

Ads and Counter-Ads

Fact sheets

Photocopy, then cut out each rectangle.

Backed by Star Power



We see stars everywhere: in magazines, on TV, and in advertising. In the race to attract consumers at any price, some companies partner with stars in order to boost their image and their products. By doing so, the company hopes to capitalize on the star's popularity by getting fans to associate that star's qualities to the products he or she is pushing.

For example, Nike, which uses Michael Jordan to promote its products, is raking in profits far higher than the millions of dollars they pay the star to wear the Nike logo. "If Michael Jordan, the world's best basketball player, wears Nike, it's probably because their shoes are also the best." That's the kind of message companies convey in their advertising.

Question: What effect do stars have on your buying decisions?

Brands



The brands and logos we see in schoolyards stoke students' desire to own these. Everything can be branded: shoes, boots, watches, knapsacks, sweaters, coats, collector cards, and so on. By focusing on brands and logos instead of the product itself, advertisers seek to create a sense of belonging and pride in consumers. "Did you see that? Ben is wearing Tommy Hilfiger!" some will say. "Hey! That's not fair, I want a Nike cap, too. All my friends are wearing one!" others will think.

In short, brands have become symbols that allow young people to dress in a style they identify with. How about you? What brand are you advertising?

Question: How do popular brands and logos affect your buying decisions?

Contrived Scarcity



Contrived scarcity is one way that marketing companies have found to boost sales. By artificially creating a scarcity of certain products, companies can get consumers to rush out and buy them. This strategy pushes people to buy more in order to increase their chances of obtaining the desired item.

The message is clear: "Don't miss out! If you don't hurry to buy the product, you'll lose out!" As a result, every time a new collection of cards is launched, young people fall prey to this strategy. Most of the time, they are ready to do whatever it takes to increase the chance of finally getting their hands on that rarest of cards.

Questions: Have you ever collected cards or promotional items? What do you think of the scarcity strategy that companies use to get people to buy more and more in the hope of completing their collection?

The Weight of Words



Every day, consumers are exposed to hundreds of ads. Advertisers have more than one trick in their bag to ensnare customers. Retailers often run promotions to capture consumer attention: best quality–price ratio, limited quantity, first-come first-served, second item half-price, buy now pay later, etc. Although very short, these expressions are loaded with meaning. Companies also use slogans. Slogans take root in our minds through repetition, allowing us to quickly associate the brand with the products sold.

Questions: What slogans or other advertising formulas do you know? How do they affect your consumer choices or those of your family members?



The Search for Identity

Throughout history, countless people have been confounded by the question “Who am I?” Everyone, at some point in life, begins to consider what truly makes them who they are.

Contrary to what many think, a person’s true identity is invisible. It is something we carry within. In other words, as the maxim goes: “Don’t judge a book by its cover!” Wearing a sports jersey doesn’t make me an athlete. And owning more than one won’t make me any happier. When we don’t know ourselves very well, we are vulnerable to pressures from society. We buy things for the sake of appearances and to be like everyone else. Consumption has become a means of communication. Tell me what you buy, and I’ll tell you who you are!

Questions: What criteria do you use when deciding to purchase a consumer good or when asking your parents to buy one? Are wanting to create a look or doing as others do good criteria?



Happiness Through Consumption

The pursuit of happiness is a universal theme through the ages. Unfortunately, not everyone finds it. Sometimes people overconsume because they feel sad, lonely, or frustrated. Others buy things because their relationships are unfulfilling or because they have no self-esteem. In other words, buying consumer goods is a way to compensate for their discomfort.

In fact, one of the top strategies that companies use to sell products is to convince consumers that what they're buying will make them happy. Have you ever noticed that the people in ads always look happy?

Questions: Do you think buying things makes people happy? Why?



Being fashionable

These days, consumption rhymes with pride. The best example to illustrate this dynamic is no doubt fashion. You have to be fashionable to be “in,” to really be part of a group, to be attractive. Many families spend a lot of money keeping up with trends. One year, short skirts are in fashion. The following year, long skirts are all the rage. One season, people spend a fortune on pastel-coloured clothes; the next year, for the same season, they'll buy almost the same clothes, but in different colours—the trendiest colours. Have you ever calculated how much it would cost to change your wardrobe every season? Why get rid of clothes if they are not even worn out?

Questions: Do you follow fashion? What happens when people follow fashion?



Buying on Credit

There was a time when credit cards did not exist. When you wanted to buy something, you had to save up your money. Since the 1920s, consumers have been able to buy almost anything they want on credit. Credit is a period of time that a company or a bank gives you for payment. The company or bank lends you money so you can quickly and easily purchase what you need. However, you still have to repay that loan, with interest. Imagine this: you borrow \$20 from a friend so you can buy the latest hit video games. Your friend asks you not only to repay the \$20, but also to pay her back a dollar a day until your debt is repaid in full.

Many people get caught in the credit trap. They build up huge debts. The supposed happiness that their purchases may have bought is far outweighed by the problems associated with their growing debt.

Questions: Would you borrow money, with interest, from a bank or from friends to buy the things you want? What would you do to pay back your debt?