

LESSON PLAN

The Influence of Advertising

Recognize how and when advertising techniques can influence buying decisions.

Learning Objective(s):

- Understand and identify basic advertising techniques and appeals
- Understand and identify deceptive or questionable advertising techniques
- Give examples of commonly seen misleading advertisements, and identify the deceptive or questionable appeals and techniques used in each
- Discriminate between facts and unsupported claims in print advertisements and in television commercials

Target Group:

- **Grade 7 – Grade 8**

Lesson Excerpt:

In today's modern world, advertising seems to be everywhere we look; online, television, billboards, magazines, newspapers, on buses, grocery carts, even cell phones.

In addition, some forms of advertising can be subliminal, such as the strategically-placed soda can in a movie. We can't help but be influenced and manipulated as consumers. In this lesson, students will become aware of the various techniques and appeals used to influence consumer behavior.

Warnings must also be sounded. Unethical selling techniques such as “bait and switch,” as well as common deceptive promotions like “get rich quick schemes” are discussed here. This is followed by information on program-length commercials, also called “infomercials.”

Finally, students are asked to develop guidelines for viewing and evaluating advertising. This skill will prepare them to make rational decisions in our very complex and evolving marketplace.

Students' Activities:

1-1 What Appeals to You? What Doesn't?

- Two weeks before giving this lesson, ask students to collect examples of ads they like and dislike. Ask students also to pay attention to TV and web ads.
- Ask students to pay particular attention to facts versus unsupported claims in ads.
- Ask students to tape up their print ads around the classroom.
- Discuss what students like and dislike about the ads they've collected or watched.

1-2 Examples of Fraudulent or Misleading Advertisements

- Ask students to look for and bring to class print ads that they think are fraudulent or misleading.
- Ask students to tape up the print ads they have collected around the classroom.
- Discuss what fraudulent or misleading techniques and appeals are used in each ad.

1-3 What Techniques Are Used in Ads You Like and Dislike?

- Discuss advertising techniques and appeals used in the print advertisements taped up around the classroom.
- If you have examples of television commercials, discuss the advertising techniques and appeals found in them.

1-4 Try It—Make a Commercial

- Divide the class into groups. Have each group research a product or a service.
- Ask each group to prepare a “commercial” for its product or service, using some of the techniques and appeals discussed in class.
- Have each group present its commercial to the class. Ask the class to identify the appeals and techniques each group is using.
- Review how to spot various advertising techniques and appeals that have been discussed in this lesson.
- Emphasize how to spot the difference between facts and unsupported claims.

1-5 Test Your Advertising Knowledge

- Have students complete the written activity to learn about various advertising techniques.

1-6 Lesson Quiz

1-1 What appeals to you and what doesn't?

1. Print ads

- Examples (from ads brought in by students)
- What do you like?
- What don't you like?
- Would you buy the product or service?

2. TV commercials

- Examples (from ads brought in by students)
- What do you like?
- What don't you like?
- Would you buy the product or service?

3. Other (e.g., online/email advertising, billboards, radio)

- Examples
- What do you like?
- What don't you like?
- Would you buy the product or service?

1-2 Common advertising techniques and appeals

For each method, discuss what it is and find an example in the ads brought in by students. Also discuss which techniques tend to be most effective for teenagers.

1. Information
2. Status
3. Peer approval
4. Hero endorsement
5. Physical attraction to others
6. Entertainment
7. Intelligence
8. Independence
9. Unfinished comparison

1-3 Sales Techniques

For each technique, discuss what it is and find an example in the ads brought in by students. Also discuss which techniques tend to be most effective.

1. Guarantees
2. Scarcity
3. Perceptual contrast
4. Scientific or numerical claims
5. Negative option

1-4 Unethical Techniques

For each practice, discuss what it is and find an example in the ads brought in by students. Also discuss which techniques tend to be most effective.

1. "Bait and switch"
2. Exploitation of fears and misgivings
3. Subliminal advertising
4. Overstated claims

1-5 Common Misleading Advertisements

For each type of ad, discuss what it is, which techniques it tends to use, and warning signs to look for.

1. "Get rich quick" schemes
2. Health fraud
3. Credit repair
4. Product misrepresentations

1-6 About program-length commercials (Infomercials)

1. What they are
2. How to spot one
3. Appeals and techniques used

1-7 Basic rules for evaluating advertisements

1. Does the ad appeal to your emotions? Try to look beyond the appeal to your vanity and find out what the ad is really saying (or isn't saying) about the product or service.
2. What are the special features of the product? Do you need those features?
3. Search for fraud and deception in the ad.
4. Be alert to ads that are misleading (those that make unreasonable claims about the product or service).
5. Read the fine print or listen carefully.

1-8 Try it—Make a commercial!

1. Group project
2. Class presentations
3. Class discussion

LESSON MATERIAL

Commonly used advertising techniques

Information

- Presentation of simple, direct information

Status

- Associates product use with those who have status, who are successful, and who enjoy and understand the “fine things in life”

Peer approval

- Associates product use with friendship/acceptance

Hero endorsement

- Associates use of product with a well-known person

Physical attraction to others

- Associates use of product with increased physical attraction/appeal

Entertainment

- Associates product with entertainment and feelings of enjoyment

Intelligence

- Associates product with smart people who can't be fooled by gimmicks

Independence

- Associates product with people who can think and act for themselves

Unfinished comparison

- Use of phrases such as, “Works better in poor driving conditions!” Works better than what?

Sales Techniques

Some commonly used approaches:

Guarantees

- Abundant use of statements such as “lifetime guarantee” and “satisfaction guaranteed, or your money back”

Scarcity

- Merchant creates a false sense of urgency by claiming that supply or time is limited

Perceptual Contrast

- Merchant presents undesirable/inferior option first to make the second option look far superior

Scientific or Numerical Claims

- “Nine-out-of-ten” may sound good, but many such claims can prove impossible to substantiate

Negative Option

- Merchandise arrives automatically unless the consumer takes steps to stop shipment and billing
- Often used by book and record clubs

Unethical Techniques

Techniques considered deceptive and/or misleading:

“Bait and Switch”

- Advertisement entices consumers into the store with bargains that are too good to be true. Once consumers are in the store, they are told the item is unavailable and are shown a similar, but more expensive, item
- Often high-pressure sales tactics are used
- Illegal in most states

Exploitation of Fears and Misgivings

- Ad feeds or plays on consumers’ fears

Supermarket Specials

- Advertisement of products that are not in stock or that are not readily available to consumers at the advertised price

Out-of-Context Quotations

- Comments by a noted person or passages from a story taken out of context to imply an endorsement of a product or service

Examples of Misleading Advertisements

Frequently seen misleading advertisements:

Health Fraud

- Promises of overnight medical cures and treatments
- Products developed after “years of research” and “proven to provide immediate positive results”
- Testimonials from medical experts and satisfied customers

Credit Repair

- Offers, for a fee, to fix a bad credit record

“Get Rich Quick” Schemes

- Ads that offer an opportunity to earn a lot of money in a short amount of time with very little effort

Product Misrepresentation

- Uses names similar to nationally recognized brand
- Merchandise offered at below-market value for a limited time only
- Vague descriptions of product

Travel Fraud

- Offers accompanied by certificates for free or very low-cost travel
- Vague description of services and accommodations

Program-length Commercials (Infomercials)

How to spot program-length commercials

- “Commercials” similar to the program content
- Sponsor identified at beginning or end
- One product is proclaimed superior

Protect yourself if you want to order the item

- Use a credit card
- The Fair Billing Act will offer you some protection if you have problems with the bill or the quality of the product

Order or pay by mail

- Your purchase will be covered under the Mail Order Rule

Actions to avoid

- Giving your bank account number over the phone

Remember

- Product claims are made by the advertiser
- Such claims represent neither an objective nor an independent evaluation of the product

Rules for Evaluating Advertisements

Ask yourself basic questions

- Does the ad appeal to your emotions?
- Look beyond the appeal to find out what the ad really says (or doesn't say) about the product or service.
- What are the special features of the product?
- Are these features necessary?

As you read, listen to, or watch advertisements...

- Search for fraud and deception in the ad.
- Be alert to ads that are misleading (those that make unreasonable claims about the product or service).
- Read the fine print, or listen carefully.

LESSON EXERCISES

What appeals to you? What doesn't?

Directions

Collect examples of ads you like and dislike. Also pay attention to TV and online ads and commercials. If possible, bring videos to class. Pay particular attention to facts versus unsupported claims in ads.

When you're done collecting ads, answer the questions below.

1. What do you like about the ads you've collected?
2. What do you dislike about the ads you've collected?
3. What do you like about the TV or online commercials you've seen?
4. What do you dislike about the TV or online commercials you've seen?

Examples of Fraudulent or Misleading Advertisements

Directions

Bring to class print ads you think are fraudulent or misleading. Tape up the ads around the classroom.

1. Describe your example of a fraudulent or misleading ad.
2. List the fraudulent or misleading techniques and appeals used in your favorite ad.
3. List the fraudulent or misleading techniques and appeals used in your least favorite ad.
4. What actions could consumers take to avoid these deceptions?

What techniques are used in ads you like and dislike?

After you've talked about various advertising appeals and techniques, answer the following questions for your favorite ad and your favorite TV or online commercial.

1. Describe your favorite ad.
2. What advertising techniques and appeals are used in your favorite ad?
3. Describe your favorite TV or online commercial.
4. What advertising techniques and appeals are used in your favorite TV or online commercial?

Try it—Make a Commercial

Directions

Divide into groups. Each group is responsible for researching a product or a service.

Prepare a commercial for the product or service your group has been assigned or has chosen. When preparing your commercial, be sure to use some of the techniques and appeals discussed in class.

Each group will present its commercial to the class. At the end of your presentation, be prepared to answer the following questions:

1. To whom are you trying to sell your product or service?
2. What specific techniques and/or appeals did you use to try to sell your product?
3. Were any of the techniques or appeals you used fraudulent or misleading?

Test your Advertising Knowledge

Answer Key

In the space provided, write the letter of the advertising technique or appeal the statement represents.

- a) *Join the gang*
- b) *Hero endorsement*
- c) *Unfinished comparison*
- d) *Independence*
- e) *“Get rich quick”*
- f) *Exploiting fears and misgivings*
- g) *Physical attraction appeal*
- h) *Negative option*
- i) *Credit repair*
- j) *Numerical claims*
- k) *Guarantees*
- l) *Bargain appeals*
- m) *Scientific claims*
- n) *Catch phrases and slogans*

1. Return this card today and begin receiving three CDs every month. If, at any time, you decide you don't want a CD, just return it within ten days. **H**
2. If you're the type of person who can think and act for yourself, drive one of our cars and you'll be convinced you can't buy a smoother ride. **D**
3. We promise your new battery will last a lifetime, or your money back. **K**
4. This detergent works better on grease and stains. **C**
5. Three-out-of-four dentists recommend this toothpaste. **J**
6. Everyone else is using this product. Why aren't you? **A**
7. At this price for a limited time only! So buy now, because you won't see a value like this again. **L**
8. After years of research by leading physicians, we've formulated a pill that, taken one hour before each meal, allows you to eat anything you want without gaining weight. **M**
9. You find yourself unconsciously singing the tune to the commercial. **N**

10. If Mr./Ms. Famous Athlete wears this type of underwear, shouldn't you? **B**
11. Just one spray of our cologne, and you'll never have to spend another Saturday alone! **G**
12. Work in your home, part-time, and earn up to \$10,000 per week. **E**
13. No matter how bad your credit is, for one small fee, we can help you get that car or van you've always wanted. **I**
14. Our complete-at-home course, which comes with a supplemental videotape and a workbook, is designed to increase your chances of getting better grades regardless of the subject. **F**

Test your Advertising Knowledge

Answer Key

Answer each of the following questions in the space provided.

15. Explain and give an example of the "bait and switch" advertising technique.
Designed to get you into the store by advertising a bargain. Once you're in the store, you're told the item is unavailable. Then you're shown a similar item of higher quality that costs more.
16. Explain and give an example of the "supermarket special" advertising technique.
Advertisement of products that aren't in stock, or aren't readily available to consumers at the advertised price.
17. Explain and give an example of an advertisement that uses "scientific claims."
Claims of "scientific proof" that are made without the substantiation required by law.
18. Explain and give an example of an advertisement that uses "bargain appeals."
Plays on human tendency to want a bargain. Lots of so-called "bargains" aren't really bargains at all.
19. List three ways to spot program-length commercials.
*Look for commercials that are similar to the program content.
Check for sponsor identification.
Be wary of programs where one product is represented as "better" than others.*
20. List two things you can do to protect yourself if you buy something from a program-length commercial.
*Use a credit card to pay for the item.
Order or pay by mail.*

Lesson Quiz: The Influence of Advertising

Answer Key

True-False

1. An “unfinished comparison” in an advertisement provides consumers with incomplete information. **T**
2. Out-of-stock advertised specials are considered to be an unethical technique. **T**
3. Credit repair service advertisements may be misleading due to the promises made to consumers in credit trouble. **T**
4. An infomercial is a type of “bait and switch.” **F**
5. Comments from buyers of a product in a commercial usually provide useful information. **F**

Multiple Choice

6. Advertisements using a well-known person are examples of the _____ advertising technique.
 - A. peer approval
 - B. unfinished comparison
 - C. status
 - D. endorsement**
7. Books, tapes, and music CDs are commonly sold using:
 - A. a perceptual contrast
 - B. numerical claims
 - C. unfinished comparisons
 - D. a negative option**
8. _____ would be an example of an unethical action.
 - A. An infomercial
 - B. An out-of-context quote**
 - C. An offer to work at home
 - D. Comparison pricing in an advertisement
9. A program-length commercial is commonly called:
 - A. “bait and switch”
 - B. a perceptual contrast
 - C. an infomercial**
 - D. an action guarantee
10. The most useful information in an advertisement would be:
 - A. the price**
 - B. comments from production users
 - C. a list of product accessories
 - D. an endorsement from a well-known person

Case Application

Recent television programs and commercials have provided information on a new method of cooking to save money, reduce fat, and improve the flavor. This cooking equipment seems to be quite good. What actions should a person take before spending money on this type of product?

Before making such a purchase, several types of research should be conducted. Contact local or state consumer agencies to determine if there are complaints against the company. Talk to others who have purchased this item or similar products. Conduct library research or an internet search to gather additional information.