The Persuaders

A. We have long lived in an age where powerful images, catchy soundbites and too-good-to miss offers to bombard us from every quarter. All around us the persuaders are at work. Occasionally their methods are unsubtle –the planting kiss on a baby's head by a wannabe political leader, or a liquidation sale in a shop that has been "closing down" for well over a year, but generally the persuaders know what they are about and are highly capable. Be they politicians, supermarket chains, salespeople or advertisers, they know exactly what to do to sell us their images, ideas or produce. When it comes to persuasion, these giants rule supreme. They employ the most skilled image-makers and use the best psychological tricks to guarantee that even the most cautious among us are open to manipulation.

B. We spend more time in them than we mean to, we buy 75 percent of our food from them and end up with products that we did not realize we wanted. Right from the start, supermarkets have been ahead of the game. For example, when Sainsbury introduced shopping baskets into its 1950s stores, it was a stroke of marketing genius. Now shoppers could browse and pick up items they previously would have ignored. Soon after came trolleys, and just as new roads attract more traffic, the same applied to trolley space. Pro Merlin Stone, IBM Professor of Relationship Marketing at Bristol Business School, says aisles are laid out to maximize profits. Stores pander to our money-rich, time-poor lifestyle. Low turnover products —clothes and electrical goods—are stocked at the back while high—turnover items command position at the front.

C. Stone believes supermarkets work hard to "stall" us because the more time we spend in them, the more we buy. Thus, great efforts are made to make the environment pleasant. Stores play music to relax us and some even pipe air from the in-store bakery around the shop. In the USA, fake aromas are sometimes used. The smell is both the most evocative and subliminal sense. In experiments, pleasant smells are effective in increasing our spending. A casino that fragranced only half its premise saw profit soar in the aroma—filled areas. The other success story from the supermarkets' perspective is the loyalty card. Punters may assume that they are being rewarded for their fidelity, but all the while they are trading information about their shopping habits. Loyal shoppers could be paying 30% more by sticking to their favourite shops for essential cosmetics.

D. Research has shown that 75 percent of profit comes from just 30 percent of customers. Ultimately, reward cards could be used to identify and better accommodate these "elite" shoppers. It could also be used to make adverts more relevant to individual consumers – rather like Spielberg's futuristic thriller Minority Report, in which Tom Cruise's character is bombarded with interactive personalized ads. If this sounds far

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fetched, the data-gathering revolution has already seen the introduction of radio – frequency identification – away to electronically tag products to see who is buying what, FRID means they can follow the product into people homes.

E. No matter how savvy we think we are to their ploys, the ad industry still wins. Adverts focus on what products do or on how they make us feel. Researcher Laurette Dube, in the Journal of Advertising Research, says when attitudes are base on "cognitive foundations" (logical reasoning), advertisers use informative appeals. This works for products with a little emotional draw but high functionality, such as bleach. Where attitude is based on effect (i.e, emotions), ad teams try to tap into our feelings. Researchers at the University of Florida recently concluded that our emotional responses to adverts dominate over "cognition".

F. Advertisers play on our need to be safe (commercials for insurance), to belong (make a customer feel they are in the group in fashion ads) and for self – esteem (aspirational adverts). With time and space at a premium, celebrities are often used as a quick way of meeting these needs – either because the celeb epitomizes success or because they seem familiar and so make the product seem "safe". A survey of 4,000 campaigns found ads with celebs were 10 percent more effective than without. Humor also stimulates a rapid emotional response. Heiman Chung, writing in the International Journal of Advertising, found that funny ads were remembered for longer than straight ones. Combine humor with sexual imagery – as in Wonderbra's "Hello Boys" ads—and you are on to a winner.

G. Slice-of-life ads are another tried and tested method—they paint a picture of life as you would like it, but still, one that feels familiar. Abhilasha Mehta, in the Journal of Advertising Research, noted that the more one's self-image tallies with the brand being advertised, the stronger the commercial. Ad makers also use behaviorist theories, recognizing that the more sensation we receive from an object, the better we know it. If an advert for a chocolate bar fails to cause salivation, it has probably failed. No wonder advertisements have been dubbed the "nervous system of the business world".

H. Probably all of us could make a sale if the product was something we truly believed in, but professional salespeople are in a different league—the best of them can always sell different items to suitable customers in the best time. They do this by using very basic psychological techniques. Stripped to its simplest level, selling works by heightening the buyer's perception of how much they need a product or service. Buyers normally have certain requirements by which they will judge the suitability of a product. The seller, therefore, attempts to tease out what these conditions are and then explains how their products' benefit can meet these requirements.

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I. Richard Hession, author of Be a Great Salesperson says it is human nature to prefer to speak rather listen, and good salespeople pander to this. They ask punters about their needs and offer to work with them to achieve their objectives. As a result, the buyer feels they are receiving a "consultation" rather than a sales pitch. All the while, the salesperson presents with a demeanour that takes it for granted that the sale will be made. Never will the words "if you buy" be used, but rather "when you buy".

J. Dr Rob Yeung, a senior consultant at business psychologists Kiddy and Partner, says most salespeople will build up a level of rapport by asking questions about hobbies, family and lifestyle. This has the double benefit of making the salesperson likeable while furnishing him or her with more information about the client's wants. Yeung says effective salespeople try as far as possible to match their style of presenting themselves to how the buyer comes across. If the buyer cracks jokes, the salespeople will respond in kind. If the buyer wants detail, the seller provides it, if they are more interested in the feel of the product, the seller will focus on this. At its most extreme, appearing empathetic can even include the salesperson attempting to "mirror" the hobby language of the buyer.

K. Whatever the method used, all salespeople work towards one aim: "closing the deal". In fact, they will be looking for "closing signals" through their dealings with potential clients. Once again the process works by assuming success. The buyer is not asked "are you interested?" as this can invite a negative response. Instead, the seller takes it for granted that the deal is effectively done: when the salesman asks you for a convenient delivery date or asks what color you want, you will probably respond accordingly. Only afterwards might you wonder why you proved such a pushover.

QUESTIONS 27 - 29

Choose the correct letter A, B, C or D. Write your answer in boxes 27-29 on your answer sheet.

27. What is the supermarket's purpose of using "basket" in paragraph B?

A Create a convenient atmosphere of supermarket
B Make customers spend more time on shopping
C Relieve pressure on the supermarket's traffic
D More than half items bought need to be carried

28. What is the quality of the best salesman possessed according to this passage?

A Sell the right product to the right person
B Clearly state the instruction of one product
C Show professional background of one product
D Persuade customers to buy the product they sell

29. What's the opinion of Richard Hession?

A Pretend to be nice instead of selling goods
B Prefer to speak a lot to customers
C Help buyers to conclude their demands for ideal items
D Show great interpersonal skill

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QUESTIONS 30-35

Reading Passage 3 has 7 paragraphs A-K. Which paragraph contains the following information?

NB You may use any letter more than once.

30. _____how do supermarkets distract consumers

31. _____how to build a close relationship between salespeople and buyer

32. _____people would be impressed by the humor advertisement

33. _____methods for salespeople to get the order

34. _____how question work for salespeople

35. _____different customer groups bring different profits

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