

Critical thinking on the persuaders

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The Persuaders is a PBS documentary which addresses the questions concerned with how marketers and advertisers are inspiring consumers to buy their product. The fascinating thing about modern consumers is that, supposedly, we have become more intelligent and more self-aware, meaning that it is increasingly difficult to market a product to the discerning consumer. However, what has become more obvious is that advertisers are wising up to this and altering their campaigns and images to suit. Apple, are one such company, who instead of marketing their product based on its ability to enable the user to carry around 15, 000 songs in their pocket (in the iPod's case), they instead market in such a way that it makes the consumer an 'individual' for owning one. In The Persuaders, one man seems aware of this and discusses it at length: Douglas Atkin. The purpose of this essay is to address his views and to argue that he is completely correct in holding them.

In his interview, Atkin states that "A brand originally was a way for a producer of a brand, like a maker of beer, to put their ownership symbol on it and to give it a sense of authenticity." (Atkin) However, he then clarifies that today; a brand is a different thing because now, "the consumer is king." (Atkin). He discusses how specific brands now help to define the customer – he states that his Apple computer stands for creativity and non-conformism, "just like me" (Atkin) and that by having it sat on his desk, he is giving people that as a message about himself. Atkin then succinctly summarises his argument by stating: "ownership of the brand has switched from the producer saying, 'this is my product', to the consumer saying 'this is my brand.'" (Atkin). His message is clear: it is a consumer market and the individual now likes to align himself with one brand that induces a sense of

loyalty and devotion. Arguably, Apple are the most prominent brand in this sense.

Cleverly, in the last decade, Apple has not only produced a range of products which have revolutionised portable, handheld devices, but they have also introduced a whole new set of vocabulary – usually with the precursor ‘ I’. The iPod, which you fill with music from your iTunes library and that, can also be played on your iPhone or iPad – without even realising it, every time a consumer refers to an Apple product, they are taking ownership of the brand because whilst it is an Apple product, it is heavily influenced by the consumer’s taste in music, games, apps and so on. Atkin agrees that brand ownership has become something of a fusion: “ there are many examples of brands where the producer has very little to do with how the brand is constructed. The consumer has almost taken over.” (Atkin).

So, whilst Apple present their products as being simple to use, creative and innovative; the sheer fact that everyone owns one, does not detract from the feeling that the consumer is still an individual. As of April 2007, Apple had sold over 100 million iPods and whilst it was recognised that Apple did not create portable music, they transformed the technology into an attractive package for consumers: “ iPod was clearly so much better. It was smaller, it was sleeker easier to use, and it looked really really good.” (Azzaro et al.). Atkin’s view that the market has become geared up solely towards the consumer is correct: Apple have marketed their products as being attractive, creative and innovative which is an image that consumers have bought into in their billions, simply to convey that they too are cool.

References

Azzaro, Marian et al. Building Customer-Brand Relationships. New York: M. E. Sharpe, Inc, 2009. Print.

Dretzin, Rachel and Goodman, Barak. “ Interview Douglas Atkin.” The Persuaders. Frontline, 2009. Television.