

PERSUASION, INFLUENCE & ADVERTISING

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Focus: Recognising manipulation, psychological influence, misinformation, ethical decisions and defending independent opinions.

A. Warm-Up – Who Influences Your Decisions?

Discuss:

1. Who has the greatest influence on your opinions: family, friends, experts, celebrities or social media?
2. Can someone influence you without you realising it?
3. Do people sometimes follow popular opinions simply to fit in?
4. Is it easier to manipulate people when they are afraid?
5. Should we question information even when it comes from people we trust?

B. Influence or Manipulation?

Read the situations. Decide whether each example involves reasonable persuasion, questionable influence or manipulation.

1. The Workplace Promotion

A manager explains why an employee deserves a promotion, using specific examples of their performance and achievements.

2. The Friendship Pressure

A group of friends repeatedly tells someone that they are boring because they refuse to spend money on expensive weekend activities.

3. The Political Advertisement

An advertisement uses frightening images and emotional music to suggest that a particular political decision will lead to disaster. It provides very little supporting evidence.

4. The Charity Campaign

A charity shares the personal story of someone who has benefited from its services and explains how donations will be used.

5. The Online Countdown

An online shop displays a countdown timer that resets every time a customer visits the website, creating the impression that a special offer is about to end.

6. The Expert Opinion

A company uses a qualified specialist to explain the benefits and limitations of a new product.

Discussion:

- Which examples are acceptable?
- Which cross an ethical line?
- Does the intention behind a message matter as much as its effect?

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C. Psychological Influence – Six Common Tactics

Read the explanations.

1. Fear of Missing Out (FOMO)

Making people feel that they will miss an important experience or opportunity if they don't act quickly.

2. Peer Pressure

Encouraging people to behave in a certain way because others are doing the same.

3. Emotional Manipulation

Using someone's feelings to influence their decisions unfairly.

4. Confirmation Bias

Paying more attention to information that supports existing beliefs while ignoring information that challenges them.

5. Authority Bias

Giving too much importance to someone's opinion simply because they have a position of authority or appear to be an expert.

6. The Bandwagon Effect

Adopting an idea or buying a product because it seems that everyone else is doing it.

Discuss:

1. Which of these tactics do you encounter most often?
2. Which might be the hardest to recognise?
3. Can you think of situations where these tactics are used positively?
4. How can people protect themselves against manipulation?

D. The Critical Thinking Challenge

Read the following claims. Decide what questions you would ask before accepting them as true.

1. "Nine out of ten customers prefer our product."
2. "Successful people never give up."
3. "Everyone agrees that this policy is necessary."
4. "This is the most environmentally friendly product on the market."
5. "People who use this service save hundreds of hours every year."

For each claim, consider:

- Who produced the information?
- What evidence supports it?
- How was the information collected?
- Is important information being left out?
- Could the wording be misleading?

Challenge: Choose one claim and explain how you would investigate whether it is trustworthy.

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E. Role-Play – The Ethics Committee

You are members of an ethics committee at a large company. The marketing department has proposed a new advertising campaign for an expensive productivity app.

The campaign includes:

- Testimonials from successful business owners.
- A claim that users become 40% more productive.
- A countdown timer offering a temporary discount.
- Influencers suggesting that successful professionals cannot afford to work without the app.

However, the company has not conducted an independent study to verify the productivity claim.

Student A – Marketing Director

You believe the campaign is creative and competitive. You want approval before a major product launch.

Student B – Ethics Officer

You are concerned about misleading claims and pressure tactics. You want the company to provide evidence and make changes.

Student C – Sales Manager

You believe the campaign will generate important revenue. However, you are worried that negative publicity could damage the brand.

Your task: Decide whether the campaign should be approved, rejected or revised.

Prepare a final recommendation with at least three supporting arguments.

F. Final Debate – Who Is Really in Control?

Choose one statement and prepare arguments for and against it.

1. Advertising has more influence over our lives than we realise.
2. Social media companies should be responsible for misleading advertisements on their platforms.
3. Consumers are responsible for making informed decisions, regardless of advertising pressure.
4. Influencers have a greater responsibility than traditional advertisers because their followers trust them.
5. In modern society, it is almost impossible to make completely independent decisions.

G. Personal Reflection

1. Have you ever changed your opinion after discovering that information was misleading?
2. What makes you trust a particular source of information?
3. How can people become more critical consumers of information?
4. Is there a difference between influencing someone's opinion and controlling their behaviour?

Final challenge: Give a two-minute presentation entitled:

How to Become a More Independent Thinker in a World Full of Influence.

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