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THE INFLUENCE OF ADVERTISING

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Abstract:

This paper will discuss today's marketers and what methods they follow in advertising in order to affect the consumers' decisions and make them buy more products which they may or may not need. By studying the human brain and how it makes decisions, marketers come out with several techniques that can influence the consumer's buying decision. This paper will illustrate some of the advertising strategies that have been used in advertising for a long time such as fear appeals, the human need for information, attracting people's attention, using celebrities to present a product, and special offers and discounts. Despite the ethical terms of using these methods, marketers found their ways to seduce our brain and influence our buying choices. The main purpose here is to inform people about the advertising world and its strategies toward consumers, and how we could make better purchase decisions and choices in the future.

The Influence of Advertising

The influence of advertising on our lives has changed over the years. In the early days, advertising aimed to inform us about a new product and its use, in other words, their message was direct. Also, the ways that marketers used to deliver their new product for the public were limited (such as newspapers and radios). Today, however, things have changed. Marketing messages are more sophisticated and pervasive. It is more to create a wish to possess a product. Also, years ago, there were few advertisements that were published in newspapers and magazines, or broadcast on radio stations. But now, it became a part of our daily life to see advertisements on television, banners on a website, or text messages in our cell-phones.

All that for sure affects our behavior. Advertising has a really strong influence on our decisions as consumers. For example, even though people do not need some products, advertising can inspire them to purchase these products. Sometimes people buy some things that they do not really need, affected by their insecurity and fears. According to Williams (2012), many products, services, ideas, and causes have used fear appeals as an advertising strategy. Some examples include dental hygiene, personal safety, insurance, and financial security. He also mentioned specific advertising examples of fear appeals include Michelin tires and the baby, and Bayer aspirin and heart attack prevention (Williams, 2012). In fact, most of these ads try to manipulate the consumers' mind and convince them that they are the only company that has the safest solution and if they did not buy what they offering, negative consequences will happen to them. Williams (2012) said that "the more frightened a person is by a fear appeal, the more likely he or she is to take positive preventive action" (p. 14).

Targeting people's fears is an example of how marketers use their understanding of human psychology to persuade consumers to buy more products. Another example for this is the

need of information. People normally like to know more about all the things around them. Marketers understand this need and use it in their advertising to convince people about their products. Advertising can inform people about a product by providing details to give them more options to decide to buy the product. In addition, most of the technical devices ads (such as smart phones, laptops and tablets) compare their product by showing the weakness and the flaws of a similar device from another competitor. For example, when Windows compared Windows 8 tablet with iPad, they showed how their new product is lighter, thinner, and multitasking. According to Business Dictionary, this marketing technique called “advertisement comparison” which an advertiser claims the superiority of its product over competing product by direct or indirect comparison. In other words, this advertising method makes products more understandable for people.

Attracting people’s attention is another method used by marketers to make people consume more. Commercials with erotic scenes or funny stories are used in order to attract people’s attention. For example, Snickers Satisfies advertising campaign has used the slogan “You’re Not You When You’re Hungry” in its hilarious commercials. The main idea of the ads is to represent a team of young people with an elderly person who does not fit in the team, but as soon as he or she takes a bite of Snickers he or she become young again. This is just one example for many funny ads that make people smile; so they watch them again and again. Although Tuttle (2012) believed that this kind of commercials is ineffective way to persuade the consumers to choose or buy the product, they will still recognize and remember that brand. Moreover, some brands use special soundtracks or songs in their commercials. As a result, these songs can become catchy and recognizable for almost everyone. Most of us remember some, if not all, of Coca Cola’s theme songs for various events such as Christmas and FIFA World Cup

2010. Although the lyrics in the songs were not directly talking about Coca Cola, people refer these songs as Coca Cola's songs. In fact, using a song in a commercial can benefit both the product company and the singer him or her self. Sanburn wrote that Ingrid Michaelson, singer, said "The hope when licensing your music is that a few people will like what they hear, then those people will seek out the song and buy the song and/or record and become a fan" (Sanburn, 2012). In short, there is a tangled relationship between popular music and advertising and they both influence people's behavior somehow.

In addition to these catchy songs, using catchy and creative slogans is another way to attracting people's attention. Here are some examples for some brands and companies slogans: Subway (Eat Fresh), Nokia (Connecting People), McDonald's (I'm Lovin It), Wal-Mart (Save Money. Live Better.), and Toyota (Let's Go Places). In an unconscious way, we find that these commercials are attached in our minds and we feel bonded with the products that they represent.

Big companies like Pepsi and OMEGA have a different history, and they produce different products. Unlike Pepsi, OMEGA is a watch company that was established in 1848 (Omega Watches, n.d.). While Pepsi, a soft drinks company, has started its business in the late 1890s (Pepsi Co, n.d.). However, they both use the same advertisement strategy, which is to use artists such as actors and musicians, or famous characters in any field such as sports, news and TV shows, to persuade the consumers. For example, when Pepsi company used worldwide singers in one of its biggest advertising campaigns. Also, during the World Cup events for many years, Pepsi company has used famous football players in many campaigns. Just like Pepsi, OMEGA has used many famous characters such as George Clooney, James Bond, and Michael Phelps to represent their watches. People interact with these ads by linked the products to the representatives. For example, they say: George Clooney's watch, James Bond's car, etc.

According to Kerin, Hartley, & Rudelius (2013) “a consumer’s purchases are often influenced by the views, opinions, or behaviors of others” (p. 124). In other words, using celebrities in order to promote and represent a company’s product is an effective way to influence people to purchase it. However, Suttle (n.d.) believed that despite the consumer’s following, celebrities are most effective if they promote products or services they are most likely to use.

Companies also use special discounts to attract consumers. People are usually attracted to ads, products and stores that have the words "special offer, sale or discount". We prefer to buy products on sale or at a discount because it makes us feel that we would spend less money. But in fact, we spend more. For example, if someone wants to buy a product for ten dollars, and there was a special offer, which is to buy two units of the same product for seventeen dollars, there is a big chance that he or she will take the offer (even if he or she just needs one) and pay seventeen dollars instead of ten dollars. And this is another way to make people consume more. In addition, some companies offer special deals in the holydays seasons, national days such as Memorial Day, or even special occasions like a person’s birthday. Gallo (2011) wrote about Walgreens pharmacy campaign in 2011/2012 during the flu season:

Walgreens could offer a discount on shampoo or any of the other products it offers, but the pharmacy decided to do something innovative. Walk into any Walgreens during the flu season of 2011/2012, check-in on Foursquare, and Walgreens will donate a voucher for a free flu shot to someone in need. Walgreens expects to contribute \$6 million worth of flu shots during the campaign. Walgreens is thinking creatively, connecting its

Foursquare special with the brand’s unique voice (Gallo, 2011).

In short, not only sales or discounts attract consumers; an offer with a noble cause can persuade people to interact, participate, and buy what ever it is include.

Sometimes we follow our primal instincts and forget to use our brain. Some of us become greedy and unsatisfied with what we have. Advertising uses techniques which make us feel that we cannot be happy without their products. They try to affect our decisions by touching our insecurity and fears. They also use the affinity that we have for certain celebrities to influence our choices. In general, marketers try to control our feeling and desires to increase their revenues. Regardless of is it ethical or not to use these techniques, it is essential for us as consumers to know what methods do the marketers use so they can really manipulate and influence our purchase behavior. Despite the fact that advertising will be thriving on our weaknesses in the years to come, we should try to do our best and use our mind and be logical as consumers, and we should not follow our irrational desire. And that means, before we buy anything, we must think carefully.

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