

Advertising is a strong influence on consumer purchasing decisions. Businesses use advertising to convince you to buy their products. Although merchants must tell you the truth when they advertise, they can and do use different techniques to influence you. It is very important that you know how to recognize these techniques so that you can identify the important information in the advertisement while ignoring the persuasion factor. By doing so, you will be able to make informed, responsible consumer decisions.

Common Advertising Techniques

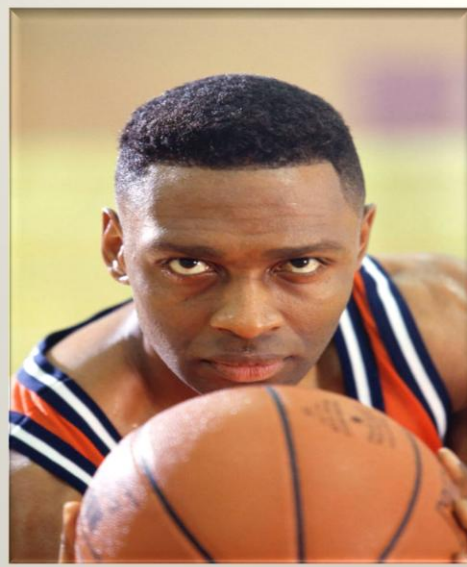


Lifestyle ads try to convince you that the people who use the product are special, and that if you use the product you'll be special too. Think of male body wash ads. Many of these ads try to tell you that if a guy uses this product, he will be irresistible to girls. These types of ads target people who want to impress other people. Be careful of buying products just to impress others. This can lead to conspicuous consumption, which is when you spend too much on things that you think make you look good to your friends, family, and neighbors. You should buy goods that are useful to you and make you feel good about yourself. Can a body spray really make you more popular? Probably not!

Examples of advertising techniques include lifestyle, celebrity, values, emotional, and comparison.

The lifestyle technique is used frequently for car advertisements. These type of advertisements show attractive people driving luxury automobiles and the advertisement suggests that you will be more attractive if you drive that type of car. Another example of this technique is commonly found with cosmetic advertisements. Cosmetic advertisements advertise that you will look better and younger if you use their new wrinkle cream or buy the "volume-building" mascara.

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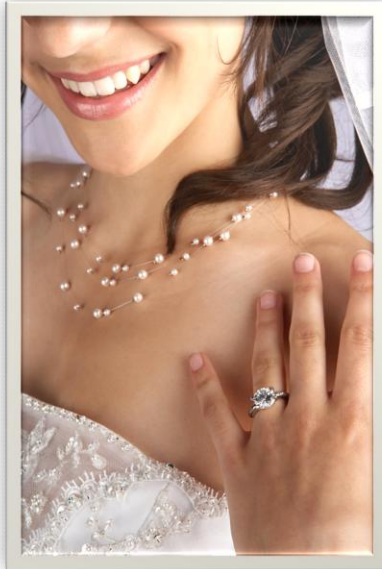
The celebrity technique uses celebrities to entice us to buy products. They promote everything from athletic shoes, to weight loss centers, and even milk.

Common Advertising Techniques



The values technique targets the things that consumers feel are important. Some American made automobiles promote the “buy American” value in their advertisements. Some cleaning products promote their products by advertising them as “green” products to target those consumers who are concerned with protecting the environment.

Common Advertising Techniques



The emotional technique pulls on your heart strings to get you to do something. Examples include commercials that use cute animals that have been abused and then ask viewers to donate money to help stop the abuse of animals. Every year around Valentine's Day you will see advertisements encouraging you to buy jewelry so that you can show your love for someone. The advertisements might show a romantic proposal using their jewelry, which makes possible buyers think, "I want to do that!" Another example is the insurance commercials that make you think of the bad things that can happen to you. They use your fears to get you to want to buy insurance to protect yourself from those things.

Common Advertising Techniques



Comparison advertisements are frequently seen with cell phone and automobile ads. You might hear something like, “our car has a higher resale value than our competitor.” Cell phone providers say that their network is faster than their competitor’s network or that they reach more places than their competition.

Types of Advertising



With brand advertising, merchants hope that you will remember their particular brand. They hope that if you remember the brand name, you will be more likely to buy their product when you shop. If you usually buy the brand that you think of first, then brand advertising has probably influenced your buying decision. Jingles and slogans are effective types of brand advertising. See which brands you can identify by their advertising slogans.

One benefit of buying a brand name product is the quality. If you like the quality when you buy the product the first time, you can usually count on getting the same quality every time you buy that product. You don't have to spend time looking for the quality you want.

Types of Advertising



Informative advertising is designed to influence you to buy a product by educating you about the product's benefits. This type of advertising is often used for complex or hi-tech products (like cars and computers) that consumers may not fully understand. Automobile ads might tell you about the safety features in their cars. They might also tell you about a system in their car that allows you to use your phone hands-free through your stereo. These types of ads can provide information that help you make good buying decisions. Beware though! The main purpose of any advertising is to persuade you to buy the advertised product. No ad will tell you the flaws in their product or about a lower price at another store.

Types of Advertising



Comparative advertising tries to influence you to buy their product by comparing its product's qualities and features to a competing product's qualities and features. These ads are always slanted in favor of the advertised product. They do, however, supply useful information. You can learn what the advertiser thinks are the best qualities of its product and about the potential weaknesses of the competitor's product. These weaknesses may be exaggerated, but you know what to look into when you start looking at each product. Cell phone companies compare themselves to other cell phone providers by saying that their network is faster, that they have better prices, or that they reach more places. Car companies compare their automobiles to other automobiles saying that they have the best resale value or the best ride and handling as compared to their competitors.

Types of Advertising



Defensive advertising is used by a company to dispute accusations from comparative advertising. They are used to respond to claims made by other companies. As with comparative advertising, these ads do not provide a complete or balanced point of view. They are trying to convince you that their product is the best choice. You should use the information they provide when you evaluate your alternatives. Recently one fast food restaurant was accused of using low quality beef in their food so they came out with advertisements inviting customers to view their ingredients list online. This ad was designed to defend the restaurant against the low-quality claims.

Types of Advertising



Persuasive advertising is designed to appeal to your emotions to influence you to buy, but it usually doesn't provide much useful information. This type of ad tries to convince you that owning their particular product will make you happier, more successful, or more satisfied. They focus on making you want to buy the product rather than on providing information that might help you evaluate the product. These ads show attractive people who seem happy or popular because they are using the advertised product, and they insinuate that you will be like those people if you choose their product. Most cosmetics use this type of advertising. Athletic shoe advertisements lead you to believe that you will be able to play basketball better or run better if you wear their shoes instead of the competitor's product. Clothing ads try to convince you that you will be stylish if you shop in their store. These ads usually have very little informative value. Remember, owning or using a particular product is not going to change your life in any meaningful way. You should ignore these types of ads when making buying decisions.

Costs of Advertising



Brand advertising can be very expensive, especially during a special event, like the Super Bowl, or when a celebrity is used in the advertisement. To pay the cost of this advertising, businesses may have to increase the price of the product. If you look at all of your product options, you will notice that the familiar name brand product is more expensive than the unfamiliar brands or generic products that have the store name on them. Unfamiliar brands and generic products may have the same quality as the familiar brand, but they cost less.

The cost of advertising is built into the price you pay when you buy goods and services. Consumers do benefit from advertising by becoming aware of the products that are available and from the increased sales generated by advertising. Increased sales allow businesses to produce a higher volume of products, which means lower production costs per product. These lower costs may be passed on to consumers through lower prices.

Remember, advertising never gives a totally balanced presentation of a product. Ads usually involve some exaggeration, which is called puffery. Puffery is legal.

Deceptive Advertising



Deceptive advertising is intentionally designed to mislead you. It contains statements that are factually incorrect. This is illegal and these businesses face huge fines by the government. However, there are some advertisements that mislead the consumer but that are legal.

Have you ever seen an advertisement for a huge one-day sale with markdowns of 50% or more? This is a very common practice in advertising. What may happen in this circumstance is that the business marked up their prices for one day so they can then advertise that the prices are marked down by 50%. By doing this, they make a huge profit, and it's legal! ALWAYS compare prices among stores. Don't assume a sale is really a sale without checking prices at other stores or on the Internet.

Deceptive Advertising



Some ads offer “free” gifts to customers who buy a particular product. The courts have said that if you have to buy or do something else in order to get a “free” item, the advertisement must tell you this. If an ad doesn’t tell you everything that is required of you, it could be considered deceptive. To get around this court ruling, advertisers may avoid using the word “free” in their ads. Instead they can say “all expenses paid” or they may have an explanation in very small print where consumers are not able or likely to read it. As long as full information is provided, the advertisement is not legally deceptive, even if it is difficult to understand.

Your best option is to remember that advertising is designed to win your business and it is intentionally biased. Use the information provided in ads to help you make good purchasing decisions. Never base your buying decision on an advertisement alone. If something sounds too good to be true, it probably is!