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Buying the Propaganda?
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English ID (TTh 9:30-11)
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I. Introduction

Super Bowl Sunday has arguably become an American pastime. This final game, which decides the nations top football team, draws family and friends across America in front of the television set. In recent years, however, a large attraction in addition to the game has become the commercial breaks. These commercials, which cost millions of dollars to run, typically win great appeal from the viewing audience. However, the goal of the various commercials is not to entertain for the mere purpose of being amusing; rather the commercial's goals are to sell a product, brand, or idea. The Random House Dictionary defines a commercial as, "produced and marketed with an emphasis on salability, profit, or the like" (Random House, 264). Commercial advertisements are inherently effective in persuading the viewing audience to purchase a product; otherwise businesses would not make an investment in commercials without the prospect of financial gain. Therefore, commercials must employ certain techniques in order to encourage viewers to use its product. Ann McClintock's essay "Propaganda Techniques in Today's Advertising" describes different forms of propaganda advertisers use to influence the decisions of viewers. Propaganda throughout history has been proven effective in selling products, brands, and ideas. Therefore it is important to understand the seven propaganda techniques discussed by McClintock, and to be able to recognize these techniques in practice. With an understanding of the different types of propaganda, an individual should be able to recognize the deception in an advertisement and stay above the influence.

II. Method of Obtaining Facts

In order to gain an understanding of how commercials attempt to influence consumers, I began by reading the essay, "Propaganda Techniques in Today's Advertising", by Ann

McClimtock. After studying the various forms of propaganda and gaining some insight into the world of advertising, I was prepared to view and dissect the deception within commercials on television. In order to view a broad range of commercials, aimed at different viewing audiences, I recorded two one hour segments of television at different time periods during the day. The first one hour period of commercials was recorded on Tuesday March 24, 2008, at nine o'clock in the evening during the airing of Jericho on CBS. The second one hour period of commercials was recorded on Wednesday March 25, 2008, at three o'clock in the afternoon during the airing of Dr. Phil on CBS. The goal in choosing these two time slots was to view the broadest range of commercials possible based upon the different audiences watching the different television shows. Jericho was broadcast in the evening when working individuals and families are more likely to gather around the television. On the other hand Dr. Phil is broadcast during the afternoon when many people are still working. Subsequently, Dr. Phil attracts non-working women viewers during the daytime. As a result of these different time slots, a wide range of commercials was collected. Upon viewing the recorded commercials, I noted a fallacy within each commercial and recognized various forms of propaganda used to influence the viewers.

III. Analysis and Discussion of the Data

The first basic type of propaganda used in commercial advertisement is poisoning the well. McClimtock, refers to this technique as name calling, and explains that it is the process of using negative slogans against a competitor (McClimtock, 5). This technique effectively leaves a sense of mistrust or dislike for a competing product in the minds of viewers (McClimtock, 5). As a result, this technique is highly effective in promoting a ^{company's} own product. During the two hour period of commercials observed, I recognized this technique several times. Sprint, for

example, ran a commercial advertising a new mobile phone plan which allows an assortment of free services. However, the commercial allude to the audience that its competitors have many hidden fees and are out to get their patrons. This is a classic example of poisoning the well. The commercial relayed to the consumers watching that Sprint is a dove, whereas its competitors are hawks. This technique was also apparent in a Foster Farms commercial. The commercial effectively alluded to viewers that only Foster Farm's chicken is fresh, and that its competitor's chicken is not. This commercial was amusing, but at the same it time took a swipe at its competitors. This propaganda technique attacks the opposition, whereas glittering generalities do the exact opposite.

McClintock describes glittering generalities as the second common propaganda technique. According to McClintock, this technique applies "attractive and slippery" words to the product being advertised (McClintock, 6). Instead of attacking the opposition, this technique attempts to make its own product look and sound better. This form of propaganda was evident in the slogans of many commercials observed. For example, the United States Air Force stated it was "above all", Valtrex stated "being safe feels good", Target stated it was the "good buy stop", and Enterprise stated "we'll pick you up". The slogans do not prove to the viewer that the product is superior to others, but they leave the viewer with a sense of security and fulfillment about the product. This type of propaganda can seduce an individual, and he or she wouldn't even notice it. This technique directly attempts to make the product look better with words, whereas transfer propaganda does so indirectly.

Transfer propaganda is the next technique discussed by McClintock. Unlike the use of glittering generalities, transfer works indirectly. In transfer propaganda, the advertisement attempts to transfer good feelings about a person or symbol to the product being advertised

(McClimtock, 9). McClimtock provides the examples of corporations choosing patriotic symbols to represent their corporation, and political advertisements filmed at national monuments. This technique attempts to transfer the feelings of patriotism, and nationalism to the product being advertised. A great example of this type of advertising was evident in a U.S. Air Force commercial. The commercial elicited a sense of patriotism and a sense of duty to join the Air Force and defend the United States. Another example of this type of propaganda was evident in a Gillette Razor commercial which featured several prominent professional athletes. This commercial attempted to transfer the positive feelings viewers have of the athletes to the Gillette Razor. These two examples illustrate how the use of transfer propaganda effectively gives a product more appeal. This technique is an indirect version of testimonial.

The fourth propaganda technique described by McClimtock is the use of testimony. This technique uses well known celebrities as advocates for the product being advertised. The use of testimonial from popular individuals works much like the transfer technique (McClimtock, 12). Well-known celebrities transfer the appeal the viewing audiences have of them to the product being advertised. This technique is very direct and easy to detect. A commercial for Dish DVR clearly used this technique. The commercial depicted a famous comedian describing how great the product was in an entertaining fashion. Although the comedian was not an expert on the product, his appeal was transferred to the product. Therefore, because the comedian has appeal to the viewing audience, the audience is more likely to believe what he has to say. Whereas this technique relies on popular individuals, plain folks propaganda relies on making individuals look like an average person.

Another common form of propaganda is plain folk's propaganda. According to McClimtock, an advertisement using this technique will attempt to sell its product by providing

the perception that ordinary people use the product (McClimtock, 16). This form of propaganda is effective in convincing audiences that a product is made, sold, and used by ordinary individuals. The use of plain folk's propaganda was clearly evident in a Sprint commercial. The commercial depicted the C.E.O. of Sprint walking down the street like an ordinary person. The commercial effectively created the image that the C.E.O. was just an ordinary person who was looking out for others by providing a mobile phone bargain. However, in reality the C.E.O. of Sprint is a corporate giant. Sprint effectively used the plain folk's technique to gain support for its product. This same technique was also used to market the pain reliever Lyrica. The commercial depicted an older woman explaining she suffered from frequent pain until she used Lyrica. Instead of advertising the medication as another product from a large pharmaceutical company, Lyrica was presented by an ordinary individual that viewers could relate to. The portrayal of a product that is produced by and for the ordinary person is an effective method for advertising. This very subtle form of propaganda is similar to the subtle tactics of card stacking. McClimtock raises attention to another form of propaganda called card stacking. This is an extremely subtle form of propaganda which easily goes unnoticed. McClimtock explains that card stacking is when an advertisement, "may suppress or distort evidence, tell half-truths, oversimplify the facts, or set up a "straw man" (McClimtock, 18). The use of this form of propaganda occurred often during the two hour period of observation. For example, a commercial for Action Scrubber, claimed "Twice the clean, with half the effort". This statement is an unfinished claim without evidence. This statement should raise the question, twice as clean with half the effort as what? The commercial made a baseless statement which effectively leaves the viewing audience with positive feelings about the Action Scrubber. Similarly, a commercial for Act Mouth made a claim that it was the only Dentist recommended mouthwash. Once again,

Advertisements fill the airways for one simple reason, they are effective. Therefore, it's important for individuals to understand the different propaganda techniques advertisers use to influence potential consumers. The propaganda techniques explained by McClintock seem as if they would be fairly transparent. However, these techniques are very subtle and have a powerful

IV. Conclusion

The final propaganda technique described by McClintock is bandwagon. The use of bandwagon propaganda is essentially the use of peer pressure. McClintock explains when using bandwagon, advertisers attempt to sell a product by informing the viewing audience that everyone else uses the product (McClintock, 21). Conformity, and the need to fit in, is a powerful technique used to sell a product. For example, a Subway commercial depicted a celebration over a five dollar sandwich. The advertisement was created in such a manner that it alluded to viewers that everyone was joining the celebration. The commercial concluded by telling viewers not to miss the celebration and go buy a Subway sandwich. Subway basically told viewers that everyone else is eating Subway, so they should too. Bandwagon was also clearly evident in a Nasonex commercial. During the commercial, an animated bee stated that over six million people use Nasonex for allergy relief. This statement was a direct appeal to bandwagon. The propaganda techniques discussed are well concealed, however, once exposed they stick out like a sore thumb.

this statement stacked the cards in its favor. The commercial never identified what Dentists prefer Act Mouthwash; rather, it gave a generalized statement about all dentists. In both instances, baseless claims effectively promoted the product. Consumers might as well jump on

influence on the products consumers purchase. To truly be an objective consumer, it is vital that a person not succumb to the various forms of propaganda. Name calling, glittering generalities, transfer, testimonial, plain folk, card stacking, and bandwagon are all effective forms of propaganda that people must be aware of. Commercials are simply deceptive ways for advertisers to promote and sale a product. So during the next Super Bowl Sunday, to borrow a phrase from the television, "stay above the influence" and don't buy the propaganda.

V. References

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College Writing Skills with Readings. John Langan. 6th ed. Boston: McGraw-Hill,

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VI. Appendixes

Tuesday March 24, 2008, Jericho: 9:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.

Sprint Ahead (3)

The commercial began with the new CEO of Sprint walking down the street like an average person. He poses the question, "If you could change the way your wireless provider works, what would you do?". The CEO then described that people should be able to use all of his or her phones services without having to worry about hidden fees and charges. Next, Sprints new "Simply Everything Plan" flashed on the screen with a list of its services.

Fallacy: Appeal to ignorance, because the phone company is not simply going to give its uses free services without a charge.

The commercial began with an animated depiction of the scrubber being tested on a dirty bathtub in a heroic way. The narrator then described that the power of scrubbing bubbles and a power grip, allows the user to rip through grime. This was accompanied with a visual of a woman cleaning a surface with ease. The narrator then described that the Action Scrubber gets rid of soap scum with half the effort of Clorox bleach and a sponge.

Fallacy: Poisoning the Well, It makes the claim that Action Scrubber works with less effort than its competitor.

Movie: The Ruin

The commercial began with quick glimpses at scenes from the movie along with the sound of a beating heart. In between scene previews, testimonial was provided from various magazines testifying to the originality, intensity, and horrifying nature of the movie.

Fallacy: Hasty generalization, because the testimony of three sources is supposed to persuade the viewer that this is one of the most horrifying movies ever made.

U.S. Air Force: Above All

The commercial began with a bird's eye view of the Pentagon. The narrator began by stating that the Pentagon will be attacked three million times in one day, and poses the question: who will protect it. The commercial then introduced an Air Force sergeant working in their cyber command unit. The narrator proceeded to explain that this unit and Air Force technology is the only cyber command protecting us from cyber attacks everyday. The Air Force is above all.

Fallacy: Appeal to fear, although this commercial is appealing to individuals interested in serving the United States, it makes a fallacy in describing that without the Air Force's cyber control our safety is at risk.

Action Scrubber: Twice the Clean, Half the Effort

U.S. Air Force: Above All

Movie: The Ruin

Action Scrubber: Twice the Clean, Half the Effort

The commercial began with a woman stating that families who purchased a house in the previous year did a good thing. She provided statistics showing that sixty percent of a family's wealth comes from their home. She then encouraged others to work with a realtor in their area to find an investment that is right for them.

Fallacy: Post Hoc, because this commercial alludes that if you buy a house you will become wealthy. The statistic used is a deceptive ploy to get consumers to go talk with a realtor.

Turbo Tax:

This commercial began with two neighbors talking in their front yards about taxes. Each one of them had a large guy on their back wearing a t-shirt that said taxes. In the conversation one neighbor asked the other if he had done his taxes yet. The neighbor responded hesitantly no because it was like a weight on his back. A narrator then stated, "Fortunately, there is Turbo Tax to help".

Fallacy: Hasty generalization, because the commercial is purporting to relieve all stress about taxes. However, Turbo Tax is a do it yourself tax assistant.

M & M

This commercial began with a living M&M sitting on a couch licking itself. A woman then walked into the room and asked what it was doing. The M&M continued to lick itself when a narrator chimed in stating, "When you're an M&M you'll really enjoy the way you taste".

Fallacy: Non-sequitur, because the narrator states that it is licking itself so it must love the way it tastes. There is any number of other possible reasons that it could be licking itself.

Gillette Fusion (2)

The commercial began with three professional athletes hitting an earth colored ball around. A narrator then stated that people could help show how phenomenal they are by using the Gillette razor. The narrator described that the Gillette blade reduces friction making it the world's most comfortable shave.

Fallacy: False Analogy, the commercial alludes that by using the Gillette razor, individuals can be as phenomenal as the professional athletes in the commercial. Using a certain razor doesn't change who someone is.

Valtrex: Being Careful Feels Good

The commercial consisted of several individuals explaining that they have genital herpes. To prevent spreading herpes to their partners, the individuals stated that they used Valtrex. In between the testimony of these individuals a narrator stated that Valtrex is the only proven remedy. The commercial concluded with the individuals stating that Valtrex is the only reason that they haven't spread it to their partners.

Fallacy: Hasty Generalization, the commercial aims to convince the audience that Valtrex is the only proven remedy based upon the testimony of the few people in the commercial.

Target: Good Buy

The commercial consisted of various products which Target sales. After each individual product was shown, the words "Good Buy" flashed onto the screen. In the conclusion of the commercial, the final screen stated, Target is the "Good Buy Spot".

Fallacy: Hasty generalization, based on the four products shown in the commercial, the consumer is supposed to believe that all products in Target are a bargain.

Hyundai: Dollar and Sense (2)

This commercial began with a car salesperson describing a Hyundai vehicle to a potential customer. The salesperson informed the customer that he could get 3,000 dollars cash back. The customer showed interest, at which point the window of the car rolled down. Inside was a financial expert, who informs the customer that he could invest the savings he would have by purchasing the car.

Fallacy: Red Herring, because the financial expert informs the customer that he could invest all of his savings. Investing money takes away from the decision to make a large investment in a new car. This red herring makes the consumer overlook the actual price of the car and think that they could actually make money in the purchase.

Movie: Run Fat Boy Run

This commercial consisted of a summary of the movie. Towards the end, the narrator stated that critics are "raving".

Fallacy: Non sequitur, the commercial attempts to portray the raving critics to mean that the movie is good. However there is a possibility that the movie is horrible or that the critics are not even raving about this particular movie.

Nasonex

This commercial consisted of a bumble bee explaining that Nasonex is the only clinically proven medication to help allergies. It continued on to provide statistics about the allergy medication. The bee concluded the commercial by telling the audience to ask his or her doctor if Nasonex is right for them.

Fallacy: Bandwagon/Ad Populum, because one of the statistics provided is that Nasonex was used by over six million people the previous year. This is supposed to get the viewer to think if everyone else is using the product, it must work.

Scotts Turf Builder

This commercial began with a happy family sitting in their backyard. They explained that after a long winter, they enjoy going outside to play. The father explains that he uses Scotts Turf Builder to get a greener lawn faster after winter. The wife mentioned that as a result they are outside a lot earlier than their neighbors. Scotts Turf Builder really made a happy family.

Fallacy: Non Sequitur, the commercial alludes that Scotts Turf Builder will make a lawn greener quicker, and as a result families will be able to leave their houses. This assumption ignores the possibilities of other reasons the grass turned green. Furthermore, to conclude Turf Builder creates a happy family is ridiculous.

Lytica

This commercial consisted of a woman portrayed as a painter describing her condition of phybromyalsia. She explained that her pain condition was treated by the first and only FDA approved medication, Lytica. A narrator concluded with a list of the medications side affects.

Fallacy: none

Arm & Hammer plus Oxi-Clean Detergent

The commercial described this new detergent as a mixture of mom's laundry secret, and the stain fighting superpower of Oxi Clean. It claimed this new product is number one in whitening and is able to remove stains other detergents cannot.

Fallacy: Hasty Generalization, the commercial claims that this product works better than every other detergent based upon the one trial version shown in the commercial.

Enterprise: We'll Pick You Up

This commercial consisted of a Mother and Son getting picked up by an Enterprise rental car. Along the way the Mother made comments about how expensive the rental must have been. The son replies that it was fifty percent off during the week and pick up was free.

Fallacy: Non Sequitur, because the commercial assumes that because a car rental is fifty percent off during the week, it is not expensive. This ignores the possibility that the rental is still expensive.

Dish DVR (2)

This commercial consisted of the comedian Frank Caliendo describing the benefits of Dish DVR. The commercial claimed to have the best HD DVR.

Fallacy: Appeal to Ignorance, the commercial invites the audience to make an inference about other DVR providers based on the premise that Dish DVR is the best in HD.

Jackson Rancheria

This commercial described the casino to be where the excitement and fun lives. It went on to promote how much money was up for grabs in March and welcomed everyone over 18 years of age.

Fallacy: Begging the Question, because it asserts that the Casino is fun but offers no evidence to the fact.

Saturn

This commercial aimed to show that Saturn has a new look. A customer walked into the store looking confused. Subsequently the salesperson informed him that it was Saturn's new look.

Fallacy: none

Wednesday March 25, 2008, Dr. Phil: 3:00 p.m. – 4:00 p.m.

Room Source (3)

This commercial advertised a store sale and listed the brands the store carries. Fallacy: None

Jackson Rancheria

This commercial described the Casino to be where the excitement and fun lives. It goes on to promote how much money was up for grabs in March and welcomed everyone over 18 years of age.

Fallacy: Begging the Question, because it asserts that the Casino is fun but offers no evidence to the fact.

Foster Farms

This commercial began with two chickens scheming to portray themselves as fresh and natural. In the end they are rejected. At this point, the narrator explains that Foster Farms chicken is always fresh and natural.

Fallacy: Poisoning the well, because this commercial implies that Foster Farm competitors don't provide fresh chicken.

Pain Patch

This commercial called on viewers who experienced chronic pain to volunteer for an experimental pain relief patch.

Fallacy: None

Pepsi Max

This commercial showed numerous people in different settings falling asleep. However, once each individual drank a diet Pepsi Max, they all woke up and began dancing.

Fallacy: Non Sequitur, because it implies that the only reason the people wake up is because they drank a Pepsi Max. In reality there are a number of different possibilities.

Bio Oil

This commercial consisted of a woman explaining that her stretch marks have been reduced by using bio oil.

Fallacy: Post Hoc, the woman assumes that her stretch marks went away by simply using bio oil. However, there may have been other factors that led to a reduction, such as exercise.

Honda

This commercial depicted a person attempting to choose between different colored green paints. The person then made the statement that a green everyone could agree on was Honda. The commercial proceeded to describe how Honda is the greenest car company.

Fallacy: False Analogy, because choosing green paint is not the same as choosing a hybrid car.

Movie Leatherheads (2)

This commercial was a summary of what the movie will be about.

Fallacy: None

Subway Celebration

This commercial depicted various individuals eating a subway sandwich. A narrator concluded the commercial by encouraging viewers not to miss the celebration.

Fallacy: Bandwagon, because the commercial portrays a big celebration over the five dollar foot long sandwich, and tells viewers not to miss it.

Sizzler (2)

This commercial advertised Sizzlers new steak and shrimp meal.

Fallacy: none

Olay Definity (2)

This commercial explained that Olay Definity does more than normal lotion by fighting what ages skin the most.

Fallacy: Appeal to Ignorance, because the commercial asserts that the product fights agents of aging skin that the viewer isn't aware of.

Act Mouth Wash

This commercial consisted of a Dentist describing the benefits of using Act. The commercial concluded with a narrator describing Act as the mouthwash all Dentists believe in.

Fallacy: Hasty Generalization, because the commercial leads the viewer to believe that because the dentist in the commercial uses Act, that all dentists agree with using Act.

Bush's Baked Beans

The commercial asked viewers to enjoy the family recipe used to make Bush's baked beans.

Fallacy: None

Revlon

This commercial depicted Hale Barry wearing Revlon makeup, and explained the benefits of wearing Revlon.

Fallacy: None

Dish DVR

This commercial consisted of the comedian Frank Caliendo describing the benefits of Dish DVR. The commercial claimed to have the best HD DVR.

Fallacy: Appeal to Ignorance, the commercial invites the audience to make an inference about other DVR providers based on the premise that Dish DVR is the best in HD.

