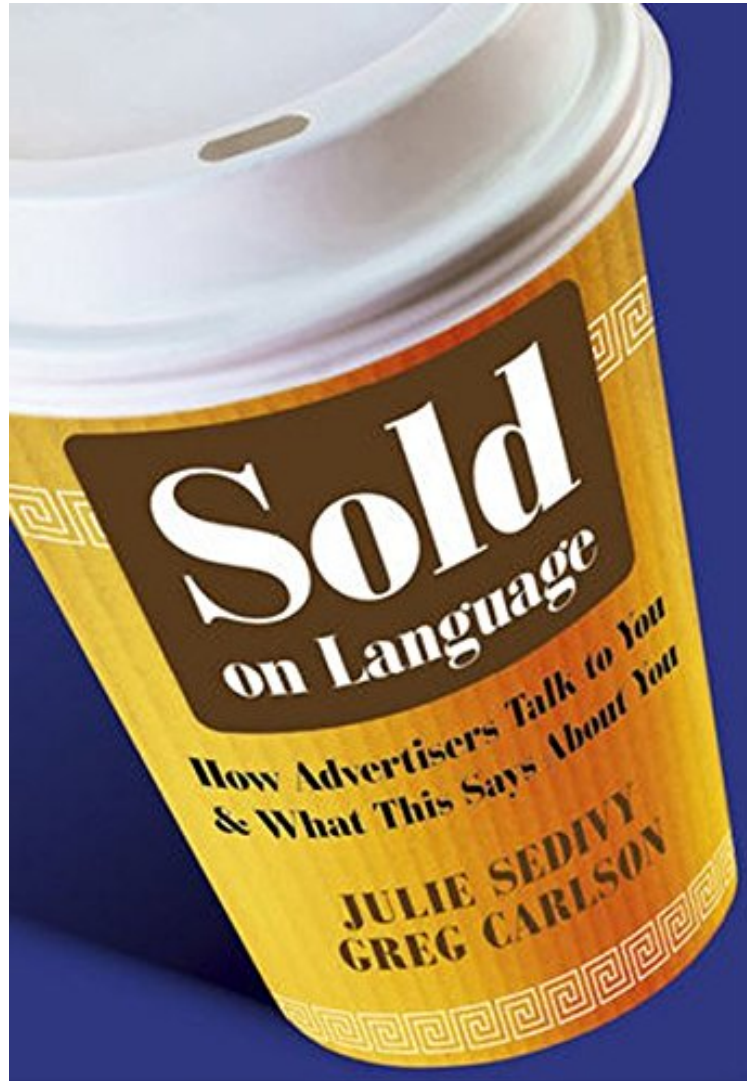


[Download pdf] Sold on Language: How Advertisers Talk to You and What This Says About You

Sold on Language: How Advertisers Talk to You and What This Says About You

Julie Sedivy, Greg Carlson

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Julie Sedivy, Greg Carlson : Sold on Language: How Advertisers Talk to You and What This Says About You before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Sold on Language: How Advertisers Talk to You and What This Says About You:

10 of 10 people found the following review helpful. From Bernays to ObamaBy DizInterestingly, this book starts with a discussion of Edward Bernays, Sigmund Freud's favourite nephew and avid reader of his uncle's work. In this, it is

similar to John Pilger's 'The War You Don't See' and Adam Curtis' 'The Century of the Self'. All three relate how Bernays effectively 'invented' public relations and also, as a first demonstration of the power of his uncle's theories, started women smoking in public in the U.S. So why this interest in Bernays? Because of the effects and effectiveness of the vast advertising and media industries that have grown up in this last century of 'extreme individualism'. This book is an attempt to unpack the mainly linguistic 'tricks of the trade' of these industries and, in doing so, to inoculate us against them. The book's main themes centre around the ways in which we are becoming aware of how our minds work and how they may be manipulated. To start with, the authors consider 'The Unconscious Consumer': 'According to Sigmund Freud...we live in constant danger of having our unconscious memories and longings grab us by the throat and lead us down a path of irrational choices...Freud probed these hidden motivators by having people lie on a couch and relate their dreams and memories. Today, scientists of the mind probe them with clever experimental tasks in labs and use expensive devices to measure the gaze patterns of eyes, and the electrical activity and blood flow in the brain. All this technological proliferation just emphasises how elusive our own minds are to us.' (P15) The authors are linguists and so the evidence they cite is largely linguistically based - but since we have so much of our being in language, this seems eminently justified. And the experiments are fascinating. They go on to consider the active role of the unconscious in 'The Attentional Arms Race'. It seems that overt attention is not a prerequisite for successful manipulation - in fact, in many ways, it's what you perceive peripherally that has more effect, as this is absorbed into the unconscious for further processing, while our conscious minds are taken up with the task in hand. Yet more experimental evidence backs up this proposition. The next chapter - 'We Know What You're Thinking' sounds ominously like an Adam Curtis documentary. The authors concentrate on linguistic formulations that can radically alter perceptions of statements. The use of 'presuppositions', of leading questions, manipulation of memories and 'Mindless Agreement and Unconscious Individualism' (P120) make it appear that we have freedom and independence of action whereas in reality, even our much-vaunted individualism may be subverted. Slowly the book unpacks many of the tricks, traps and tips of the persuasive industries. It is all told in an informal and readable style, but it still packs a punch. However, much of it seems kind of 'anecdotal'. Apart from the initial references to Freud, there is no outline of a consistent theory here. It's as if this science is still in the 'gathering evidence' stage. It's still very interesting, but slightly frustrating at the same time. Finally, the authors turn their attention to the growing role of advertising-style practices in politics. This, for me, was by far the most interesting section of the book. Even if, after reading up to here, you think you're aware of the techniques used by advertisers, you can't help but feel that it is far too easy for those 'in the know' to manipulate and control us. Thus, it is no surprise to find the authors discussing Plato's reservations on democracy. They talk of 'Democracy in the Age of the Mackerel Mind' (P250) where the 'mackerel mind' refers, if you like, to a 'herd' or 'collective' mind. They examine the increasingly fragmented tribalism of society, the way that beliefs are perpetuated even in the face of completely contradictory and factual evidence (they don't mention it, but I can't help thinking of Obama's birth certificate). But, at the same time, they start to develop Freud's ideas of the unconscious. What they suggest is that, far from being at the mercy of our unconscious, the interplay between conscious and unconscious mind is a far more active, dynamic and two-way affair. As such - and this is really the crucial point - a conscious recognition of the ways in which the unconscious may be manipulated can go a long way in inoculating us against just this manipulation, making us all, perhaps, Philosopher Kings. All in all, an illuminating, readable and rewarding book.

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Insight into Our Brains on Advertising

By StellenI found this book to be a surprisingly captivating look at how advertising and advertisers today tap into our conscious and subconscious minds, and also how these persuasive methods apply to political ends. While I expected to be informed on how I as a consumer was affected by ads, I did not expect the level of entertainment I enjoyed while reading. Sold on Language focuses on choice in a consumer's mind, whether it is real, and to what extent. It touches on subjects within formal linguistics (such as basic phonetics, aspirated consonants, priming, presuppositions, etc.) in a way that makes them quite accessible to the average reader. The first 7 chapters focus on such subjects as subconscious messages, how advertisers compete for your attention and how this plays into how we divide our attention as humans, and how advertisers use indirect and emotional language to get their intentions across. The final chapter touches on politics, and how everything from the comfiness of a politician's name to the way they give speeches influences our opinions and how we vote. It's hard to convey the breadth of this book in a single review. Instead, I will simply identify what appealed to me most. The authors seamlessly transition from and within topics in linguistics, as applicable to the chapter as a whole. The reader is given information that encapsulates their knowledge of the selected broad topics in numerous ways. Each section includes a title that helps guide the reader into what the following text is about and how it will inform the overall topic of the chapter. While each chapter flows in and out of the main topic, I found each section introduced me to new knowledge that was very often interesting, such as the extent of how presuppositions frame our idea of what previous knowledge we possess. This new information was at times almost shocking. I was, for instance, somewhat bamboozled at the idea of subliminal messaging, and how something that had previously felt so much like science fiction could suddenly be backed by scientific study. Sold on Language makes the reader take a good look at themselves in the process, and I found myself sometimes unhappy at the discoveries I made about my own brain's interactions with advertising. In this way, the book brought unpleasant but

important truths into my life, and created in me a more knowledgeable consumer. As I read *Sold on Language*, I found it to be at times unexpectedly humorous. From footnotes that indicate ironic ends to advertising campaigns (such as cars that advertise acceleration only to have to make recalls when the gas pedal is dysfunctional) to quotes from Clintons scandal or Stephen Colberts *Colbert Report*, the author finds ways to inject humor into a fairly dense body of text. These humorous details all suggest an undeniable fact about advertisements: that they have become an inseparable part of American culture. Overall, *Sold on Language* is a somewhat dense read and can certainly not be read through in one or two sittings. However it is a highly interesting and informative, captivating look at our brains, language, advertising and where all of those meet. It introduced me to invaluable facts about how advertisers take advantage of my fellow consumerist public and me. Having read this book, I now feel much more aware of the tricks of the advertising world and how to operate within it as a knowledgeable consumer. I would definitely recommend this book to anyone wishing to gain insight into themselves as consumers and how language and advertising interact.

5 of 5 people found the following review helpful. Full of insights
By Peg
The human brain is a wondrous thing -- especially that huge subconscious part that hums along without us giving much thought to it. We go through the day without having to think about the mechanics of breathing, digesting our food, walking, running, smiling laughing. We respond to all sorts of stimuli in our environment without having to give them much (if any) conscious thought: when we hear something funny we smile or laugh without first figuring out what makes it amusing or having to think through which muscles in our face we need to move in order to accomplish the task; when we're walking along and reach a set of stairs, we don't have to consciously think about lifting our leg higher; if someone throws a rock in our direction we instinctively duck or move out of the way without having to consciously process the danger of the situation and figure out how to move out of the way. In fact, most of our actions are determined by our subconscious brain. Yet when it comes to language and advertising, most of us operate on the assumption that the normal functions of our subconscious brain are magically suspended. Not so, according to this insightful book. The authors weave together a broad range of research and examples to demonstrate just how much of our behavior is determined below our conscious minds. They show that our responses to language, non-verbal cues, and emotional images are rarely the result of conscious and reasoned thought, but rather reflexive reactions based on a combination of hard-wiring and our internalized observations of how the world around us operates. Advertisers then use the latest scientific knowledge of our brains' 'default' processing mechanisms to hawk their merchandise. Fortunately, just as we can train ourselves to override our reflexes in various spheres of life, we can do the same when it comes to advertising. But in order to do so, we need to be aware of what those reflexes are and make conscious choices to respond differently. I always thought of myself as relatively immune to advertising, but I had no idea just how 'sneaky' ads can be, and the degree to which they exploit the hard-wired settings in our brains. If you want true and meaningful choice when it comes to your shopping and voting behavior, I highly recommend you read this book.

As citizens of capitalist, free-market societies, we tend to celebrate choice and competition. However, in the 21st century, as we have gained more and more choices, we have also become greater targets for persuasive messages from advertisers who want to make those choices for us. In *Sold on Language*, noted language scientists Julie Sedivy and Greg Carlson examine how rampant competition shapes the ways in which commercial and political advertisers speak to us. In an environment saturated with information, advertising messages attempt to compress as much persuasive power into as small a linguistic space as possible. These messages, the authors reveal, might take the form of a brand name whose sound evokes a certain impression, a turn of phrase that gently applies peer pressure, or a subtle accent that zeroes in on a target audience. As more and more techniques of persuasion are aimed squarely at the corner of our mind which automatically takes in information without conscious thought or deliberation, does 'endless choice' actually mean the end of true choice? *Sold on Language* offers thought-provoking insights into the choices we make as consumers and citizens and the choices that are increasingly being made for us.

From the Authors: Five misconceptions About the Effects of Advertising Coauthor Julie Sedivy
Its easy to feel as if were in control of the choices we make. But as cognitive science is discovering, much of our own thinking remains hidden from our conscious awareness. *Sold on Language* explores the science of language and persuasion, along the way popping some illusions about how we respond to advertising. Here are a few common misconceptions: I dont pay attention to ads, so they dont affect me. You are bombarded by ads, most of which you push to the edges of your attention. But it doesnt mean you arent processing the information in them. Think of your visual system: You have clear, detailed vision (called central vision) in only a very small area where youre aiming your eyes, but your peripheral vision still sends signals to your brain. When youre devoting your full attention to a message, you process it in more detail and more skeptically. Peripheral thinking kicks in when you choose not to pay full attention to an ad. It relies on more superficial cues so when you think youre tuning out an ad, youre more likely to be persuaded by truthiness than by truth. If I dont believe an ad, it doesnt affect me. Lies are more effective than you might like to think, even when you know theyre lies. For example, in 2000, John McCains run for the Republican Party nomination was badly damaged by false insinuations that hed fathered a child outside of marriage. Studies have found that people form a poor impression of someone whose name was linked in any way with unsavory behavior--even if it was to clear that person

of wrongdoing (for instance in a headline such as Andrew Winters not Connected to Bank Embezzlement). And there is a sleeper effect of skepticism: A message that is rejected when first heard comes to seem more believable over time. It's as if the message itself outlives your rejection of it. Subliminal advertising doesn't work. In 1957, James Vicary claimed to have lured crowds of movie-goers to the snack bar by flashing the commands Eat popcorn and Buy Coca-Cola for fractions of a second. In the end, Vicary's controversial experiment turned out to be a likely hoax. But recent actual research reveals many ways in which attitudes and behavior can be tweaked by unconsciously perceived information. For example, scientists have seen people shift political attitudes when exposed to the subliminal image of a flag, perform better on a creativity test after watching a subliminal logo for Apple rather than IBM, and yes, under the right circumstances, to crave a specific drink when subliminally primed with the product's name. But there's no unique or magical power to messages that are too brief to be seen; their effect is just one aspect of the human tendency to suck up, process, and act on as many cues in the environment as possible, without necessarily being aware of having done so. Today's consumers are more sophisticated about evaluating advertising than they used to be, and therefore more resistant to its effects. Advertising has adapted in interesting ways to public skepticism. One trend has been to move away from ads where the audience passively receives a message, and towards ads where the audience actively re-creates its meaning. For example, one ad for Durex condoms contains no real language at all; it simply has a price tag attached to the company logo (\$2.50) and another attached to the image of an elaborate baby toy (\$140), leaving the viewer to connect the dots. Implied meanings are especially useful when stating them outright would meet with a lot of resistance. Think of Apple computers' groundbreaking 1984 commercial. Many understood the ad to mean that Apple was going to liberate people from the soul-sucking conformist corporate culture of then-dominant IBM. Of course, Apple couldn't come right out and say this. But it could lead viewers to draw this conclusion themselves. The age of mass marketing and consumer conformity is dead, and people now make more choices as individuals. Consumers now often use products as a way to express their personalities and values, and it's easy to mistake this as a sign of individualism. But paradoxically, this trend reflects the fact that consumers are now more malleable to messages that focus on group identity—it's just that the groups consumers are identifying with are smaller and tighter. The brand itself becomes a symbol of a group identity, and everything about the message—its music, its choice of spokesperson, the words or accent that are used—serves to reinforce this social identity. Whether you drink Pabst Blue Ribbon or Heineken is not just about individual taste and preference; it's about signaling which tribe you belong to.

"Students and teachers of persuasion would benefit greatly from reading *Sold on Language*. Other professionals in communication, marketing, change management, sales, negotiation, and politics will find the examples and techniques of influence to be useful as both best practices to emulate and pitfalls to avoid." (PsycCRITIQUES, 11 January 2012) "The result is a truly enjoyable, ironic and fresh volume, easy and pleasant to read for any type of audience." (Metapsychology, 15 November 2011) "This is a well-written, entertaining, and penetrating book on advertisers' ubiquitous attempts at persuasion to influence marketplace behaviour, including the basis for an argument that advertisers are bent on making choices for the consumer. . . Highly recommended. Upper-division undergraduates through professionals/practitioners; consumers, general readers." (Choice, 1 October 2011) "I highly recommend the landmark and must-read book *Sold on Language: How Advertisers Talk to You and What This Says About You* by Julie Sedivy and Greg Carlson, to anyone seeking an open, honest, as well as an engaging study into the nature of advertising messages, brands, and the words used to market products. This eye-opening book will change the way readers approach advertising messages and the illusion that the market offers real choice." (Blog Business World, 28 April 2011) "For a university student with nascent interests in language and thought, reading this book might well provide a stimulus to take some philosophy or psychology or language sciences, which would be no bad thing." (Times Higher Education Supplement, 21 April 2011) "In this wise and witty book, Julie Sedivy and Gregory Carlson use modern research in psychology, linguistics, and psycholinguistics to show us how little of what we choose is the result of reasoned and conscious deliberation. We like to think of ourselves as being in charge of our lives: we're not. *Sold on Language* may not be for everyone. But if you shop, it's for you. And if you vote, it's for you. Reading this book may be the best defense you have against being manipulated by others." Professor Barry Schwartz, Department of Psychology, Swarthmore College and author of *The Paradox of Choice*, and *Practical Wisdom* "Via engaging prose and scientific evidence, Sedivy and Carlson have made a noteworthy contribution by providing fresh and deep insights into something we thought we'd already understood." Dr Robert B. Cialdini, Author of *Influence: The Psychology of Persuasion* Tell most people that advertisers and politicians exploit language to manipulate desire and opinion, and they'll likely respond "So what else is new?" and then go on to add, "though, mind you, I'm not fooled for an instant." But advertisers eat that self-assurance for breakfast food; they know that no audience is so easy to beguile as one that's smugly confident in its own sophistication. With engaging examples and lucid explanations, Sedivy and Carlson document the persuasive power that inhabits every corner of language not just in the familiar puffery of adjectives like "new and improved," but the implications hidden in little words like *your* and *the*. Whether you're a student of language or just a consumer of it, you'll come away from *Sold on Language* a bit more humble and a lot more attentive and by the by, with an appreciation of how much more there is to language than the wisdom we acquired in seventh

grade at the end of Sister Petra's ruler. Geoffrey Nunberg, University of California at Berkeley, Language commentator, "Fresh Air," NPR Language comes to us brilliantly easily. How else could children be learning new words at the incredible rate of 10 a day? But that ease of learning carries with it the risk that we will be oblivious to the power of words as written or spoken by others to control our behavior. To all who might want to protect themselves against that risk, I say: read this book. Jay Ingram, author of *Talk, Talk, Talk*, Canada From the Back Cover As citizens of capitalist, free-market societies, we tend to celebrate choice and competition. However, in the 21st century, as we have gained more and more choices, we have also become greater targets for persuasive messages from advertisers who want to make those choices for us. In *Sold on Language*, noted language scientists Julie Sedivy and Greg Carlson examine how rampant competition shapes the ways in which commercial and political advertisers speak to us. In an environment saturated with information, advertising messages attempt to compress as much persuasive power into as small a linguistic space as possible. These messages, the authors reveal, might take the form of a brand name whose sound evokes a certain impression, a turn of phrase that gently applies peer pressure, or a subtle accent that zeroes in on a target audience. As more and more techniques of persuasion are aimed squarely at the corner of our mind which automatically takes in information without conscious thought or deliberation, does 'endless choice' actually mean the end of true choice? *Sold on Language* offers thought-provoking insights into the choices we make as consumers and citizens and the choices that are increasingly being made for us.