

# How influential is subliminal advertising?



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The term “ subliminal” means beneath the threshold of perception. Many things are subliminal, such as the circulation of our blood, which we normally do not feel, experience, or perceive moving throughout our bodies. And it is possible to have our skin touched in such a way that we do not notice the touch. Subliminal advertising, however, is supposedly the power to motivate action based on something that no one can perceive, such as a message flashed on a movie or television screen at 1/3000th of a second or a word unrecognizably embedded in ice cubes in a liquor print ad.

Subliminal advertising became infamous in the late 50's when a private market researcher named James Vicary supposedly exposed hundreds of moviegoers to the subliminal messages “ Drink Coca Cola” and “ Eat popcorn.” But this study has not been replicated or published and is considered as a publicity stunt.

The general public in USA, some believe, are constant victims to broadcasted subliminal messages promoting products, creating a state of mind or incorporating political viewpoints. For example, during the 2000 US presidential campaign, a television ad campaign for Republican candidate George W. Bush showed the word “ BUREAUCRATS” where the last part “ RATS” were superimposed. In Russia, scientists who feared the power of subliminal ads over viewers of national television have developed a device to detect and disable these ad messages.

## **1. 1 Background**

Experts have long since debunked the subliminal hoaxes, and many people with more than a passing knowledge of advertising know not to take this

subject seriously, but the fascination with the subliminal myth led me to take this subject. Though many experts believe that Subliminal Advertising does not exist, people who popularized has been in demand. Books on the topic (Wilson Bryan Key's *Subliminal Seduction* as well as Vance Packard's *Hidden Persuaders*) were best sellers, and their ideas circulated far more widely than other social critiques. In the late 1950s and again in the 1970s, the outcry over subliminals even inspired legislators to draft laws banning the practice.

This research proposal sets out to present a problem definition in the field of Marketing Management that merits research and is backed by initial literature study. The problem definition, derived after initial literature study and through choices regarding research focus, reads as follows:

How effective is Subliminal Advertising in influencing the decisions and buying patterns of consumers?

The questions I wish to address through this research are

What is Subliminal Advertising and how are the subliminal messages communicated to the consumer?

What is the role of Subliminal Advertising in Marketing and what are the recent trends emerging in this area?

## **1. 2 Needs and Significance of the Study**

Several efforts have been made to monitor the impact of Subliminal Advertising on consumers. There is little understanding of the matter that up to what extent the business organizations are utilizing subliminal messages for marketing their products and what is the role of these messages in the <https://assignbuster.com/how-influential-is-subliminal-advertising/>

marketing plan, pricing policy and company's profit. This research is aimed at filling the gap found in the researches conducted so far around this topic and with the help of surveys, the research tends to explore the level up to which the business organizations are making use of Subliminal Advertising for product promotion. The main objectives of the study are:

To portray the current scene of Subliminal Advertising utilization in business organizations

To examine the usage of Subliminal Advertising as a marketing tool by business organizations

To investigate the impacts of Subliminal Advertising on consumers

To find the evidence about the benefit of Subliminal Advertising in terms of increase in profitability of firms

### **1.3 Research Aims and Objectives**

This research will probe deeper into the area of subliminal advertising and the effect it has on consumers. Many of the companies are still skeptical in using subliminal advertising to promote their products. One of the objectives of this study is to help marketing managers and advertising companies understand the impact of Subliminal Advertising in the minds of consumers. It is expected that for companies to use subliminal ads, they should understand the consumer behaviour and whether the consumers can actually spot the message inside the ad. A desirable outcome the proposed research would clarify such set of questions.

## **2. Methodology**

For collecting data for this study, a combination of primary and secondary resources has been utilized. The study comprises of qualitative as well as quantitative research. In the first phase, various secondary sources will be referred and the literature will be collected to gather the qualitative information about the issue. In the second phase a quantitative “ statistical survey” is conducted among the organizations and the consumers in order to collect their opinions and experiences regarding the use and effect of Subliminal Advertising. Hence this research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques (secondary analysis of data and statistical survey) and both of these methods will be utilized to find the answer of the research question.

### **2. 1 Sources for Data Collection**

#### **2. 1. 1 Secondary Research**

A thorough search of secondary sources will be carried out to refine the objectives and provide lines of enquiry for the next stages. Specifically, the desk research phase will gather information on subliminal advertising, how it is being used by companies and the recent trends emerging in this area. In this regard different journals, research reports, magazines, books, electronic journals and web portals will be accessed and information will be gathered from these sources to conduct the analysis of the available secondary data.

#### **Primary Research**

The primary source utilized for the research study is “ statistical survey” that is “ a quantitative method, requiring standardized information from and/or

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about the subjects being studied. The subjects studied might be individuals, groups, organizations or communities; they also might be projects, applications, or systems. This will be by interviewing people in the field who have working experience in the subject, and are relatively easy to reach. The goal of this exercise is

To get a quick feel for necessary further literature research

To get an idea of possible cases to study

To find out the methods and frameworks that already exist

## 2. 1. 2. 1 Significance of Statistical Survey

Massey, O'Connor and Krotki (1997) explained that a survey is effective and efficient method of collecting data from large number of respondents that allows the data collection through very large samples. The data can be use to determine validity, reliability, and statistical significance. Surveys are also considered ads flexible research method because they are standardized, easy to administer and free from various errors. Keeping in view the significance of surveys and the requirement of the research study, this research tools is selected and quantitative data is gathered by conducting a survey.

## 2. 1. 2. 2 Interviews

Interviews are an important source of case study information. Yin (2003) identifies two jobs that need to be carried out in the interview process. First, there is a need to follow a line of inquiry – in this case an “ appreciative

inquiry”, second, ask the actual questions in an unbiased manner serving the needs of the line of inquiry. The questions in the interviews will be open-ended and encourage unsolicited discussion. The strengths of data collection through interviews is that it focuses directly on the case study topic and is insightful, however, the downside is that, unless the questions are well constructed, there could be bias, or inaccuracies due to poor recall, or simply the interviewee gives the interviewer what he/she wants to hear (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2001, p. 271; Yin, 2003, p. 86). Historical data will also be gathered through the interview process, particularly for finding out the founder(s) and business(es) history. The interviews are carried out with key people in the business such as the founder or potential successors. The interviews will make the main contribution to the study.

### 2. 1. 2. 3 Focus groups

Focus groups are an efficient way of gathering information in a short amount of time because of their synergistic nature and the fact that they capitalize on group dynamics (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005). The questions proposed in a focus group are important in acquiring feedback about the area being studied.

### 2. 1. 2. 4 Survey Sampling

Descriptive Survey method will be used to explore and understand the attitudes of consumers towards advertisement and subsequent quantitative research will be used to measure how widespread these attitudes are. The planned methodology is as follows:

## Conclusion and Suggestions

Analyse the Information and Explain

Collect Questionnaires and Adjustment

Design Questionnaires and Sampling

Build the Basic Structure of Study

Collection of Information and Literature

Participants for this study will be selected from those willing to participate in the study, based on the inclusion criterion that will be established. Also, prior to administering the questionnaires, participants will be requested to formally express their consent to participate by filling and signing the informed consent form. Subject confidentiality will be ensured by coding each participant form with a corresponding number, so that only the research team will have access to the information of the research subjects. Also the privacy of all confidential business information that the researcher might receive during the course of study will be ensured.

The quantitative phase will probe the following:

Whether the consumer recognizes the subliminal message in the advertisement

Which group of people are more likely to catch the implanted message in the advertisement?

Their ability to recall such an advertisement

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The attitudes of the consumer towards such an advertisement

## 2. 1. 2. 5 Questionnaire for the Survey

The questionnaire for the survey will be constructed by using the Likert scale that is bipolar scaling method used to measure either positive or negative response to a statement. It is a common system that is used in the surveys. By following the Likert scale, the respondents are asked to indicate their degree of agreement with the statement or any kind of subjective or subjective or objective evaluation of the statement. Usually, a five-point scale is used under this methodology. Even for this study, the five-point scale system will be used and the respondents will be asked to express their opinions about the given statement by picking the answer from the given 5 option: “ Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neither agree nor disagree, Agree and Strongly disagree”. These points also rates from 1-5 where

1 = strongly disagree

2 = disagree

3 = neither agree nor disagree

4 = agree

5 = strongly agree

## **Literature Review**

Several studies have employed embeds in controlled situations to test for effects. One study by DeFleur and Petranoff (1959) used television to test subliminal persuasion. In this five-week experiment, no evidence was found

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that subliminal messages had the slightest effect in persuading the mass audience, even though the actions to be carried out were simple (continuing to watch a news program following a movie with subliminal suggestions) and routine (purchasing a certain food product after exposure to subliminal stimuli). In another highly controlled buying environment, George and Jennings (1975) used a slide projector to subliminally superimpose Hershey's Chocolate over a meaningful background (a movie). They found that no one bought the candy in a 10-day period following the experiment.

Kelly (1979) used two dummy magazines, one with embeds and one without. The portfolio of ads with subliminal embeds did not produce significantly greater recall of brands or illustrations than did the control ads. Vokey and Read (1985), using vacation photographs, embedded the word sex, a nonsense syllable, or no embed. When tested both immediately and two days later, the photos embedded with sex were no better recognized than the pictures in the control conditions. To specifically test Key's premise in a simple, well-controlled manner, Gable et al. (1987) placed deliberate embedding on one of two sets of photographs of a camera, pen, beer, and food. They found no significant preference between photos of products with embeds and those without.

According to Wilson Bryan Key (1974), " Subliminal perception is a subject that virtually no one wants to believe exists, and – if it does exist – they much less believe that it has any practical application. The techniques are in widespread use by media, advertising and public relations agencies, industrial and commercial corporations, and by the Federal government itself." He also quotes that " Most national advertising includes embedding

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[of hidden stimuli]. Retail or local ad layouts may not have the facilities, as their artists and writers either do not know about subliminal techniques or they lack the skill and craftsmanship required to do the work well. Every major advertising agency has at least one embedding technician in its art department. The technique is taught in most commercial art schools.”

Jerry Kirkpatrick (2007), in his article named “ Does Subliminal Advertising Exist?” states that the notion of subliminal perception is a self-contradiction because it is not possible to perceive something that is beneath one’s threshold of perception. He mentions that the message has to be either above or below the levels of thresholds of perception and it cannot be halfway between. And once it is below this level, then it is less likely that we are to be influenced by the message.

**Activity**

**Duration**

**Full Proposal**

**3 Months**

**Literature Review**

**6 Months**

**Methodology**

**6 Months**

**Data Gathering**

**12 Months**

**Data Analysis**

**8 Months**

**Conclusions and Implications**

**4 Months**

**Introduction**

**2 Months**

**Amendments and Revisions**

**2 Months**

**Total**

**36 Months Timeline**