

Issue 5

Issue: We live in a culture saturated with advertising messages. Some popular criticisms of advertising form the public discourse, but the issues that should concern us more lie at a deeper level.



A digital billboard of the TV show *The Americans* in Times Square. Whether you live in the big city or a small town, you are exposed to thousands of advertising messages every day.

JEWEL SAMAD/AFP/Getty Images

Advertising

Advertising is pervasive throughout our culture, as you saw in Chapter 11. We cannot avoid being continually exposed to ads of all kinds every day, everywhere. This leads us to criticize advertising for various reasons. In this chapter, we will analyze this criticism as we confront the issue about whether this criticism is warranted or not.

DELINEATING THE ISSUE

Some people regard advertisers as unscrupulous manipulators who will do or say anything to get you to give them your money. They think advertising has changed the culture for the worse by making us too materialistic—creating a throwaway society of products, ideas, and people.

Other people regard advertisers as American heroes who are responsible for keeping the economy fired up by creatively encouraging more and more consumption, which has produced the richest society ever—one with the highest standard of living and the most variety of everything imaginable. They see advertising as a glamorous profession for creative people—a fast track to a rewarding career.

Most people, however, do not criticize advertising, ignoring it as so much a part of the environment to be taken for granted. Every once in a while a particular ad might capture their attention by offending them and trigger a criticism.

Despite the fact that most of us have a positive or at least neutral attitude about advertising, we all have our pet peeves and find ourselves criticizing advertising from time to time. These criticisms typically stay on the surface; that is, we

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rarely dig down below the surface to try to find out what is really bothering us. However, when we expend the effort to analyze these surface criticisms, we will often find deeper insights that will direct our thinking into new areas or make us realize that our surface criticism was misdirected.

This condition raises the issue of whether advertising should be criticized more and, if so, what those criticisms should be. We begin by making a distinction among three kinds of criticisms. One kind of criticism is based on inaccurate ideas of advertising, so these criticisms are faulty. A second type of criticism is based on personal values. And a third type of criticism illuminates a difference between social responsibility and economic responsibility. We will examine each of these three kinds of criticism then I'll present some guidelines to help you work through these different kinds in constructing your own informed opinion of advertising.

FAULTY CRITICISMS

Three of the popular criticisms of advertising—advertising is deceptive, companies manipulate us using subliminal advertising, and advertising perpetuates stereotypes—are faulty. Let's examine why.

Advertising Is Deceptive

In everyday language, we think of deception as lying. Do ads lie? The answer is no in the sense that lying is making a claim that can be proven as false. Advertisers know that if they present a factual claim that they cannot support with evidence, their competitors will spot it and report them to the Federal Trade Commission (FTC). The FTC will investigate and punish those advertisers with fines or require them to pay for a corrective advertising campaign where they have to admit they lied. Therefore advertisers are careful to avoid outright lying.

Advertisers, however, know they can stretch the truth or make the public believe exaggerated claims about their products without actually lying by using something called puffery. Puffery is a promotional statement that presents subjective claims

that cannot be tested for truth although they convey the impression that they are truthful in saying that their product is superior or valuable (see Table Issue 5.1). Advertisers puff up their products with exaggerations that are expressions of opinion rather than claims of some objective quality or characteristic of the product. Thus puffery attempts to trick us into believing there is more to the product than there really is by creating the illusion that ads are making strong claims when in fact the claims are weak or even nonexistent (see Table

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Issue 5.2). So from a legal point of view, these puffery claims are not deceptive. However, from a consumer point of view, it is reasonable to consider puffery claims as being deceptive because they are misleading.

TABLE ISSUE 5.1 Puffery Techniques

Technique	Description	Examples
Partial truth	An ad can present a kernel of truth but puff it up to make it sound bigger than it actually is, thus misleading the public.	Many brands that are labeled as a fruit juice drink contain only 10% fruit juice. Ads for many cereals show a brand as "part of this complete breakfast," which features several nutritious foods such as fruit, bread, and milk. This statement is literally truthful, but almost none of the nutrition in the claim comes from the cereal that is being advertised.
Pseudo-survey	A claim is made that is supported by a survey without providing enough detail to tell if the survey was any good.	"Four out of five dentists surveyed said they recommend X." Who are these five? Maybe they were paid to recommend it.
Pseudo-claims	An ad makes a clear claim for its product but does not give us enough detail to enable us to test it.	"This toothpaste fights cavities." But we are not told how. Is it a chemical in the toothpaste, the movement of the brush on the teeth, or the habit of brushing?
Comparison with an unidentified other	There is an implied comparison that makes the product sound superior, but it really is a meaningless claim.	"X has better cleaning action." Better than what? Better than another brand? Better than not cleaning?
Comparison of the product to its earlier form	A claim is made that the current version of the product is better than a previous version without explaining why.	"X is new and improved!" Again, on the surface, this seems like a good thing—until we start thinking about it. What was wrong with the old version? And what is wrong with this current version that will end up being new and improved again next year?
Irrelevant comparisons	A claim is made that the product is better than unspecified other products.	"X is the best-selling product of its kind." What kind? Maybe <i>kind</i> is defined so narrowly that there is only one brand of its kind. Also, maybe it is the best seller because it is the cheapest or because it wears out so fast.
Juxtaposition	No claim is made but a claim is implied from the visual, which leads viewers to associate the product with something positive.	A smiling person holds a product so that viewers associate happiness with the product.

Another form of deception that is not illegal and not technically lying is advertiser-generated reviews posted online. While 70% of consumers say they trust the reviews from online review sites (such as Yelp, TripAdvisor, and Angie's List), up to 30% of those reviewers were found to be fake; that is, almost one third of product "reviews" were not reviews written by actual consumers of the products they were writing about but instead were glowing product recommendations written by people hired by the advertisers. Some of these are written by the owners of the businesses being reviewed along with their friends, family members, and employees who post their reviews under false identities. Also, a survey of Amazon's top 1,000 reviewers found that 85% had received free products from the products and publishers they were reviewing (Grant, 2013).

TABLE ISSUE 5.2 Examples of Puffery in Advertising

Seattle's Best Coffee: Serving the best
Gillette Razors: The best a man can get
Folgers Coffee: The best part of wakin' up
Papa John's Pizza: Better ingredients. Better pizza.
L'eggs Pantyhose: Nothing beats a great pair of L'eggs
U.S. Army: Be all you can be
Ford Trucks: Built Ford tough
Kellogg's Frosted Flakes: They're great!
Coors Light Beer: Cold as the Rockies

perceives that "extra message." For example, in the 1950s, James Vicary inserted messages of "Eat Popcorn" and "Drink Coke" into a theatrical film and claimed that the theater audience bought much more popcorn and Coke, even though no one reported seeing the ads because they were projected too quickly. Later, it was found that Vicary's results were a hoax. But this story has entered our folklore, and many people believe that unscrupulous advertisers are exposing us to subliminal messages all the time.

The idea of subliminal advertising having an effect on us is also a hoax. The word *subliminal* means below our threshold to perceive. For example, the human eye cannot see an image if it is shown for less than about one sixteenth of a second—that is below our line of ability to perceive an image. This is why we perceive movies as a smooth flow of moving images when, in actuality, what is being projected on the screen is a series of still shots. If those shots are projected at about 12 per second, we see flicker in between shots, but we still perceive motion. Once those individual images are projected as fast as 16 per second, the flicker disappears; that is, it happens too fast to register an impression on us. The flicker between the individual images is still there, but we can no longer perceive it. Hollywood films are projected at 24 or more frames per second. At this speed, there is no chance for any individual frame to register a unique impression on us. So even if an advertiser placed an ad in one frame every second, each of those exposures would be too brief to cross the line of our ability

Companies Manipulate Us Through Subliminal Advertising

Is there such a thing as subliminal advertising; that is, are there subliminal messages that have a powerful effect on us? To answer this question, we first need to be clear about what *subliminal* means. The popularized version of subliminal persuasion suggests that the designer of a message is trying to deceive the audience by adding something to a message that is not consciously perceivable by the audience—but the person's unconscious mind still

to perceive them. If our sense organs cannot perceive an image, then it can have no effect on us. I'll further clarify this point with an audio example. You can train a dog to come to you when you blow a dog whistle, which emits a very high-pitched sound that the dog can hear but you cannot. The pitch of the sound is outside of the hearing range of humans; that is, the sound does not cross the line into our perceptual

ability to hear it. Can you train a person to come to you every time you blow a dog whistle? No, because people cannot hear the whistle so they cannot know when you are blowing it, and therefore they cannot respond to a stimulus that they cannot perceive. Thus, subliminal stimuli—because they are outside a human's ability to perceive them—can have no effect on humans.

When people use the term *subliminal advertising effects*, what they really mean is "unconscious effects of advertising." This unconscious influence is a powerful effect. In fact, advertisers depend on it; that is why they spend hundreds of millions of dollars on ad campaigns to embed their ads in highly cluttered environments—like in commercial pods on TV and radio, pages of newspapers and magazines, and websites. Advertisers typically do not want their audiences to pay a high amount of attention to their ads and consciously process their claims. Instead, they want their images and jingles to flow into your mind unconsciously where they are not evaluated or their claims discounted. Then gradually over time, the ads alter our standards, our perception of needs, and our expectations for life. Advertising does this by showing us that we can change our attractiveness, body image, smell, whiteness of smile, relationships, self-image, and degree of happiness by using certain products. Advertisers can alter our perceptions of what is real. For example, until about the 1970s, advertisers used White actors almost exclusively, thus making audiences believe that minorities did not exist or, if they did, that they were unimportant. Then in the 1970s, African Americans began appearing on TV and eventually grew to about 10% of the actors in ads and in television shows; however, other ethnic minorities are still almost invisible in ads (Mastro & Stern, 2003). Because television commercials not only promote consumption but also shape images and "sustain group boundaries that come to be taken for granted" (Coltrane & Messineo, 2000, p. 363), it is important to consider how such representations might influence racial/ethnic minority viewers.

Because advertisers continually present the same kinds of messages, over the years we also learn many general lessons about consumption and how to solve problems. Although each ad is trying to get you to buy a particular product, at a deeper level all ads are teaching



Think about the unconscious effect of this Lacoste advertisement. What does this image say about the brand of clothing without saying it in writing?

Meißner/ullstein bild via Getty Images

you lessons about who you should be and how you can get there. To illustrate, let's consider an example of an ad for toothpaste, which on the surface appears to be simply an appeal to get you to use a particular brand of toothpaste. But it comes with several layers of deeper meaning embedded in the message. At a deeper level, the ad is a message about the importance of health. At an even deeper level, it conveys a message about consumerism—that is, the ad tells you that you need to buy something to clean your teeth; you cannot simply use water to brush your teeth. Also at a deeper level is implied permission to eat foods that might contribute to decay because as long as you use the product to brush your teeth, you need not feel guilty about eating things that promote tooth decay. You can see that a “simple” ad for a toothpaste carries with it several layers of meaning, some of which may be consciously processed (the surface claims made in the particular ad) and some of which are unconsciously processed (how to solve problems, the nature of health, etc.).

Advertising Perpetuates Stereotypes

Almost all advertisers must use stereotypes. A 30-second television commercial cannot develop a character in all the rich detail needed to make us feel that the character is not a two-dimensional stereotype. Advertisers must present their messages very quickly. This requires simplifying everything, including characters.

When we analyze this criticism, we can see that the problem has less to do with stereotyping than it has to do with whether portrayals are negative or positive. If an entire class of people (such as all women or all African Americans) is portrayed with negative characteristics, then it is reasonable to argue that this is bad. If all young blonde women are portrayed as dumb, this is a negative stereotype and is offensive to many people. However, if an entire class of people is portrayed as being attractive, smart, and successful, it is not likely that people would be offended by this, although this too is a stereotype.

CRITICISMS BASED ON PERSONAL VALUES

There are three popular criticisms of advertising that are based on personal values. Thus the criticisms tell us more about the tolerance levels of the people complaining about the advertising than about the advertising per se.

Advertising Is Excessive

As you saw earlier in this chapter, our culture is saturated with advertising. Whether this is excessive requires an evaluative judgment. This means you must have a standard for what is an acceptable amount. If you have a high standard for excessiveness, then you will likely conclude that the amount of advertising has not yet reached that level, and therefore advertising is not excessive. So this criticism tells us more about people's standards than about how much advertising exists.

In public opinion polls, when people are asked, “Do you think there is too much advertising on television?” about 70% of people say yes. But if they are asked, “Do you think that your being shown all this advertising is a fair price for you to pay to be able to see ‘free’

television?” again 70% say yes. But television is hardly free; it just seems free because you are not charged for each show you watch. Most of us pay an access fee to cable or satellite companies monthly. An even more hidden cost of television is our indirect support through buying advertised products. For example, when you buy soap or toothpaste, about 35% of the cost goes for advertising.

Let's examine this criticism more closely. Take direct mail or junk mail as an example. The average household receives 848 pieces of junk mail each year. This weighs 40 pounds and eats up 100 million trees each year. It is estimated that more than 40% of this junk mail ends up unopened in landfills each year. Consumer and environmental groups have gotten 19 states to consider legislation for a do-not-mail list, but none of these states have passed any legislation, primarily because junk mailers lobby strongly for their right to send out this material. So from an environmental point of view, this form of advertising does seem excessive and should be cut back drastically. However, the junk mail industry claims that the advertising it sends out generates \$646 billion in sales each year (Caplan, 2008). If we were to cut back this form of advertising drastically, wouldn't sales also drop drastically? If sales drop, companies who advertise their products would make less money, so they would pay less in taxes to support social services and have to lay off employees, which would increase unemployment and hurt the overall economy. Viewed from this perspective, is direct mail advertising excessive?

You must decide for yourself whether you think advertising is excessive or not. When you are making this decision, consider what your standard is for an acceptable amount of advertising. How did you set this standard?

Advertising Manipulates Us Into Buying Things We Don't Need

The key to analyzing this criticism lies in addressing the question: How do we define a need? If we limit ourselves to the minimum needs for survival, then we must conclude that advertisers ask us to buy many, many things that are well beyond our need for basic survival. When we analyze the idea of “need,” we can see that we have many different kinds of needs in addition to basic survival. The psychologist Abraham Maslow has pointed out that humans have a *hierarchy of needs*; that is, our needs are arranged by levels such that when our needs at a lower level are met, we move to needs at a higher level, so we are always striving to satisfy some kind of need. Humans' most basic level of needs are those required for survival (food, water, shelter). The next level are the safety needs (freedom from attack from predators and disease). Next is the social level of needs (friendship, family, and belonging to groups). Then there is the self-esteem level of needs (achievement, confidence, respect from others). And the highest level of need is *self-actualization* (fulfilling one's self through creativity and morality). For example, when our survival and safety needs are met, the drive to satisfy our needs shifts up to the social level in the hierarchy and we become focused on friendship or family problems. For these social needs, we need many different outfits of clothes to help us maximize our comfort in a variety of social situations. We need a certain type of car. We need to live in a certain kind of home. We need certain kinds of foods and beverages to go along with our lifestyles. We use all these products to define ourselves in social situations. Are these products luxuries or necessities? Each person must define what is a necessity for himself or herself.

Advertising Makes Us Too Materialistic

Some critics claim that advertising makes us too materialistic. However, when we analyze this criticism, we are faced with the question: How much is *too* much? Some people believe we should conserve natural resources and live at a lower level of consumption. Other people believe that we should always strive for more of everything; if it looks like we might run short of resources, we will be able to figure out a way to solve the problem. With less than 8% of the world's population, the United States consumes nearly 30% of the planet's resources. Americans can choose from more than 40,000 supermarket items, including 200 kinds of cereal. Do we really need all these material products?

Americans say they are dissatisfied with materialism despite all the abundance. In surveys, more than 80% of Americans typically agree that most of us buy and consume far more than we need. And about two thirds agree that Americans cause many of the world's environmental problems because we consume more resources and produce more waste than anyone else in the world (Koenenn, 1997). Yet we continue to consume at a greater rate each year. Clark (2000) reports that private materialism (individuals buying material goods for their own consumption) has been rising since 1960. Furthermore, Kaneblei (2008) reports that private spending by Americans is 50% to 90% higher than private spending by Europeans and that a significant number of Americans spend more on material goods each year than they earn. Thus, the public is schizophrenic about consumption. We believe we are too materialistic but keep buying more products.

CRITICISMS ABOUT RESPONSIBILITY

The final four criticisms focus on responsibility. Each one shows that there is a conflict between economic responsibility and social responsibility. The people who run companies have an economic responsibility to the owners of their companies; it is their job to increase the wealth of those owners. However, the public is typically more concerned that companies be socially responsible. This does not necessarily mean that the public expects companies to contribute actively to social well-being (like being philanthropic), but it does mean that the public expects companies to avoid actively harming society.

We need to realize that with advertisers, the economic responsibility is more primary than the social responsibility. The first and overriding purpose of advertising is to increase sales and market share of advertisers' clients. If advertisers can satisfy this economic responsibility and also be socially responsible, they will do both. Advertisers are not trying to harm society; they do not want to offend anyone. However, there are times when they must make a choice when they cannot be both economically and socially responsible. When advertisers are faced with such a choice, they almost always choose economic responsibility. This can trigger some significant criticism. Let's examine four of these criticisms.

Advertising Potentially Harmful Products

There are some products that are potentially harmful to individuals and society, especially for some groups of people and especially when they are not used properly. Many of these

products are legally available, and the marketers of these products are motivated to find new users as well as push existing users to buy more of the product. For example, the sale of alcoholic beverages to adults is legal but sale to adolescents and children is not, which manufacturers of these beverages, of course, know. They also know that television is a powerful advertising medium but that there are always some adolescents and children in the TV audience for all shows. While beer companies have always used television for advertising, manufacturers of liquor avoided using television in an effort to be socially responsible.

But during the fall of 1996, Joseph E. Seagram & Sons began airing spots for two whiskey brands on independent TV stations around the country. The company was motivated by the desire to increase sales and felt it was bad business to continue avoiding the use of the powerful advertising medium of television. In defense of his company's move, Tod Rodriguez, general sales manager, said, "There are a lot worse things than alcohol ads on TV" (quoted in Gellene, 1996, p. D2). Many people found this incident very upsetting and the Seagram Company's reasoning very self-serving.

Anheuser-Busch—the number-one brewer in the United States—found beer sales flat in 1998. Its primary target audience was young men, so to increase sales the company decided to also target a secondary audience, which was women. Anheuser-Busch felt that women were an underutilized group because women were accounting for only 17% of the company's sales. So Anheuser-Busch decided to break its self-imposed barrier of not targeting women in the television audience and began advertising in daytime TV. A consultant to the company said, "It should be done. For the beer people not to be selling full-bore ahead on one gender is absurd" (quoted in Arndorfer, 1998, p. 8).

Until the 1980s, pharmaceutical companies marketed their drugs only to physicians. Then in the 1980s, they began marketing to the general population. Pharmaceutical companies thought that they could increase sales of prescription drugs, especially antidepressants, if they went directly to people and bypassed physicians. They reasoned that people with symptoms for certain diseases would pressure their doctors to prescribe the advertised medications. Of course, this introduced the risk that many healthy people would imagine they had the symptoms depicted in the drug ads and they too would pressure their doctors for prescriptions. This marketing strategy worked because sales of antidepressants increased 400% from 1988 to 2008, and less than one third of people on antidepressants had seen any kind of a mental health professional in the past year (Wehrwein, 2011). This means that many people see an ad, think they are depressed, go to their family doctor, and get a prescription without seeing an expert in mental health.



Repeated exposure to advertisements for potentially harmful products like beer and liquor on TV, billboards, and at sports events could encourage people to consume more.

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Liquor, beer, and pharmaceutical products are all legal, and each can be used in responsible and even positive ways by individuals. However, the aggressive expansion of persuasive messages in the mass media to encourage people to use more of these products is likely to risk greater harm to society.

Invading Protected Groups

Psychologists, parents, and social critics are concerned about protecting children from a barrage of advertising, especially from inappropriate products. Recall from Chapter 5 that young children have not developed to a point where they can understand certain elements about ads and therefore cannot protect themselves. Also, children have had less experience with products than have adults, and therefore children are not as sophisticated in making decisions about how to spend their money. However, from an advertiser's point of view, children are regarded as an important market. Children are regarded as a highly desirable target market for many advertisers who are spending more money each year to convince children to consume their products. For example, tobacco companies have been targeting young people (ages 14–24) for decades as a prime market. In 1991, the Joe Camel campaign was launched to appeal to teens by focusing a lot of ads around high schools and colleges. In 5 years, the sale of Camels to teens went from \$6 million to \$476 million (Holland, 1998). Teenagers are three times as likely as adults to respond to cigarette ads; 79% smoke brands depicted as fun, sexy, and popular (“Study Links Teen Smoking,” 1996).

Invading Privacy

In their pursuit of their economic goals, advertisers continually invade your privacy by monitoring your economic transactions (as well as many other activities) and by invading your day-to-day lives with messages designed to alter your behavior. Advertisers collect information on every product you buy, they monitor your online shopping behavior, and they monitor your interests on blogs and social networking sites (see the next issue chapter for a detailed treatment of this topic). For example, Rubicon Project claims that its database includes more than half a billion Internet users, and TargusInfo brags that it delivers 62 billion points of data each year that identifies customers, what they are doing, and what they want.

Retail companies are becoming more sophisticated at assembling more detailed pictures of their customers then using that information to stimulate greater sales. For example, Williams-Sonoma uses information about its 60 million customers' income and the value of their homes to produce different versions of its catalog. Amazon uses customers' past buying behavior to drive its “recommendation engine,” which has been credited for stimulating 30% of its sales (“Building With Big Data,” 2011).

Advertisers are continually looking for ways to use this information to get you to buy more of their products. For example, online retailers know that 98% of visitors to online shopping sites leave without making a purchase. So they collect data on each of these people and send them messages to lure them back to what they visited. This is called *retargeting*. Advertisers want to know what you are thinking as you walk down the street so

they can send an ad to your smartphone as you pass a store that has something you want. Companies like Loopt and Foursquare broadcast users' locations from their cell phones to advertisers so those advertisers can send special messages and discount offers to customers when they get close to one of their stores. Mobile advertising revenue is projected to increase to \$25.8 billion by 2017, up from \$2.3 billion in 2009 (“Boosted by Mobile,” 2014). The goal is to make your smartphone as smart as you but quicker—predict what you want before you know it (Pariser, 2011). If you trust that your phone is smarter than you are, then this is a good thing because it frees you from having to expend the mental energy required when you think for yourself.

Altering Needs

Perhaps the most powerful effect of advertising is that it alters our beliefs about needs in several ways. One way is that it has shifted our belief in needs from *public goods* to *private goods*. Public goods are those that are owned by society and are open for sharing for free or for a modest fee (e.g., parks, beaches, city streets, bridges, public transportation systems). Private goods are those that you buy, own, and control (e.g., your clothing, car, furniture, phone). Harvard economist and social critic John Kenneth Galbraith argued that advertising is fundamentally a negative force on society because it serves to shift a society's resources from benefitting the public to benefitting only individuals, and this leads to a great deal of waste (Arens, 1999). When we sell large cars and SUVs to individuals who rarely travel with many passengers, there is a waste of fuel, and we need to build more and more expensive highways and parking lots. But if that money were put into public transportation, the resources would be used much more efficiently, and everyone in the public would benefit more. Advertising is what drives private demand. If it weren't for advertising, consumers would buy much less, and some of the resources that currently go into satisfying private demand could be reallocated for the common good, such as public education, public parks, and public transportation.

In contrast to Galbraith, historian David Potter regards advertising as a positive force on society (Arens, 1999). He sees advertising as a social institution comparable to the school and the church in its power to convey information and to teach values. An important value in America is the transforming of natural resources into abundance. Advertising supports this value and reinforces our inherent need to consume and enjoy it. Potter, however, does express some concern that advertising has no overriding responsibility to society. Other



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Advertising conditions us to believe certain ways about our standards for success and beauty. Does owning a designer purse make you successful? Designer purse companies say, yes.

institutions (such as the family, education, religion) are altruistic; they try to improve the individual and society. Advertising is very different. Advertising is selfish; its only responsibility is to serve the marketing objectives of the company that pays for it.

Advertising has also conditioned us to believe that we have more and more needs. It does this by subtly and gradually shaping our standards about success, romance, and beauty. Then it leads us to believe that we are not living up to those standards. This triggers a false need to consume more in order to meet those standards. One example of this is with women's clothing. In 1930, the average American woman owned 9 outfits. Now the average American woman buys more than 60 pieces of clothing each year (Wolverson, 2012).

YOUR OWN INFORMED OPINION

It is important that you develop opinions about a cultural phenomenon as pervasive and as important as advertising. And it is essential that your opinions be informed by accurate facts rather than faulty information, informed by your own personal values that you use as evaluative standards, and informed by the differences between social responsibility and economic responsibility. You have begun this task by reading through the material presented above in this chapter. Now you need to continue this development of more informed opinions by using your media literacy skills (see Applying Media Literacy Skills Issue 5.1).

With entertainment and news-type messages, we are typically more active in searching for exposures and processing the information in those messages compared to advertising messages. In contrast, we encounter almost all advertising messages in a state of automaticity, where we are unaware of how much exposure we are experiencing. As we surf the Internet, listen to radio, and flip through magazines, we are searching for entertainment and news messages and not paying much attention to all the ads embedded there. This is especially the case when we are multitasking.

To protect ourselves from all this unplanned advertising exposure, we remain in a state of automatic processing so we don't have to pay attention to all of the ads. However, exposure to the ads continues even though we are not paying attention to them, and this makes our exposure unconscious, which is what most advertisers want. When we are multitasking and not paying attention to ads, persuasive messages have a greater effect on us because we are much less likely to analyze the ad claims and counter-argue (Jeong & Hwang, 2012). During unconscious exposure, advertisers can plant their messages into our subconscious, where they gradually shape our definitions for attractiveness, sex appeal, relationships, cleanliness, health, success, hunger, body shape, problems, and happiness. For example, we might have the radio on in the car as we concentrate on driving, and when ads come on, we do not pay much attention. Then later, we find ourselves humming a jingle, or a word or phrase occurs to us, or we pass by a store and "remember" that there is a sale going on there. These flashes of sounds, words, and ideas emerge from our subconscious, where they had been put by ads that we did not pay attention to. Over time, all those images, sounds, and ideas build patterns in our subconscious and profoundly shape the way we think about ourselves and the world.