READING: THE INFLUENCERS

Imagine this, you are in a café when you hear a teenage boy talking about a new computer game. He's explaining its amazing features to a girl and the girl wants to know where she can buy it. Nothing unusual, you might say, until after fifteen minutes, the boy and girl move to another café and have an identical conversation. On your way home, a "tourist" in the street asks you to take a photo with their camera. You do and, afterwards, they tell you how they bought the camera recently, and how it's on special offer. New friend or fraud? Welcome to the world of stealth marketing. You may say you haven't met a stealth marketer yet, but that's the point. The chances are that you have.

Stealth* or "word of mouth" marketing isn't like normal advertising. We can recognize adverts on billboards or in glossy magazines, but it's difficult to spot stealth marketing – it just tricks us. Studies have shown that people are more likely to trust a person on the street, who they think is giving free advice, rather than an advert. In fact, in a recent poll of teenagers, only 5% believe adverts, compared with 52% who trusted their peers.

More than $500 billion a year is spent on advertising worldwide, but compared with conventional advertising campaigns, stealth marketing is cheap and effective. So how does it work? Well, let's look at company X. Company X wants to launch a new product for teens. They need their product to look cool and interesting, so they decide to pay young people to talk about it. These young marketers are carefully selected – company X researches teens websites and targets the most popular people or "trendsetters". These teens then persuade their peers to buy the cool new product. Seventeen-year old Tanya Fulham is one of them.

Tanya Fulham is beautiful, sporty and clever. She's interested in fashion, loves shopping and listens to the latest pop music. She has more than a million followers on her social media page, and she often influences their choices and opinion. She´s the latest recruit of an undercover marketing agency. People like Tanya promote brands in blogs and social media websites. "Products which are fashionable or have a strong brand image are easy to sell", explains Tanya. "I can usually get people to buy everything from makeup to luxury goods, like designer jeans". Other teen marketers upload videos of themselves, which describe recent shopping trips and display their "hauls"*. They show people how a product works or what it looks like up close.

"It's great getting free samples of cool, new products that my friends haven't heard about" adds Tanya. "It makes me feel important because I have insider knowledge". But do her friends know that she's paid to promote them? "No, they don´t" she admits. "But I don't think it's dishonest. If I find something I like, I talk about it. It doesn't make any difference whether I am paid or not".

Perhaps Tanya is right. Lots of people tell others about the new book they are reading, a new place they've discovered or a cool gadget they´ve just bought. We are also a 24-7 generation and see more than 3000 ads a day, so what difference does it make? However, other people are worried. "You think a person is being helpful", says retail psychologist David Green, "but that's very different from someone telling us something because they are getting paid for it. You don't know who to trust or who to listen to anymore". We have already met the stealth marketers and they are just like us.

*hauls=large amount of goods

*stealth marketer=the act of doing something wrongfully or secretly

VOCABULARY: ADVERTISING AND CONSUMERISM

Study the underlined words in the text and then write them next to definitions 1-8. If the word is a verb, write the bare infinitive form (without to).

Example: to talk someone into doing something: __persuade__

2- to study something in more detail:

3- to lie to someone:

4- to have an effect on someone's ideas and choices:

5- to advertise something for the first time:

6- to show something so people can look at it:

7- to advertise a product and encourage people to buy it:

8- to aim something at someone:

Collocations: Advertising

Look at the highlighted collocations in the text. Then replace the phrases in italics in sentences 1-8 with the correct collocations.

Example: Many people can't afford products that are *unnecessary and very expensive*, like diamond and jewellery. __luxury goods__

2- I bought the jeans because they were *cheaper than usual.*

3- The *billboards and magazine advert* for the new trainers were a big success. Lots of people bought them.

4- Most of the models in *weekly fashion publications* are really too thin.

5- Stealth marketers often *have more information about a product than other people.*

6- *The company that develops ideas for adverts* came up with a great idea for a shop window display.

7- Some companies give people *examples of their product that they don´t have to pay.*

8- Nike is a successful sports company with a very strong *idea associated with its name.*