

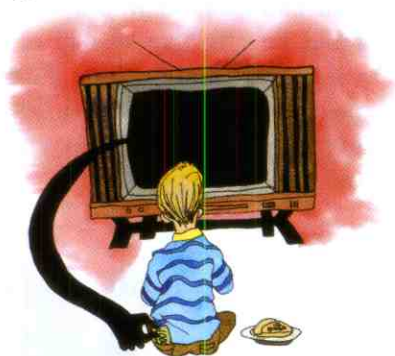
ISSUE 27

TV Commercials

When we turn on the television, or listen to the radio, we might think we get to enjoy free entertainment. But actually it is not free, not by any means. Advertisers pay vast sums of money to provide us that service, in exchange for an opportunity to make a subtle sales pitch. They know that a certain percentage of people who hear their message will buy their product. The “free” program is actually just packaging; the broadcasters give us twenty minutes of enjoyment in exchange for our giving them ten minutes of attention.

What do you think about TV commercials?

- (1) Some of them are interesting.
- (2) They are usually informative.
- (3) They make me sick!
- (4) They encourage impulse buying.
- (5) TV commercials need to be more strictly controlled.



-commercial : advertisement on television or radio

-vast : extremely large -subtle : not obvious

-sales pitch : statements and promises made to persuade (sb) to buy (sth)

-impulse buying : purchasing (sth) without planning or choosing carefully

Sample Answers

(A) Television programming has become so poor and predictable that many of the commercials are more entertaining than the *sponsored* show. The best ads cost a lot more money to make than the typical TV show, so the photography, scripting, acting, and directorial skill are usually far superior. Many times, a half-hour program will be shot nearly live, with perhaps a few scenes being done in two or three *takes*. But a thirty-second commercial will probably be shot over and over, dozens of times, until it is perfect. It may take days to shoot, rather than just a few hours!

(B) By definition, advertisers are *manipulators* of behavior. Even if the information they convey is *factual* (which is not always the case), it is designed to create an emotional response. We don't usually pay a lot of conscious attention to any commercial, but we do *absorb* its message, especially since we are exposed to it time after time. So, I think governments should take a more active role in regulating the content and delivery style of commercials.

Speak Your Mind

1. Do you believe whatever commercials tell you?
2. Do you change the channel whenever a commercial comes on?
3. Did you ever buy something because of a commercial?
4. Who do you think is the most easily *brainwashed* by commercials?
5. What was the most appealing commercial you've seen?
6. Is there any difference between TV commercials and ads in newspapers or magazines? If so, what?
7. Can we make commercials more honest?

→ **sponsor** : pay for an event, a television or radio program

→ **take** : section of a movie or television program that is recorded without stopping

→ **manipulator** : (sb) who influences people in a clever or dishonest way

→ **factual** : based on truth → **absorb** : soak (sth) in

→ **brainwash** : persuade (sb) by intense means, such as repeated suggestions, to adopt a belief or behave in a certain way

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

1. Do you believe whatever commercials tell you?

(A)

Of course. I know that it is against the law to *deliberately* make false claims in advertising. No business would be brave or foolish enough to lie on TV, because they all know they'll get caught and have to pay a heavy *fine*. Plus, the bad *publicity* could destroy them in terms of public esteem.

(B)

We have to be very *skeptical* about commercials, even those that *employ* seemingly-accurate statistics. After all, perhaps figures don't lie, but liars certainly do *figure*. We probably don't have to be overly concerned about absolute falsehoods being told, but information that looks to be correct but isn't quite accurate is far more *insidious* in its persuasion.

2. Do you change the channel whenever a commercial comes on?

(A)

What good does that do? All the commercials come on at the same time, so it doesn't make any difference.

(B)

I just leave the channel alone but leave the room. I'm glad there are so many commercials; that way I have a lot of opportunities to go to the bathroom or to get something to eat without missing any part of my favorite shows.

→ **deliberately** : with a definite intention; not by chance

→ **fine** : amount of money paid for violating a law

→ **skeptical** : having doubts about (sth)

→ **figure** : calculate; think manipulatively

→ **publicity** : widespread mention

→ **employ** : use (sth) for a particular purpose

→ **insidious** : intended to trap; sneaky

3. Did you ever buy something because of a commercial?

(A)

Of course not. A commercial helps keep me informed about the existence of new products, but it's never influenced my decision to buy them. If I need something, I talk to my friends and see what they like.

(B)

We like to think that we are independent-minded and always make our own decisions about what to buy and how much to spend. And certainly, it is never the case that everyone who watches a commercial goes out and buys the advertised product. But sales is directly related to how many people see the commercial. Businesses know that fact and *act upon* its predictability. They would not continue to spend such large amounts on advertising campaigns (and the costly programs they sponsor) if commercials didn't work.

4. Who do you think is the most easily brainwashed by commercials?

(A)

Kids are very *impressionable*. They don't yet have much experience in the ways of the world and are usually pretty *gullible*. They are also especially *vulnerable* to *peer pressure*. So they make easy targets for *unscrupulous* advertisers.

(B)

Commercials are like magic tricks. Once you see how they are done, they lose their effect. So, it isn't a question of "who" is the most easily brainwashed — we all are. It's actually a question of whether we take an actively or passively critical approach to them. None of them can trick us into doing anything unless we want them to.

Speak Your Mind

Speak Your Mind Helpers

5. What was the most appealing commercial you've seen?

(A)

I never pay any attention to commercials, so I'm not aware of any of them in particular.

(B)

I think the best commercials are the ones that have a very funny, very memorable *catch phrase* in them. Pretty soon, we hear our friends use that phrase in their own conversations, and we all know the reference without even thinking about it.

6. Is there any difference between TV commercials and ads in newspapers or magazines? If so, what?

(A)

The *conscious* manipulation is the same. But newspaper ads are cheaper and more *static*. They are easier to examine for factual errors and obvious distortions. But commercials are dynamic. The words and pictures are in constant motion, and we pay more attention to color, sound, and movement than we do to the actual *script*.

(B)

I guess all ads, including billboards and posters, are effective at selling their goods. But I think the print ads are boring and don't understand how they can persuade anyone. But commercials are clever and *compelling* enough that we don't mind watching them again and again.

7. Can we make commercials more honest?

F : That's disgusting!

M : What?

F : That commercial. The people responsible must think their audience is a *gaggle* of fools.

M : I rather liked it. What's wrong with it?

F : It doesn't really say anything at all. It's just a bunch of extra-good-looking people pretending to have a great time together. The *implication* is that if I buy the product, then I too will be like them.

M : Yes, that's what I thought too. But I enjoy watching several *well-endowed* beauties enjoying themselves. What's wrong with that? It sure *beats* watching a lot of sweaty young men running up and down a field.

F : What's wrong is that the *underlying* message is a lie. It's a beer commercial. Drinking beer leads to serious health problems, not to more fun. It's all a *blatant* lie.

M : What do you expect the advertiser to do, run an ad that says, "Drink my product and you'll get fat and sick"?

F : No, of course not. But there should be some kind of social responsibility for public advertisers. There should be some recognition of the health and safety problems that are *associated with* the consumption of alcohol.

