

Analyzing Persuasive Techniques in Advertising

Understanding persuasive techniques can help you evaluate the messages that surround you and identify misleading information.

HERE'S HOW

Strategy 1: Consider the message and the audience. The obvious goal of most ads is to get you to buy a product or “buy into” an idea. When you understand the message and audience, you can determine which techniques are being used and why. Ask yourself:

- What is the message? What does the ad want the consumer to buy?
- Who is the audience? Does the ad appeal to certain emotions or beliefs? What do those emotions or beliefs tell you about the audience?

Strategy 2: Spot the persuasive techniques. Advertisers strive to make each ad memorable, convincing, and exciting. Characters, slogans, text, and sounds are all part of the persuasive technique. Ask yourself:

- **Who appears in the ad?** The people who appear in the ad often reflect the target audience or whom members of that audience are likely to admire. Advertisers might choose specific celebrities to endorse products because they want the audience to associate the celebrity with the product. Actors or models might be chosen for many reasons. For example, they might be people just like the audience (**plain folk**), rebellious or unique (**individuality**), or “one of the crowd” (**bandwagon**).
- **Does the ad appeal to emotion or to logic?** Many ads today don't provide information about the product, and some ads don't even show the product. Instead, the ads appeal to the audience's emotions, such as **pity, fear, or vanity**. For example, commercials for telephone companies often appeal to viewers' emotions of happiness or nostalgia to leave them with a positive feeling about their product and company. Some ads use **humor** to persuade an audience.
- **What language is used?** Every word in an ad counts, but not all the words actually inform the audience. Loaded language, including **purr, snarl, and weasel words**, appeal to the audience's emotions rather than their reason. Purr words—such as “tasty” and “sensational”—can make a product seem more desirable.
- **Does the slogan stick?** The best slogans are memorable and create an “image” of the product. Slogans are less about the actual product and more about the audience recalling a catchy phrase and associating it with the product.

Strategy 3: Understand the intended effects on the target audience. Most ads don't employ just one persuasive technique. They often use several. Each technique is chosen to appeal specifically to the product's target audience. Ask yourself: Why do I think these techniques were chosen?

Persuasive Technique	How It Is Used	Intended Effect
Bandwagon	Uses the argument that a person should believe or do something because “everybody else” does	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers buy the product because they want to fit in. • Consumers assume that if others buy it, the product must be good.
Bait and Switch	Dishonest tactic in which a salesperson lures customers into a store with the promise of a bargain	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers are persuaded to buy a more expensive item.
Celebrity Spokesperson	Uses a celebrity or famous person to endorse a product	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers transfer admiration or respect for the celebrity to the product.
Emotional Appeals	Make viewers feel certain emotions, such as excitement, sadness, or fear	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audience transfers that feeling to the product.
Glittering Generalities	Emphasizes highly valued beliefs, such as patriotism, peace, or freedom	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers accept this information, often without enough real evidence to support the claim.
Humor	Used to make audiences laugh, but provides little information about the product or service	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers remember the ad and associate positive feelings with the product.
Individuality	Appeals to consumers’ desire to be different from everyone else; the opposite of the bandwagon appeal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers celebrate their own style, or rebel against what others are doing. • Consumers perceive the product as unique, stylish, or cool.
Loaded Language	Uses words with positive or negative connotations to describe a product or that of the competitor—such as purr, snarl, or weasel words	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The words appeal to consumers’ emotions, rather than their reason. • Purr words, such as “fresh” or “juicy,” make a product seem more desirable.
Name-calling	Attacks people or groups to discredit their ideas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers focus on the attack rather than the issues.
Plain Folk	Shows ordinary people using or supporting a product or candidate	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers trust the product because it’s good enough for regular “folks.”
Product Comparison	Compares a product with the “inferior” competition	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consumers believe the feature product is superior.