

# Advertising: is it information or manipulation



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Advertising: is it information or manipulation? Advertising is a form of communication used to drive consumer behavior. Its chief purpose is to make consumers take action either with regards to procuring a good or service or to buy in to a certain ideology such as a political ideology. It is difficult to establish when advertising began, however there is evidence of forms of advertising from the old civilizations of Ancient Egypt, Rome and Greece. This implies that advertising has been used as a form of communication for a long time. To inform generally means the communicator aims at providing someone with the tools to make a decision whereas to manipulate the communicator goes further by influencing the receiver of the communication to take the communicator's desired course of action. Advertising could arguably be accused of doing the latter, that is manipulation; but its fundamental purpose is to give information. It is quite easy to declare that advertising is manipulation but this demands deeper reflection on human nature and communication. It is human nature that when one informs, one also seeks to achieve a certain goal. This implies that often the information given where one is communicating to another is often subjective. Advertising has a similar role. Its primary purpose is to inform, and then its secondary purpose is to find a way to convince one to take a certain decision. The ultimate goal of any business is to make a profit and therefore it would be difficult for businesses to purely inform and not try to convince customers to buy into their ideas, products or services. Professor Walter Dill Scott, who introduced the study of psychology as an important element in advertising in 1902, declared that anyone who intends to advertise " must be a student of human nature and [that] he must know the laws of the human mind" (" Advertising History" 4). There have been several

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attempts by consumer groups and government agencies to prevent the manipulative nature of advertisements for example restricting television advertising aimed at children who are aged 8 and below. The argument being that at such a young age a child is unable to question the claims of an advertisement as anything but fact (Mayer 1). However it is from this back and forth arguments between advertisers and consumer groups that we can identify the truth about whether advertising informs or manipulates. A business seeks to create a buzz around its offerings so as to make sales then profits whereas the consumer seeks to get the best product or service that will give him or her maximum value. It is therefore the consumer's duty to sift all the information that he/she obtains from an advertisement and make his/her choice. This means that it is up to the consumer to choose whether to be manipulated or not. Conclusion Consumers are the ultimate decision makers. The modern day consumerism is not as a result of advertising but it is a consequence of buyer decisions. Businesses will depict their products / services in the best way possible to make a sale but that does not necessarily imply manipulation. To portray oneself in the best way possible is an intrinsic human trait that we must accept. Advertising therefore is simply a reflection of how human communication whose core purpose is to inform.

Works Cited " Advertising History." Designhistory. org. Web. 30 Apr 2011.  
Mayer, Caroline E. " Information or Manipulation?" Washingtonpost. com 24 Feb 2004. Web. 30 Apr 2011.