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Marketing Mania: an Attack on Advertising

If you have ever been in a big wide-open field somewhere out in the country, you have seen large clumps of gnats spread throughout the area. These populous buzzing swarms can engulf you from all sides, while you helplessly swat at them and try to avoid their irritating presence. Advertisements accost people in a similar way. Though both are annoying and aggravating, neither actually does you any physical harm. People encounter advertisements every day, whether it's in the newspaper, online, or while watching TV, and this amount is only increasing. According to Jay Walker-Smith, former president of the marketing firm Yankelovich, "we have gone from being exposed to about 500 ads a day back in the 1970's to as many as 5,000 a day today" (Johnson). This colossal increase depicts how massive the marketing industry has become and shows its heavy reliance on advertising to entice consumers. Not only is the amount of advertising increasing, but the level of intensity is rising as well. Aggressive advertising techniques are escalating from just flashy signs and catchy slogans as people become numb to the constant barrage of endorsements. The possibility for the development of new technologies to attract consumers is addressed in Heather Lindsley's dystopian, science fiction short story "Just Do It" in which she illustrates a futuristic world where companies can force consumers to buy their product by shooting them with stimulants that induce cravings. Lindsley's critique on the escalation of aggressive advertising in today's society is supported by her rhetoric throughout the narrative, as well as by current research from the marketing field today.

The concept of advertising has been around almost as long as people have been buying and selling things in competitive markets. Volney B. Palmer officially introduced the industry to America in the early 1840s when he opened the first American advertising agency (EAA: Timeline). This indirect form of mass selling proved to be much more efficient than face-to-face interactions, and the industry exploded (Funk & Wagnall's). Advertising has come a long way since the first newspaper advertisement in 1704, which was "an announcement seeking a buyer for an Oyster Bay" (Ad Age Advertising Century). As technology developed, so did the advertising industry. From early newspapers and magazines, to radio stations, to television and all the forms of social media we are currently obsessed with today, advertising has continued to evolve and be a part of each new technological advancement. For example, the popular app Snapchat possesses a variety of filter choices, including advertisements and sponsored filters. The perseverance of the advertising industry is evident through this continued existence even with all the changes and transitions, both technological and cultural. This continued use today demonstrates the importance of advertising to the marketing industry as a whole. History proves that producers need advertisements to compete effectively in the markets and sell their products, and who knows how far they are willing to go to maintain relevance in a changing world.

Lindsay's piece emphasizes the uncertainty for the hypothetical future of advertising. Because advertising has continued to evolve with technology over time, it can be assumed that it will still be a part of society in the future. The question is, how big of a part will advertising play? Advertising techniques could be escalated over time to become even more aggressive, as portrayed in Lindsay's piece. Imagine a world where employees are hired with the sole purpose of hunting down people like animals and forcing them to become consumers of products they

may not even want, much less need. Sounds very *Hunger Games*-esque when you consider the brutal and barbaric means used to achieve their deceptive goals. The point is, the advertising industry could very easily get out of control if there aren't rules to rein it in. If the technology continues to develop and become more advanced, scenarios like ones described in Lindsley's future world could be possible. When Alex Monroe, the main character in Lindsley's narrative, fails to dodge a dart, an unfortunate series of events unfolds: "The itching starts almost immediately, and I reflexively reach up and touch the bump above my eyes. I know better than to scratch it, but I do anyway. The scratching releases a flood of chemicals that create a powerful and specific food craving. I brace myself. French fries" (Lindsley). Alex's predicament could become one that consumers understand all too well if the advertising industry continues to move in that direction with aggressive techniques. Chemicals and stimulants could be created that target specific people or specific interests in order to keep consumers captivated. A new, darker meaning would be given to the common phrase "Wow, I'm really craving *insert specific brand or food type here*". But it wouldn't just be limited to food companies. This technology could expand to all products that advertise, such as Nike or North Face. With producers having that kind of power, consumer vulnerability increases drastically.

Even though the future Lindsley describes seems very dystopian, it possesses a legitimate basis in current advertising techniques. Advertisements today use many different techniques to seduce consumers. It's not just all about creativity in modern times; the marketing industry has evolved into much more. According to Curtis P. Haugtvedt, former president of APA's Consumer Psychology Division and current associate professor of psychology and marketing at Ohio State University, "... psychologists have all this knowledge about persuasion and communication. People need to understand there's a scientific way of making these ads better"

(qtd. in Clay). Haugtvedt is right, and companies are now taking advantage of the edge that psychologists can provide in the advertising industry. For example, studies done by Jane E. Raymond, a psychology professor at the University of Wales, show that the brain processes information in chunks, not continuously. Therefore, better timing in commercial advertisements will maximize the information that consumers remember about a product or brand (Clay). Also, Raymond has conducted studies that conclude logo usage is more effective than brand name when ending a commercial: "While viewers engaged in visual processing won't take the time to read a word, a logo allows them to process the brand without having to switch to verbal processing" (Clay). She also makes the point that logos are a better tool in the global market because it is easy to associate a logo with a brand and avoid any language barriers. In Lindsley's piece, Alex Monroe refers more than once to the "evil clown" that she associates with these French fry cravings: "I manage to get past the first shadow the clown casts on my route with relative calm, but by the second the itching is more intense and all I can imagine are French fries" (Lindsley). We can assume this symbol represents the equivalent of the future McDonalds. Universal symbols like Ronald McDonald, the Nike swoosh, and many others are utilized constantly in our culture to evoke thoughts of the intended brand or product.

Companies employ psychologists like Raymond to ensure that advertising techniques we encounter today are strategically manipulated to contain psychological components. For example, before you see a movie at a movie theater, there are commercials and previews that play before the film begins. One specific commercial is actually an advertisement for the theater itself. The commercial consists of a sensory-filled message that advertises the concessions at the theater. You hear the irresistible crunch of popcorn, the hiss and sizzle of soda being poured into an ice-filled cup, the satisfied "ahhhh" of the consumer after the enjoyable experience. And just

like that, you realize that you're starving, not to mention parched. This commercial targets the subconscious parts of your brain which, according to testing done with electroencephalograms (EEGs), is necessary to really get the viewers' attention (Singer). These tests are being conducted by a neuro-marketing firm in California called Neurofocus. Since "the brain expends only 2 percent of its energy on conscious activity, with the rest devoted largely to unconscious processing," advertisements must attempt to access consumer's brains at a subconscious level in order to be effective (Singer). The sensory images in the movie preview, along with most other advertisements today, are artfully designed to create these exact reactions.

The psychological techniques described in Lindsley's futuristic world of advertising are a little different. Rather than trying to target the subconscious parts of the brain to get the viewer's attention, the techniques in "Just Do It" are much less subtle. The chemical injections from the darts can release stimulants that directly affect the areas of the brain that control cravings, which are the hippocampus, caudate, and insula. NeuroImage published a study that used MRIs to detect which areas of the brain were most stimulated when participants went on a diet (Fesler). Researchers concluded that "the hippocampus is important for memory, which helps reinforce the reward-seeking behavior that causes us to crave. The caudate also plays a role in these reward mechanisms, and it helps us to form habits, including food-related ones. The insula contributes to the emotional connection between food and cravings" (Fesler). The chemicals inside the darts would hypothetically be targeting these areas of the brain in Lindsley's piece. This aggressive escalation of advertising could be possible with a few more technological advancements. A current example of aggressive advertising today that is not as extreme as the dart stimulants but still shows the potential movement of the advertising industry in that direction is the Forbes website. When you attempt to view Forbes articles online, you are unable to access

them unless you turn off the ad-blocking software on your computer. This forces people to view the ads if they want admittance to the website. Though you are not being directly stimulated by chemicals to perform a certain action like in "Just Do It," people are still being forced to interact with advertisements that they could have otherwise avoided. Evidence like this proves that the marketing industry is escalating the aggression of their advertising techniques and allows for the possibility that the future could turn out something like Lindsley imagined in "Just Do It".

While the idea of advertisers shooting consumers with stimulants meant to force people to buy their product may seem extreme, this is the direction in which we are headed. If we start on this path of chemically-controlled behavior, where will the line be drawn? Lindsley's ending of the story illustrates that once this habit has begun, it will invade all aspects of our everyday life: "I unholster my parenting gun and shift the round in the chamber from Go to Bed to Wake Up. 'Get up Tommy,' I say as I draw a bead on his sleep-tousled head. 'I'm not going to tell you again'" (Lindsley). This indicates that certain levels of escalation could lead to behavioral modification, which is partly what advertising hopes to achieve. In order to convince people to buy certain products, advertisements must shape consumer's ideas and direct them to certain actions, specifically purchasing their product. Lindsley's comment is that it can very easily go too far. Targeting nameless and faceless consumers with crave-inducing chemicals to earn a profit may be wrong and corrupt, but shooting your own child to induce a certain behavior seems cruel, even if it is just to make him get out of bed more quickly. However, this mother still does it, anyway; the action does not seem as extreme to her because humans are adaptable creatures. With each and every change or development in society, we adjust, conform, and do what we need to do to survive. This behavior is both a blessing and a curse. It allows us to become used to aspects in society that we should not think are okay, but since they become common in practice,

we dismiss them too easily. The depiction at the end of Lindsley's piece shows a mother who has become numb to the new societal developments of her time and does not even think to question the humanity of her actions. People today are vulnerable to that same numbness as marketing techniques continue to escalate and become more aggressive, which threatens consumer safety. The world is already going through extreme changes that people laughed at and never thought possible before now. Britain left the European Union, Donald Trump was elected President of the United States, and if these drastic societal changes don't prove that highly aggressive advertising techniques like the ones described in Heather Lindsley's "Just Do It" are a possibility in the future, then I'm not sure what will.

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