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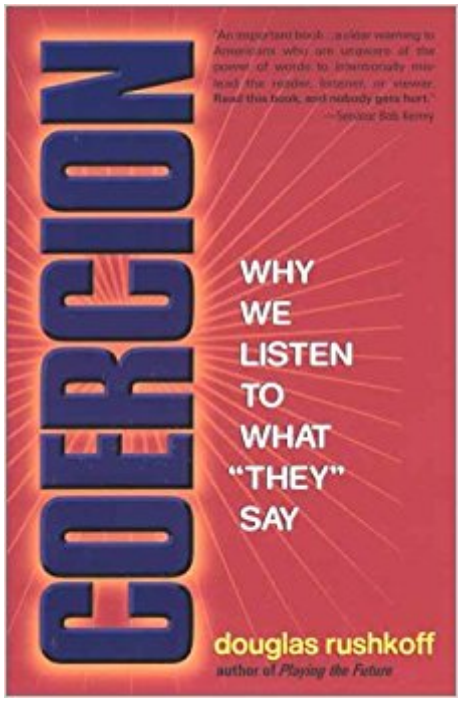
Coercion: Why We Listen To What "They" Say



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Synopsis

Noted media pundit and author of Playing the FutureÂ Douglas Rushkoff gives a devastating critique of the influence techniques behind our culture of rampant consumerism. With a skilled analysis of how experts in the fields of marketing, advertising, retail atmospherics, and hand-selling attempt to take away our ability to make rational decisions, Rushkoff delivers a bracing account of media ecology today, consumerismÂ in America, andÂ why we buy what we buy, helping us recognize when we’re being treated like consumers instead of human beings.

Book Information

Paperback: 304 pages

Publisher: Riverhead Books; 1 edition (October 1, 2000)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 157322829X

ISBN-13: 978-1573228299

Product Dimensions: 5.1 x 0.8 x 7.9 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars 58 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #449,738 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #131 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics & Government > Specific Topics > Propaganda & Political Psychology #1199 inÂ Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Social Psychology & Interactions #1280 inÂ Books > Medical Books > Psychology > Cognitive

Customer Reviews

In 1994’s Cyberia: Life in the Trenches of Hyperspace, Douglas Rushkoff extolled the democratic promise of the then-emergent Internet, but the once optimistic author has grown a bit disillusioned with what the Net--and the rest of the world--has become. His exuberantly written, disturbing Coercion may induce paranoia in readers as it illuminates the countless ways marketing has insinuated itself not just into every aspect of Western culture but into our individual lives. Rushkoff opens with a series of pronouncements: "They say human beings use only ten percent of their brains.... They say Prozac alleviates depression." But "who, exactly, are ’they,’" he asks, and "why do we listen to them?" Marketing continues to grow more aggressive, and Rushkoff tracks the increasingly coercive techniques it employs to ingrain its message in the minds of consumers, as well as the results: toddlers can recognize the golden arches of McDonald’s, young rebels get tattooed with the Nike swoosh, and news stories are increasingly taken verbatim from company

press releases. "Corporations and consumers are in a coercive arms race," argues Rushkoff. "Every effort we make to regain authority over our actions is met by an even greater effort to usurp it." As he surveys the visual, aural, and scented shopping environment and interviews salesmen, public relations men, telemarketers, admen, and consumers, Rushkoff--who admits to being one of "them" in his occasional capacity as paid corporate consultant--concludes that "they" are just "us" and that the only way the process of coercion can be reversed is to refuse to comply. "Without us," he assures, "they don't exist." --Kera Bolonik --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Until recently a cyber-optimist who, in popular books like Cyberia and Media Virus, augured a digital revolution, Rushkoff now warns that the promise of the Net as an open-ended civic forum is fading as relentless corporate marketers peddle their wares and capitalize on shortened attention spans. In a scathing critique that extends far beyond cyberspace in scope, Rushkoff identifies the subtle forms of coercion used by advertisers, public relations experts, politicians, religious leaders and customer service reps, among others. Retreading territory covered by critic Neil Postman and others, Rushkoff provides additional examples of how the ordinary person is often unsuspectingly manipulated, whether in the shopping mall, at a sports event or in a Muzak-drenched store or office. This analysis is particularly strong when deconstructing the "postmodern" techniques of persuasion that advertisers use to reach increasingly cynical target audiences, including commercials that self-consciously mock the marketing process. Rushkoff also argues that mass spectacles (e.g., rock festivals, Louis Farrakhan's Million Man March, Promise Keepers rallies) foster "tribal loyalty" but are often contrived, commercial or downright destructive. He devotes a chapter to pyramid schemes used by cults, infomercials, Internet con artists and get-rich-quick marketers. His freewheeling survey underscores the social cost of these coercive strategies, which, he says, tend to make us see one another as marks. Despite his up-to-the-minute examples, however, his overall analysis is not fresh or original enough to take the place of Vance Packard's The Hidden Persuaders. (Sept.) Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In our consumer driven market no effort is spared to acquire as much of everyone's "disposable income" as possible. Every aspect of consumer behavior is studied and strategies are created to maximize sales and consumption. Within the field of Marketing everything is considered a viable option to encourage consumption and the objective is to bypass the consumer's good judgement

and trick them into purchasing items by tampering with the very means humans use to make informed decisions.For example department stores and Malls are designed with a confusing layouts, strategically placed mirrors, and non-intuitive exit paths to keep you in the store longer maximizing your exposure to products, increasing the chance the store will make a sale. These layouts are not only deliberate, but a great deal of research is at the root of them aiming to maximize consumer purchases and foil the natural defenses of the consumer so he will no longer act in his own best interests but those of the proprietor.The U.S. government and politicians are also aware of this science and use specific forms of communication to deliberately mislead and manipulate the voting populous, to their detriment, while avoiding educating them that such tactics exist. This omission from the public education system is deliberate as strategies to deal with and combat predatory marketing would also reduce the politician's ability to manipulate sentiment and reduce their collective political power.Another among these powerful tactics include such mind and life altering techniques as Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) which is a field of psychology created to help alter the thought process and emotional state of the mentally ill, those with psychiatric disorders, as well as those trying to make changes in their lives as a way to change the way people think and feel about things. In the hands of an altruistic Psychotherapist trying to help a patient overcome psychiatric disorders it's a powerful tool for good, but the field of Marketing has widely embraced it as a way to manipulate consumer's thoughts and emotions about their products to produce sales. While NLP was invented in 1975 and enjoys wide use in the field it is obscure outside of Marketing and psychotherapy, and dismissed far too easily as the conception of it's effects seem almost magical. Most outside the field reject the notion that their thoughts and emotions can be altered by the carefully chosen words of others out of hand, and while the idea does seem almost seems magical, the technique produces tangible results. Unfortunately those results are mostly in sales rather than easing human suffering.Coercion details several levels of well known and obscure methods of deceptive marketing that prey on the manner in which the human brain functions to create a sale opportunity. A short list would include mimicry, repetition, false senses of endorsement, false social requirements, blatant misrepresentations of facts & performance, and all manner of techniques to convince the target unwittingly or without their consent to perpetuate consumption. Douglas goes on to describe how Marketers have reclaimed what he initially felt were the liberated tools of mass communication created by the internet (Blogs, Twitter, Youtube, E-mail, forums, and viral videos)into just another medium for creating a sale, and his unwitting involvement in marketing's use of those tools.The reading level is very accessible, approximately a 10th grade level, the content is rich and there are plenty of relatable examples

throughout. This is one of two modern books I feel is indispensable in a personal library and always have on hand extra copies to loan or give to others. It's content is so important that I feel morally obligated to share it with those who are not content to be blissfully unaware of the mental warfare being waged against them on a daily basis. The other book being Eric Hoffer'sÂ The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements (Perennial Classics). While that book is a very inaccessible and difficult read by a non-writer Coercion is a well written book that can be easily read without outside assistance though both, in my opinion, should be required reading for modern high school students.

Reveals how the manipulation of media and media statements is in its effect, very coercive. Rushkoff is an excellent writer making the book both enlightening and highly readable. He is intellectually honest and perceptive. This is my second copy after I couldn't fail to share it with someone else.

I think Rushkoff is dead on, particularly in regard to the Internet's failure to live up to its potential. After all, here I am conversing on a commerce website, because has figured out a way to tie my basic human need to share my opinions with generating book sales. I think Rushkoff accurately predicts a world where consumers will still have free choice, but the spectrum of choices will become much narrower. It will be interesting to see what it will be like to eat in a restaurant in a foreign country twenty years from now. Perhaps the need to actually choose and order your food will seem as quaint and antiquated as the lack of ice cubes in soda is today.

I know that may seem like a lot.. but trust me.. for a twenty-something kid that always knew these things exsisted, but never truly understood how and why.. this book changed my life. I feel better prepared to handle the world around me, and I now have the ability to better control my life and not let it spin out of control by being sucked into the social nonsense spun by advertisers and media heads. This book should be on the reading list of every communications class in every school and college in the country.

Great insight into marketing psychology.

wake up and read this!!, it happens to everyday people I was fooled

A++++

Douglas Rushkoff, a man best described as a cross between Marshall McLuhan and Malcolm McLaren, here presents a brilliant expose of the all-pervasive coercion in modern Western society. His book focuses on direct and indirect sales techniques, the public relations strategies of celebrities from Marv Albert to Bill Clinton, and even the tactics of cult leaders (including Mary Kay).While rich in both wit and scholarship, there is one thing that this book lacks: a conclusion. After spending 300 pages explaining how business, government, and the media set up their smoke and mirrors, the author offers us no alternative to sitting back and trying to enjoy the magic show, knowing full well that we are being manipulated. Some might say this was a deliberate attempt to avoid coercing the reader... my guess is that he doesn't know either.

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