



Coercion: Why We Listen to What "They" Say

By Douglas Rushkoff

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Noted media pundit and author of *Playing the Future* **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, consumerism in America, and why we buy what we buy, helping us recognize when we're being treated like consumers instead of human beings.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

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*

From Publishers Weekly

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.)

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From Library Journal

According to Rushkoff (*Cyberia*, *Media Virus*!), advertisers and marketers are becoming increasingly adept at finding new ways to coerce consumers into buying unwanted products. "The more complex, technological, and invisible coercion gets," he writes, "the harder it is for us to rely on" our ability to detect the hard sell. "As soon as we become familiar with the new terrain--be it the mall, the television dial, or the Internet--it is the goal of the coercion strategists to make it unfamiliar again, or to lure us somewhere else." Rushkoff is

particularly interested in the ways that corporations and other for-profit institutions have drawn on underhanded techniques developed by cults, pyramid schemes, dishonest salesmen, and the public relations industry. The good news is that ordinary people "have the prerogative to stop, to think, and to disengage." Lively and well researched, this is recommended for public and general libraries. AKent Worcester, Marymount Manhattan Coll., New York
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Users Review

From reader reviews:

Pamela Adair:

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