

SAMPLE ESSAY:
ADVERTISING TO GENERATION Z

Student Name
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Date

For those whose business is creating the television advertisements that most people see daily, the measurable effect of a well-constructed TV commercial is more money in the client's pocket. Surprisingly, the people that advertisers want to persuade to buy a product would seem to be the people with the least disposable income—children, teens and young adults. O'Reilly and Tennant explain, "People under twenty ... are the new holy grail of marketing, and they know it. Children, tweens, teenagers, and young adults have enormous power to create, trash, and rebuild social trends 'Tweens' (people eight to twelve years old) are said to represent a \$335 billion market."¹ These young people are not spending the money themselves; instead, they are influencing their parents' spending. "Marketing experts say that "the majority of parents consult their kids before making major purchase decisions, even in their choice of a new vehicle."² Since young people are often more tech savvy, it's not surprising that they might be consulted on the purchases of computers and smartphones. O'Reilly and Tennant reveal that "[t]hough estimates vary, the upper-end figures suggest that each year, young people are directly and indirectly responsible for \$570 billion in purchase decisions."³ Advertisers are learning to target this lucrative market and are changing their tactics to make sure they have an impact.

Since young people rarely listen to radio, preferring to stream their music from an online source such as Spotify, the advertising media that influence them most frequently are found on TV and YouTube. On TV and in school and in other locations, "it's estimated that children may view as many as 40,000 commercials each year."⁴ One result of this inundation by advertising is what experts see as an increasing demand by young people for the products that are advertised.

1 Terry O'Reilly and Mike Tennant, *The Age of Persuasion: How Marketing Ate Our Culture* (Toronto: Alfred Knopf Canada, 2009), 74-75.

2 Ibid., 75.

3 Ibid., 75.

4 Daniel S. Acuff, PhD and Robert H. Reiher, *Kidnapped: How Irresponsible Marketers Are Stealing the Minds of Your Children* (Chicago: Dearborn Trade Publishing, 2005), 14.

Acuff and Reiher have interviewed focus groups for over two decades, and increasingly, mothers have responded saying, “they have felt driven by our consumer society to succumb to their children’s pleas for the latest sugary cereals, electronic game systems, cell phones, clothes, skateboards—in other words, the latest everything.”⁵ With increased spending power abdicated to the hands of young people, a criticism of advertising also becomes a criticism of current culture.

On the plus side, advertising “pays all the costs of commercial television and radio ... providing everyone with free entertainment and news reports.”⁶ On the other side, others argue that “dependence on advertising lowers the quality of TV programming. In order to sell advertising time at high prices, TV networks try to attract the largest possible audience ... [and] therefore broadcast too many general entertainment programs and not enough informational and cultural programs.”⁷ Complaints about the vapidness of what is available for viewing on television are, therefore, not complaints about the networks, but about the kinds of programming that advertisers are requesting in order to appeal to the most viewers.

Viewers are very capable of walking away from traditional broadcasting, choosing to watch TV programs in bulk on Netflix or streaming them on their laptops or smartphones. Parents can bypass advertising using the children’s editions of Netflix and other channels that source programming for children. But advertising is still prevalent in the lives of young people, especially if they are on social media such as Facebook, or if they enjoy watching videos on YouTube.

5 Ibid., 14.

6. Ron Beasley, Marcel Danesi, and Paul Perron, *Signs for Sale: An Outline of Semiotic Analysis for Advertisers & Marketers* (Toronto: LEGAS, 2000), 85.

7 Ibid., 85.

Jeff Chester and Kathryn Montgomery describes today's marketing as a "'marketing ecosystem' [that] encompasses cell phones, mobile music devices, instant messaging, videogames and virtual, three-dimensional worlds. New marketing practices in these diverse media environments are fundamentally transforming how corporations ... sell to young people."⁸ Interactions with social media are used by marketers and companies to collect data about a product's users or business's customers. Liking a product's Facebook page or texting a particular number for a free gift, and often answering a quiz or a series of questions (for another prize,) are all ways of information gathering. This information gives advertisers the data they need to target their audience in very specific ways.⁹

Anyone who has used a points card for a drug store or grocery store has seen the appearance of products previously purchased being offered again at a discount or for extra points. The stores have learned the person's buying habits and can directly target that person with ads for products that are likely to appeal. "The unprecedented ability of digital technologies to track and profile individuals across the media landscape, and engage in 'micro' or 'nano' targeting, raises the twin spectres of manipulation and invasion of privacy."¹⁰ As nice as it is to get extra points for purchasing a kitchen cupboard staple, it is a little scary, too.

A Google search using the terms "marketing to teens on YouTube" generated over four million hits; the terms "marketing to young adults on YouTube" generated over ten million results. There is clearly a need for learning how to effectively market to these age groups, and YouTube is one route to these influencers and buyers. Many YouTube videos begin with a short,

8. Jeff Chester and Kathryn Montgomery, "No Escape: Marketing to Kids in the Digital Age," in *How Does Advertising Affect Teen Behavior?* ed. Roman Espejo (New York: Greenhaven Press, 2012) 33-34.

9. *Ibid.*, 34-36.

10. *Ibid.*, 34.

non-skippable, advertisement. The YouTuber makes money every time the viewer waits through the advertisement to get to the YouTube video. Advertisers prefer non-skippable advertisements and seek out popular YouTube sites for placement. They know that the YouTuber has loyal followers and will wait through the ad for their favourite personality. For skippable advertisements, the YouTuber makes money depending on how long the viewer watches before skipping to the video.¹¹

A 2014 poll by Defy Media demonstrated the influence of YouTube personalities and the products they promote. “YouTubers ... had a much bigger influence on purchase intent among teens, as 63% said they would try a product or brand suggested by a YouTuber. In comparison, fewer than half of respondents said the same about recommendations from a TV or movie star.”¹² The statistics showed that 62% of adults between the ages of 18 and 24 felt the same trust in a product suggested by a YouTube personality.¹³ One key to this high level of trust is the relatability of the viewers to the YouTube personalities that they follow compared to their relatability to TV or movie stars. “[When] asked about how relatable each group was: 41% of teens said YouTubers did the things they wanted to do, vs. just 15% who said the same about TV and movie stars.”¹⁴ Another study by the entertainment magazine, *Variety*, showed that “teenagers’ emotional attachment to YouTube stars is ‘as much as seven times greater than that

11. Eric Escobar, “How to Make Money on YouTube,” *Quick and Dirty Tips.com: Tech Tips*, July 7, 2016, <http://www.quickanddirtytips.com/tech/tech-news/how-to-make-money-on-youtube>.

12. “Do YouTubers Fuel Purchase Intent Among Teens?” *eMarketer*, March 24, 2015, <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/Do-YouTubers-Fuel-Purchase-Intent-Among-Teens/1012260?ecid=MX1086>.

13. *Ibid.*

14. *Ibid.*

toward a traditional celebrity’”¹⁵ YouTubers have the appearance of being regular people, just like their viewers, and marketers know how to turn that perception and relatability to their advantage.

Fashion and electronics are two industries that have successfully made inroads to YouTube success. “Rafe Petkovic, head of industry–retail, Google Canada said YouTube is a good platform for retailers to connect authentically with consumers.”¹⁶ Lewis Hilsenteger from Newmarket hosts a YouTube channel called, *Unbox Therapy* where he unwraps packages of electronics with a running commentary of his thoughts and reactions. By fall of 2015, he had over 300 million views.¹⁷ “Best Buy spokesman Elliott Chun says that kind of content allows consumers to see products in a more natural and organic way . . . YouTubers are a category of influencers, said Chun. ‘You want to build a relationship and encourage them to be an ambassador for your brand.’”¹⁸ In 2015, Best Buy also partnered with Jaime Berger at JaimePaigeBeauty. Berger’s demographic consists of teen and young adult women—an audience that Best Buy is eager to reach as it adds furniture, lifestyle and beauty products to its base in electronics and office equipment.¹⁹

Teens and young adults are important markets for advertisers, and this generation will continue to have influence in the years to come. “Candace Corlett, president of WSL, a retail strategy firm in New York City, says the importance of retail partnerships with YouTube

15. Stuart Dredge, “Why are YouTube Stars So Popular?” *The Guardian.com: Technology*, February 3, 2016, <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2016/feb/03/why-youtube-stars-popular-zoella>.

16. Francine Kopun, “How YouTubers are influencing back-to-school spending”, *thestar.com: business*, September 20, 2015, <https://www.thestar.com/business/2015/09/20/how-youtubers-are-influencing-back-to-school-spending.html>.

17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. Ibid.

personalities is likely to grow as “Generation Z” [14 to 20 years old] moves into the marketplace.”²⁰ No matter what the medium, TV or YouTube, advertisers know that the money available to be spent on their clients’ products is in control of teens and young adults. Because advertisers also have a strong influence on culture through their influence on TV and print media, and are now partnering with influential YouTubers, it’s important to be wary and understand how that influence works and how culture and society may be affected in the future.

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20. Ibid.

O'Reilly, Terry and Mike Tennant. *The Age of Persuasion: How Marketing Ate Our Culture*.
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