Lesson #1: Analyzing Television Commercials

How To Analyze a Television Commercial

1. **What is the product or service being sold?** Can you easily figure out what the product is? 

2. **What is the general mood or feeling of the commercial?** Since we know the product or service being sold, what methods are the advertisers using to make us interested? How do they portray the product or service in a positive light?

3. **How does the soundtrack play a role in your interpretation of the commercial?** Is the music cheery, dreary, suspenseful, whimsical, fun, or exciting? Does the music affect our perception of the mood? Is there a voice-over of someone telling us something? What is the voice over trying to tell us? Does the person speaking coincide with the overall mood of the commercial? Would our perception of the voice change if the voice was of a different gender or race?

4. **How do the actors playing the characters affect your interpretation of the commercial?** Would your interpretation change if the characters were of a different race or gender? What if the characters dressed differently or spoke differently? How would that change your perception of the character?

5. **How does the commercial try to get your attention?** Does it use flashy graphics with fast music? Does it alter the way we see the world, either through the use of special effects or through the story line?

6. **Who is this commercial aimed towards?** Is it you or someone like you? How do you know? Why do you think the advertiser created this commercial the way they did? Would it have been as effective if it was just black and white text on the screen? Why or why not?
**Classic TV Commercial Analysis:**

Watch these clips and analyze at least 2 commercials of your choice from the 1950’s, 1960’s or 1970’s. Please fill out the chart accordingly:

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Name of Product being advertised and year</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Who paid for this commercial? (government, company that made the product, etc) How can you prove it?</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>To what group does it appeal? (Adults, children, teens, girls, boys, men only, women only)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>What techniques of persuasion are being used? Give proof how you know. (Pathos, logos, ethos, avante garde, weasel words, magic ingredients, patriotism, transfer, plain folks, snob appeal, bribery, bandwagon)</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>What kind of lifestyle is presented?</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>What hidden and obvious messages exist?</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>How is this commercial healthy or unhealthy media? Why?</td>
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The persuasive strategies used by advertisers who want you to buy their product can be divided into three categories: pathos, logos, and ethos. Pathos: an appeal to emotion.

1. **Pathos**: An advertisement using pathos will attempt to evoke an emotional response in the consumer. Sometimes, it is a positive emotion such as happiness: an image of people enjoying themselves while drinking Pepsi. Other times, advertisers will use negative emotions such as pain: a person having back problems after buying the “wrong” mattress. Pathos can also include emotions such as fear and guilt: images of a starving child persuade you to send money.

2. **Logos**: an appeal to logic or reason.

An advertisement using logos will give you the evidence and statistics you need to fully understand what the product does. The logos of an advertisement will be the "straight facts" about the product: One glass of Florida orange juice contains 75% of your daily Vitamin C needs.

**Ethos**: an appeal to credibility or character.

An advertisement using ethos will try to convince you that the company is more reliable, honest, and credible; therefore, you should buy its product. Ethos often involves statistics from reliable experts, such as nine out of ten dentists agree that Crest is the better than any other brand or Americas dieters choose Lean Cuisine. Often, a celebrity endorses a product to lend it more credibility: Catherine Zeta-Jones makes us want to switch to T-Mobile.

Practice labeling pathos, logos, and ethos by placing a P, L, or E in the blank:

- _____ A child is shown covered in bug bites after using an inferior bug spray.
- _____ Tiger Woods endorses Nike.
- _____ Sprite Zero is 100% sugar-free.
- _____ A 32-oz. bottle of Tide holds enough to wash 32 loads.
- _____ A commercial shows an image of a happy couple riding in a Corvette.
- _____ Cardiologists recommend Ecotrin more than any other brand of aspirin.
- _____ Advil Liqui-Gels provide up to 8 hours of continuous pain relief.
- _____ Miley Cyrus appears in Oreo advertisements.
- _____ People who need more energy drink Red Bull Energy Drink.
- _____ A magazine ad shows people smiling while smoking cigarettes.
The following are some more specific strategies that advertisers use. Often, they overlap with the rhetorical strategies above.

**Avante Garde**

The suggestion that using this product puts the user ahead of the times. A toy manufacturer encourages kids to be the first on their block to have a new toy.

**Weasel Words**

“Weasel words” are used to suggest a positive meaning without actually really making any guarantee. A scientist says that a diet product might help you to lose weight the way it helped him to lose weight. A dish soap leaves dishes virtually spotless.

**Magic Ingredients**

The suggestion that some almost miraculous discovery makes the product exceptionally effective. A pharmaceutical manufacturer describes a special coating that makes their pain reliever less irritating to the stomach than a competitor’s.

**Patriotism**

The suggestion that purchasing this product shows your love of your country. A company brags about its product being made in America.

**Transfer**

Positive words, images, and ideas are used to suggest that the product being sold is also positive. A textile manufacturer wanting people to wear their product to stay cool during the summer shows people wearing fashions made from their cloth at a sunny seaside setting where there is a cool breeze.

**Plain Folks**

The suggestion that the product is a practical product of good value for ordinary people. A cereal manufacturer shows an ordinary family sitting down to breakfast and enjoying their product.

**Snob Appeal**

The suggestion that the use of the product makes the customer part of an elite group with a luxurious and glamorous lifestyle. A coffee manufacturer shows people dressed in formal gowns and tuxedos drinking their brand at an art gallery.

**Bribery**

Bribery offers you something “extra.” Buy a burger; get free fries.

**Bandwagon**

The suggestion that you should join the crowd or be on the winning side by using a product—you don’t want to be the only person without it!