

Can advertising influence the way we live our life essay

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Can Advertising Influence the Way We Live Our Life? The prevalence of advertising in modern, consumer driven, societies is strong and growing more all the time, with television, radio, the Internet, newspapers and magazines the most ubiquitous platforms. With advertising companies increasingly looking for new media and platforms on which to advertise: roller coasters such as the “Pepsi Max T Big One” and the “Playstation” at Blackpool’s Pleasure Beach, and aspects of every commercialized sport currently played, from football jerseys right down to the helmets of motorcycle riders, this begs an important question: do advertisements merely influence consumers choice of the brand of product they will buy, or do they fundamentally influence the basic types of products consumers can choose, and even the consumer’s lifestyle? Perhaps the most controversial industry of which this question has been asked is the tobacco and cigarette industry, whose advertisements can regularly be seen on large ‘billboards’ by UK highways, and also covering the cars, drivers and all promotional material associated with “Formula One” racing. Pollay (2004) examined the 2002 trial, which assessed the constitutionality of Canada’s Tobacco Act, passed in 1997, which attempted to regulate cigarette advertising and promotion. With respect to promotional communications, the purpose of the act was “to protect young persons and others from inducements to use tobacco products and the consequent dependence on them” (Pollay, 2004).

The provisions prohibited advertisements that were “false, misleading, or deceptive or that are likely to create an erroneous impression about the characteristics, health effects, or health hazards” (Pollay, 2004). Also prohibited were testimonials and endorsements, including “the depiction of

a person, character, or animal, whether real or fictional”, and “ lifestyle advertising or advertising that could be construed on reasonable grounds to be appealing to young persons” (Pollay, 2004). The trial involved new evidence of industry tactics in the 1990s, including the use of lifestyle advertising of sponsorships and the marketing of a new product that was falsely claimed to be “ less irritating. ” Pollay provides highlights from the legislative background, the document production, the trial testimony, and the judge’s decision, which ended with an endorsement of the law. This trial, the supporting evidence and the judges decision all tended to support the view that cigarette advertising was not only capable of influencing the way people lived their life, but that it actively did.

Cigarettes are known as a badge product because they provide consumers, especially young consumers, with a token for communicating their identity. “ In the cigarette category brand image is everything. The brand of cigarettes a person smokes is their identity.

Cigarettes tell others who they are as a person. There is a strong emotional connection to the brand, the image it projects about the smoker, not only to themselves but to others” (Pollay, 2004) This evidence is further reinforced in another cultural context: Goldberg (2003) analysed a survey of over 1, 700 Hong Kong adolescents, and found that it indicates that their smoking-related behaviors are related to their exposure to cigarette advertising, promotional products, and movies. American media and tobacco firms dominate the Hong Kong tobacco and cigarette industries, resulting in strong preferences for American cigarette brands, particularly Marlboro.

As a correlational study, this research does not, of itself, address the issue of causality; however, “ These findings do add one more dimension to a growing body of literature that cumulatively suggests a causal relationship between exposure to tobacco advertising and promotion and youth smoking. ” In other words: the research tends to indicate that cigarette advertising may create lifestyle changes amongst young consumers, leading them to take up smoking for lifestyle reasons, when they would otherwise not have. However, the tobacco industry does differ from a great many other industries, in that different brands of cigarettes are virtually indistinguishable from one another, except for image illusions.

As ITL’s marketing vice president testified in an earlier tobacco related trial, based on the Tobacco Product Control Act (TCPA) of 1988, also in Canada: “ So the discrimination in product terms, pure blind product terms, without any packaging or name around it is very limited....

t’s very difficult for people to discriminate, blind tested. Put it in a package and put a name on it, and then it has a lot of product characteristics. ”

(Brown, 1989) This is a fact which has been known by many experts for decades: “ In a market with minimal product differentiation, advertising becomes a disproportionately important part of the marketing mix” and “ without easily perceptible product differentiation, except for extremes, consumer choice is influenced almost entirely by imagery factors. (ITL 1971 Marketing Plans) As such, cigarette manufacturers are forced to distinguish their products from other brands by using lifestyle marketing, which thus impacts strongly on consumers, especially younger consumers who are still

developing and defining their lifestyle. However, in order to truly examine the potential impact of advertising on people's lifestyles, it is necessary to look at other industries, where products are more naturally differentiated, and also at consumers as a whole. Interestingly, in 2001, the Economist found that consumers in developed markets have, in fact, become more fickle. A study of American lifestyles by DDB, an advertising agency, found that " the percentage of consumers between the ages of 20 and 29 who said that they stuck to well-known brands fell from 66% in 1975 to 59% in 2000.

The bigger surprise, though, was that the percentage in the 60-69 age bracket who said that they remained loyal to well-known brands fell over the same period, from 86% to 59%. (Economist, 2001) This provides evidence that it is now not only the young who flit from brand to brand, following changing trends, but every age group, it seems, is more or less equally skeptical of brand loyalty, and the potential for brands to use it to their advantage. The result of this is that many of the world's biggest brands are struggling, as they have resolutely failed to track and follow the lifestyle of their customers, and if they are making more and more noise, it is out of desperation. As they moved from merely validating products to encapsulating whole lifestyles, brands began to evolve a growing social dimension, and in the developed world, " They are seen by some to have expanded into the vacuum left by the decline of organised religion.

" (Economist, 2001) But this has made brands, and the multinationals that are increasingly identified with them, not more powerful, but more vulnerable, as consumers will tolerate a substandard product for far longer

than they will tolerate a substandard lifestyle, or being associated with a brand that is viewed as substandard.