two pens from competing companies, one pen had superior features compared to the other so logically people should choose the higher performing pen. The results showed that majority of the participants chose the lesser performing pen due to the fact that it was being held by a smiling teddy bear (Dempsey and Mitchell, 2010). This illustrates how placing items that represent positivity in near proximity to a product, the feelings can be transferred to the product and thus the consumers associate teddy bear feelings when looking at a pen. Even though the studies in these discussions have been conducted in a scientific procedure, there is skepticism because that's the nature of

research and all of these studies started off as opinions, so it only makes sense that they give rise to other opinions.

Sex has been a controversial topic for centuries but as for the millennials generation, there is a lack of grotesque or appalling behavior attached to the idea of sex being placed in mainstream commercials. Before that, sex was implemented in a subliminal way to avoid offending anyone that was watching the commercial around children, now, that would be considered censorship. And when millennials here just the slight concept of something being considered anything close to censorship, there immediate reaction is to prove that they are open and free without thinking of what their children might be exposed to because they ultimately believe that sex should be an open discussion amongst all ages(Friedman, 2004). But now that advertisers have majority of the public open to them being direct to a reasonable degree, there ads don't shock people as much as they once did, thus making copywriters think that sex doesn't influence people in commercials anymore. In a study done by Bongiorno, Bain & Haslam in (2013) , women are less likely to purchase products with women who are dressed in a scandalous manner (Bongiorno, Bain & Haslam, 2013). The research involved was, taking PETA advertisements, showcasing celebrities close to completely naked and the point of the advertisements are to encourage people to stop wearing fur with the idea that these women would rather go naked then wear fur (Bongiorno, Bain & Haslam, 2013). The results showed that men were more likely to stop wearing fur after seeing the advertisements then women (Bongiorno, Bain & Haslam, 2013). The reasoning behind this result was interpreted to be the cause of jealousy, the advertisements had made

the women feel a sense of aggravation due the fact that these women were perceived to be very comfortable in their kin which apparently overshadowed the fact that they were supposed to think of the inhumane treatment of animals (Bongiorno, Bain & Haslam, 2013). This study was geared towards how sexual appeal doesn't work in advertisements, but while in the process of proving this hypothesis, they admitted to males being sexually influenced by sex in ads, so in sum sex still works for men due to the lack of scholarly evidence. However, for women, the research is present but very limited and sex in advertising has been around longer than the lifespan of the research involving the ineffective use of sex in advertising.

Even though the scholarly article discussed previously states that women find ethical campaigns with sexualized women less attractive, finding something less attractive is still considered influential and at the end of the day this paper is about why people are influenced by commercials, advertisers might find the counterargument above to be valid but their thinking about the end goal of selling their product or accomplishing a different goal than what this paper's goal is, which is whether or not advertisements are influential and if women are influenced by a sexualized woman on an anti-fur campaign in a way that makes them want to wear, that is considered to be influential but in the opposite direction of what the ad was intended for. Furthermore, a chapter written by Mainak Dhar in (2015), states that celebrity use in branding should be utilized in a way where women feel relatable, so for instance having a celebrity who was casted in a family sitcom where the character is considered physically mediocre and behaves in a sloppy yet again relatable manner, would be the best fit for this particular

situation while also gaining the shock factor that advertisers desire (Dhar, 2015). On top of that, the amount of in depth research covered in books such as Reichert and Lambiase's *Sex in advertising: Perspectives on the erotic appeal*, discuss the numerous ways that sex is interpreted in advertising and how it influences humans has been linked to unlocking parts of memory and attention that enables the consumers to basically throw away information that they retained in their childhood, and replace it with the product, and this all starts with commercials involving some level of sexual content (Reichert & Lambiase, 2012). Lastly, there is research being done now, concerning the research style of the scholarly articles that advertisers refer to when constructing advertisements make sure that sex actually influences humans (Liu, 2014). Overall, the defining error in the scholarly articles presented, is the lack of peer review involving the counterarguments side, although there might be a discrepancy in a different type of emotion.

They say that laughter is the way to a lover's heart, but apparently for some, it isn't the way to influence people in advertising. There are allegations stating that humor no longer influences people to purchase anymore due to the fact that they are looked at as only entertainment to the point where some may not even realize that there was even a purchasable product inside the commercial. A study done by Michael Curran in (2012), states that humorous ads no longer sells products and because of that, it is hypothesized that humorous ads do not influence people (Curran, 2012). The study involves a thorough analysis of super bowl ads in 2011, one particular ad that was discussed was a Huggies commercial, in a focus group, participants gave feedback that the ad was comical and relatable which the

author points out as the two ingredients advertisers expect to be effective (Curran, 2012). However, the revenue sales didn't correlate to how impressed the focus group seemed to be, the research went back to the participants and the follow up was that relatability at this day and age gets absorbed in a decreased attention oriented situation instead of a direct cause and effect attention span that advertisers were accustomed too (Curran, 2012). Funny Ads now, follow a regiment of being viewed mostly through online platforms and that change from tv to computer or phone, effects the influence that commercials have, phones for a societal reason, have a less serious demure then televisions (Reyes, Rosso & Buscaldi, 2012). Ads on tv are usually absorbed more attentively then ads on phones because of the greater time length and the lack of ability to fast forward through ads in television compared to phones has been assumed to be the reason behind the lack of influence and attention to the product (Reyes, Rosso & Buscaldi, 2012). As demonstrated previously, the results are speculations, the research assumes lack of attention in the current generation is the reason behind the ineffectiveness of humor advertisements. However, the effectiveness of humous advertisements, has a large spectrum including attention and how to work in gauging an audience to focus on the main product while entertaining people in the right manner.

The above information was compelling in terms of the decrease in sells revenue that didn't correlate to the popularity in humorous advertisements, unfortunately, those claims are not well sourced with scholarly articles. Which leads readers like myself, to conclude that it is the reason why a credible publisher wasn't interested in the article. A study done by Koneska,

Teofilovska &Dimitrieska in (2017) , discusses the importance of humor and how in this day in age, it is still effective relevant to advertising (Koneska, Teofilovska &Dimitrieska, 2017). The research involved the observation in European ads, which differ in the use of humor because unlike American ads, European ads use humor in a more useful and realistic manner (Koneska, Teofilovska &Dimitrieska, 2017). For example an ad for soap in France had a man using the soap advertised in a way were women would be attracted to him, now this may seem boring and overrated, but the way it differs from other ads is that the cinematography elevates it, the vivid colors and editing involved resembles a movie worthy scene (Koneska, Teofilovska &Dimitrieska, 2017). On the other hand, American ads use humor now a days in a way were soap ads, for example Old Spice ads, use a screaming person in very bizarre situations demonstrating overly unrealistic ways that the soap would benefit people to the point where does become popular but more towards a joke and decreases the promotive aspect of the product (Alamán and Rueda, 2016). So in sum, Humorous ads sill influence people, it's just that advertisers are deviating further away from the product, which obviously would result in a lack of attention towards the product from an audience perspective when the makers of the commercial are essentially experiencing the same outlook. Up until this point, the discussion has been about observable entities and what some way disagrees with, but now the concern is about the arbitrary and theoretical sides of advertising and what the controversy that might be associated to it.

As years have gone by, people find other resources that are considered experimental, to have pertinence in their field, and advertising is no

different. Affective conditioning has had its fair share of criticism. The main concern regarding affective conditioning in advertising is that it is speculated to be non-influential because the human brain can't grasp such complex ideas, so instead of enhancing the audience's focus onto the product in commercials, it just ends up confusing the consumers altogether (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). In a study completed by Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc in (1980), the research involved a comparison between human brains and animals that have been analyzed and assumed to have very similar biological structures to humans, the animals being discussed are monkeys (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). The scholarly paper then proceeds to discuss the Darwinian links between cognition and evolution, the justification of why the human mind and a monkey's mind is a plausible comparison that can be used in this article and so many others, is that evolution has been garnered as one of the most well researched and respected concepts in the scientific community. So in sum the logistics of this paper was published due to the fact that it's foundation which is evolution, which has been proven to be utilized in physiological comparisons between humans and animals (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). The results from the study can be interpreted to say that the average human has the memory cognition span of a monkey and so such sophisticated psychological tactics that advertisers are trying to aim for are not suitable for the majority of their audience and it results in their affective conditioning going way over the consumer's head (Kunst-Wilson & Zajonc, 1980). The information provided from the counterargument side, may be considered well rounded has a better structure due to the fact that it is using a biological explanation to deteriorate a theoretical concept that is affective conditioning. But what it lacks to include is the behavioral aspect

that advertising is focused on, it's not an activity that necessarily involves a physical participation from the consumer to be influential.

Although the claims made by Kunst-Wilson and Zajonc, are valid they haven't been a direct correlation between advertising and cognition from their evolutionary perspective. As well as the fact, that this article was published over two decades ago, it loses its validity especially with the addition of multiple studies that have been done in advertising and behavior making direct inferences between advertising and cognition. In a study done by Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens, & Crombez. discussing the level of psychological effects that advertising has on the human mind (Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens, & Crombez, 2010). The research included in the scholarly article, focuses on how the implications of conditioning techniques on memory and attention (Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens, & Crombez, 2010). The findings concluded, that hypothetical scenarios that involved the LOOPS experiment, would show signs that indicate the information being stored in parts of the brain that hold long term memory (Hofmann, De Houwer, Perugini, Baeyens, & Crombez, 2010). This information can be inferred to say that when advertisers use affective conditioning in commercials, their intentions are for the consumers to have a heightened memory so that when hey consumer sees their item that was advertised in stores, their product will be associated to the commercial as well as being thought of as a positive stimulus. Overall, the information provided, has been displaying factual points and possible justifications to familiarize the concepts in advertising from past and present. However, the implications of the societal effects that advertising has on the public has to

be addressed. Because it can potentially lead to dangerous repercussions and weaken the mind of the future legacy of the world to believe everything in commercials and advertising in general. If this were to happen, with the advanced psychological studies and techniques being used to enhance deception, children might be exposing themselves to adult content before they are cognitively prepared to understand and prioritize the information in a safe and responsible manner.

There are many dangerous circumstances that arise from the psychological implications of commercials when done in a malicious way. A study done by Nairn and Fine in (2008), described information on the effects of advertising on the psyche of children (Nairn, & Fine, 2008). The study then explores the various ways advertisements influences children's cognition, for example, the researchers provide an experiment where the participants are shown snack commercials, the experimental group was given the snack commercial in back and white and the controlled group was given the snack commercial in its original vibrantly colorful manner (Nairn, & Fine, 2008). The results from this study infers that children are more compelled to perform acts that were demonstrated in the vibrant commercial over the black and white commercial (Nairn, & Fine, 2008). This can prove to be a problem if such commercials were encouraging children to jump off higher structures or promote violence in general. The skeptics would dismiss these findings as not relevant due to the fact that it supposedly a cause of immaturity and being juvenile. But as demonstrated in a study by Nielsen & Bonham, would prove otherwise, the research involves an analysis if car advertisements and the effects of what their audience tries to replicate in their commercials. The

research provides various cases which show a significant amount of dangerous car tricks that consumers perform that were very similar to stunts performed in car advertisements (Nielsen & Bonham, 2015). The findings in this scholarly article, can infer that grown adults that have gone through various tests to achieve their driving license, meaning they have demonstrated a level of responsibility that a child would not be able to reach, would still be susceptible to the dangers of advertising (Nielsen & Bonham, 2015). In order to converse the ethical implications that advertisements have on humans, the most efficient way to deliver the information would be to show various examples of cause and effect from a direct standpoint instead of a theoretical perspective which most of the previous argument have been based on.

There is a plethora of unethical commercials, from cigarette companies to candy companies. But instead of listing all unethical commercials, there will be one commercial that will be discussed in this section, that is the Pepsi commercial featuring Kendall Jenner, it is in fact the commercial that inspired this essay. On April 4, 2017 , Pepsi released a commercial featuring model and notorious reality tv star, Kendall Jenner, the result was a global uprising of people from the left wing and the right wing in complete disgust over the advertisement (Peñaloza, 2018). The commercial starts off with people of all types of gender , color and ethnicities, joining together and showing their artistic skills with the trademark Pepsi colors being utilized in their work, then Kendall Jenner is introduced and joins a crowd of people charging a line of policeman, the commercial ends with Kendall handing over a can of Pepsi to a policeman and then everyone smiles (Peñaloza, 2018). Now, from the

audiences point of view, the majority of people found the commercial to be inappropriate was perceived as making a mockery of a serious issue with strikes, especially since the Ferguson and Dallas protests happened in a relative time to when the commercial was aired plus the hatred grew even stronger after the Charlottesville riot occurred five months after the commercial was aired which resulted in a reoccurring bad taste that was left in a lot of consumer's mouths (Peñaloza, 2018). The company wanted the perception to be about unity and peace and how Pepsi has the ability to entice that behavior, but the result was that most people found there farfetched idea to be insulting rather than just a ridiculous idea and the fact that they featured a high profile social media icon in their advertisement, just made there troubling commercial reach a larger platform in a shorter time frame than if they were to not include any familiar faces. This example culminates a lot of the themes that advertisements have towards it's audience in this day in age, because commercials are becoming increasingly prejudicial in what advertisers might think of as an innocent advertisement actuality can be very harmful and the fact that social media is making the current generation more savvy and critical thinkers, is resulting in forcing advertisers to be more considerate of the repercussions that there advertisements may cause.

In summation, my essay's purpose is to layout the information regarding why people are influenced by commercials. I have approached this argument by going through the subconscious, emotional, and behavioral aspects that are associated with advertisements to prove my argument has factual evidence and is thus valid. I have also shown what my opponents opinions are

regarding my argument which includes gender, generational and anti-emotional counterarguments, but I have also shown how these arguments are lack luster compared to my argument due to evidential and situational circumstances. At the end of the day the question right now is why should my argument be considered important or valuable. First of all, we are living in a generation where commercial advertisements are expected to stick out like a sore thumb and it leads to desperate plough that can sometimes come across racially insensitive to a collective group and also create racial stereotypes or reemphasize a racial stereotype to people who are unaware of dissecting the truth from what is presented due to ignorance or lack of knowledge. Second of all, most commercials are targeting the youth because we live in a world where 19 year olds can get a credit card without even knowing what interest is, and so advertising agencies use that lack of knowledge to their advantage by making commercials that have nothing do with the product but are just entertaining as can be and increase the shock value to a thousand to the point where it becomes a social media spectacle which ends up peer pressuring the youth to buy the product in the popular ads to be considered relevant what is the said popular ad was advertisement a 40, 000 car or beer so some other item that could be abused by someone in a reckless mind frame that most of the youth of today have. So, what that all said, what do we do now? My opinion is to regulate the content before it hits the mass market and becomes a possible catastrophe, so I propose a version of the FCC but for commercials and if that does exist then there should be a rule lobbied about eliminating racially insensitive advertisements and removing any youth brainwashing tactics that persuades adolescents to engage in reckless behavior with the product being

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advertised. As all arguments stand, there are situations where my claim would not fall completely true. For instance, millennials are becoming more and more psychologically educated due to TV shows, most adolescent leisure shows have some sort of psychological undertone whether it be a teen drama or comedy, and this overall leads to them being savvy and intelligent enough to step back say they wait a second this commercial may have supermodels and my favorite football player but I don't need a car and to make their assumption valid they will tweet to their friend but their friends will probably see the same observation that the original consumer saw. So yes, intelligence can backfire on advertisements but on the other hand, less and less millennials are interested in going to higher education due to the overwhelming amount of successful social media influences are getting through YouTube and Instagram, who are actually apart of Forbes lists. So, this ultimately means that advertisers will just use a more sophisticated kind of psychological mechanisms that an average high schooler would not be able to catch. The fact of the matter is that there is an abundance of evidence that proves how, why and what influences commercials have on people to a high degree.

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