



# 5 FACT SHEET HOW TO RECOGNIZE HIDDEN ADVERTISING

## OBJECTIVES OF THE CURRICULUM

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### DISCIPLINES AND LEVELS CONCERNED

#### English (Secondary – Cycle 2)

##### Reading and assessing various texts

- Putting common texts in perspective by using other written or oral texts;
- Making a critical judgment: taking a critical distance from the text by relying on cultural and media references that confirm the credibility or acceptability of a source or information.

##### Organizing a text

- Recognizing and using elements that allow a written or oral text to be attached to a common field.

#### ERC (Secondary – Cycle 1)

##### Theme: Autonomy

- Conditions that favour autonomy (e.g. critical judgment, common sense, moral responsibility, ability to choose, authenticity, etc.)

##### Form of dialogue

- Conversation, discussion, debate.

### SUGGESTED DIGITAL TOOLS

- Discussing, surveying and obtaining students' reactions: Mentimeter;
- Creating a post: Canva;
- Analyzing a post: Instagram;
- Creating a video: Clips (iOS), Funimate (Android);

### TARGETED DIMENSIONS OF THE DIGITAL COMPETENCY

- Develop and engage information literacy;
- Exploit the potential of digital technology for learning;
- Develop critical thinking regarding digital information;
- Produce content with digital technology;
- Innovate and show creativity with digital technology;
- Communicate by using digital technology.

### EDUCATIONAL INTENTION OF THE GUIDE

By the end of these activities, the students will be able to recognize two types of non-traditional advertising, concealed in different formats and sometimes hard to identify.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE ACTIVITIES

- Discuss and give an opinion on the rules and good practices to follow when publishing sponsored content.
- Create a post containing sponsored content while respecting good advertising practices.
- Discuss the students' relationship with sponsored content found everywhere on social media.
- Create an advertising video.

## INTRODUCTION

Everyone thinks they can recognize advertising. You know when to expect it: between two segments of a TV show, at the beginning of a YouTube video, between two Facebook posts or in the middle of stories on Instagram, for example. But non-traditional advertising can sometimes go unnoticed. This fact sheet covers two major examples to which we are all exposed. One is the advertorial, which looks like a journalistic report. The other is product placement by influencers, which resembles a regular post on social media.

## SECTION 1 – ADVERTORIALS

### What is an advertorial?

The name says it all. An advertorial is advertising that looks like editorial content. It uses the form and style of a print, audio or video journalist's report. The subject isn't neutral. That's because a company pays for the advertorial to promote its products and services.

Advertorials are mainly found in specialized magazines.

The sale and publication of advertorials in the media has generated many debates among journalists. While they're a major revenue source for the media, some believe they hurt journalistic independence.

Attention: sponsored reporting isn't necessarily bad, uninteresting or false. But it's important to be prudent and remember that someone with monetary interests has a say in the advertorial.

### Examples

- A skin care brand pays a women's magazine to publish an article on the best anti-wrinkle creams. In exchange, its products must appear in the article.
- A home insurance company sponsors an article in a daily newspaper on the risks of not being insured. The expert quoted is an employee of the company. The services recommended are part of its offer.
- More and more Canadians are buying American milk. So Canadian dairy farmers sponsor a newspaper article on the benefits of buying locally.

### The rules governing advertorials

Canada currently has no law specifically governing advertorials. However, they are subject to the standards for advertising, competition and consumer protection. For example, misrepresentations and deceptive advertising are prohibited.

This form of advertising is therefore partly self-regulated. The information industry follows codes of ethics that govern advertorials. Here are some rules:

#### Clearly disclose the advertising nature of the content

Out of a concern for transparency, the media must identify all advertising. Here is a non-exhaustive list of terms that some publications use to identify advertorials:

- Advertorial;
- Advertising;
- Presented by...;
- In collaboration with...;
- Sponsored content;
- A presentation by...;
- Partnership (or partner);
- Branded content;
- Paid content;
- Native advertising.

### Clearly distinguish paid content from journalistic content

The public must be able to distinguish journalistic content from paid content at a glance. To do this, the media uses different graphic standards, different sounds or different video introductions.

- Different font (size and typeface);
- Different colours;
- Different layout (such as boxes);
- Banner or header indicating that a report is an advertisement;
- Audio excerpt or video clip indicating that a segment is an advertisement.

### Clearly identify the advertiser

It's in the public interest to clearly identify the company or the person who sponsored an advertorial. Look for the company names and logos.

### Journalistic independence and conflicts of interest

Journalists may not work in the interest of an individual or a company. The codes of journalistic ethics and many media forbid journalists to sign advertorials. This is to avoid any form of conflict of interest. Other writers are in charge of writing this advertising.

## SECTION 2 – INFLUENCERS

### A new way to advertise

Influencers are relatively new to advertising, especially in Canada. They are effective and cost less than a TV spot. Their approach is more subtle.

Advertisers are attracted by the intimate relationship influencers maintain with their subscribers. For example, if a YouTube content creator is known for her makeup, her recommendations are likely to have an impact on her audience. A cosmetics company therefore sees her network as a wonderful opportunity to make its products known (and sell them).

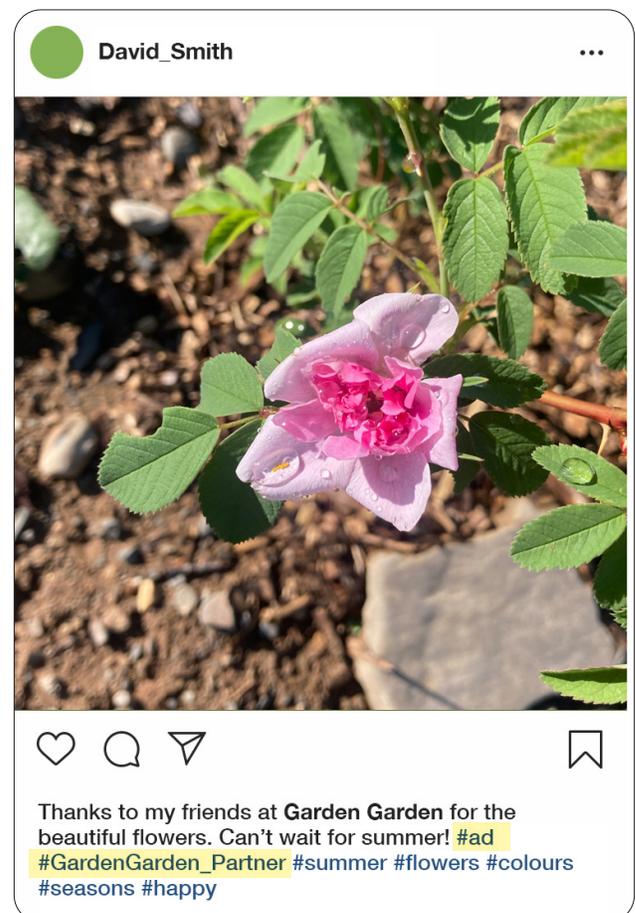
### Rules and good practices

In Canada, the *Competition Act* governs influencers' practices. The Competition Bureau's website states that influencers must clearly indicate any connection with a company, a product or a service they promote. These connections may be:

- A payment;
- Products or services received free of charge;
- Discounts;
- Free trips or event tickets;
- Personal or family ties.

This indication must be visible, clear and honest, while following these guidelines:

Identified by obvious hashtags (#ad, #advertisement, #spon, #sponsored, #COMPANY\_Partner, #paidpost)



**Identified in the sections provided for this purpose on social media**



If they don't obey the *Competition Act*, influencers are exposed to heavy fines and even prison terms.

**Traps to avoid**

In the past few years, the Competition Bureau of Canada has sent warnings to marketing companies that do business with influencers. Because they're relatively new in the advertising landscape, they're still becoming familiar with the regulations that govern their practices. Vigilance must be maintained.

Here are some traps to avoid, inspired by the Ad Standards recommendations. They should help you determine if a post was paid, even if it isn't clearly identified as such.

**Hidden disclosures**

If the hashtag #ad is difficult to find in a post, buried under ten other hashtags, this is dishonest.



### The brands are “identified”, thanked and mentioned repeatedly

Be suspicious if an influencer identifies a company in a photo, mentions it repeatedly in a post or thanks it. The influencer may have received free products.



### Ambiguous hashtags

Only very clear hashtags obey the rules. Beware of hashtags that may be confusing, such as #ambassador, #thankyou\_COMPANY, #partner, #collaboration...



# EXERCISES

## EXERCISE 1

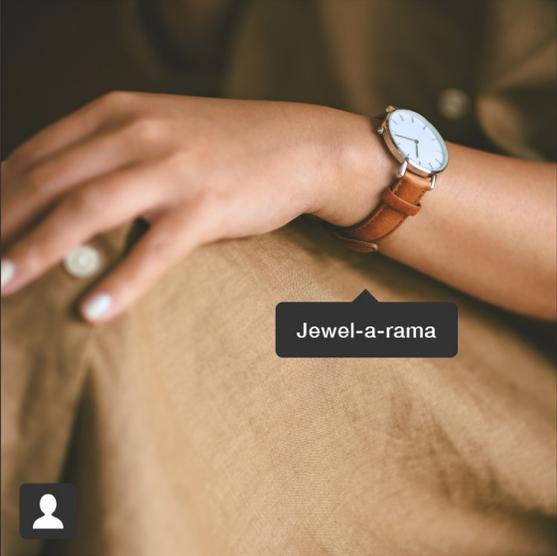
**Why do you think it's important to identify advertising clearly in the media?  
What are the consequences of hidden advertising for the public? For the media?**

**Suggestion:** The activity can begin with an interactive discussion on Mentimeter. Ask the students one question at a time. As the case may be, allow creation of word clouds, multiple choice, long answers, classifications, etc. The students will have the opportunity to give their opinion, find out what their peers think, and ultimately reach a consensus from the answers posted.

## EXERCISE 2

**These two influencers were paid to talk about a company via their Instagram account.  
Which one follows good practices? Explain your choice**

**A** Karen\_Baker  
Paid partnership with Jewel-a-rama

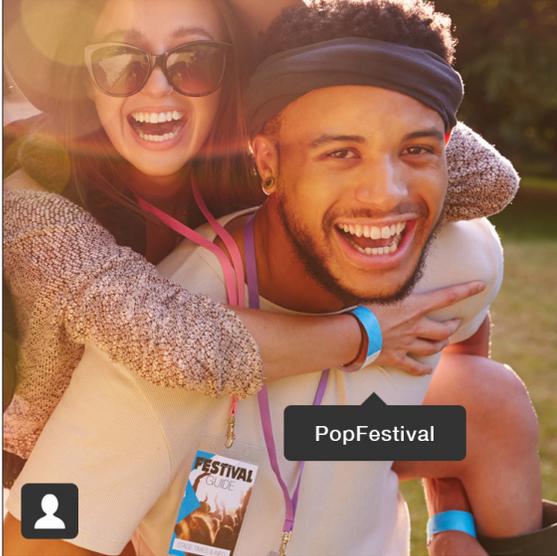


See Likes

My new @jewel-a-rama watch is a fabulous match for my clothes. I'm ready to go back to school. Code KAREN20 gives you a 20% discount on your next purchase at their store!

#ad #watch #jewellery #partnership\_jewel-a-rama #back-to-school

**B** JohnClark



See Likes

Pop Festival is my favourite new music festival! The atmosphere is INCREDIBLE! Thank you @popfestival for a crazy day! Continuing next weekend!

#ambassador #festival #music #popfestival #beach #fashion #travel #Canada #band #group #friends

**Suggestion:** After discussing good practices to adopt in advertising and choosing the influencer who follows the rules better, the students are now invited to create their own sponsored content. They must consider the theory discussed earlier in this document. Putting themselves in an influencer's shoes, the students will promote a product or event of their choice. They can use the Canva platform to produce their post. Once the sponsored content is created, the teacher may post some examples on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). The group can analyze it to find out if the good advertising practices and rules were followed.

# EXERCISES

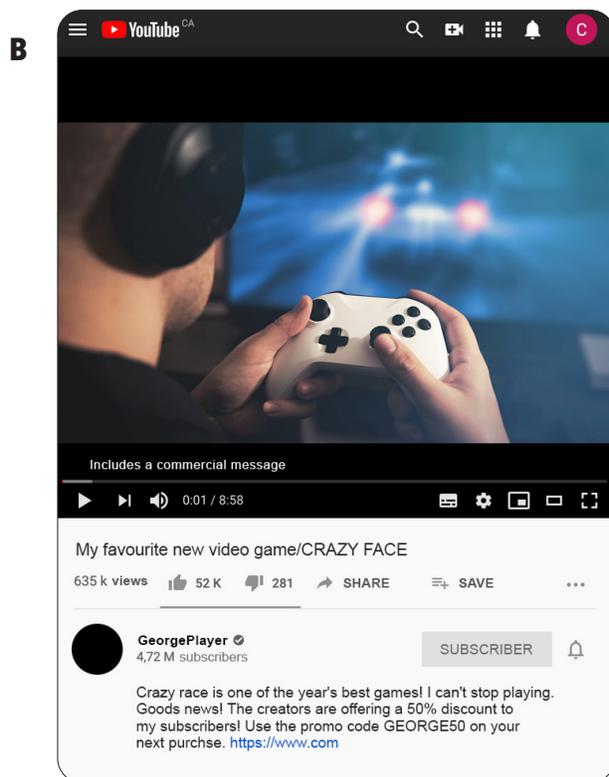
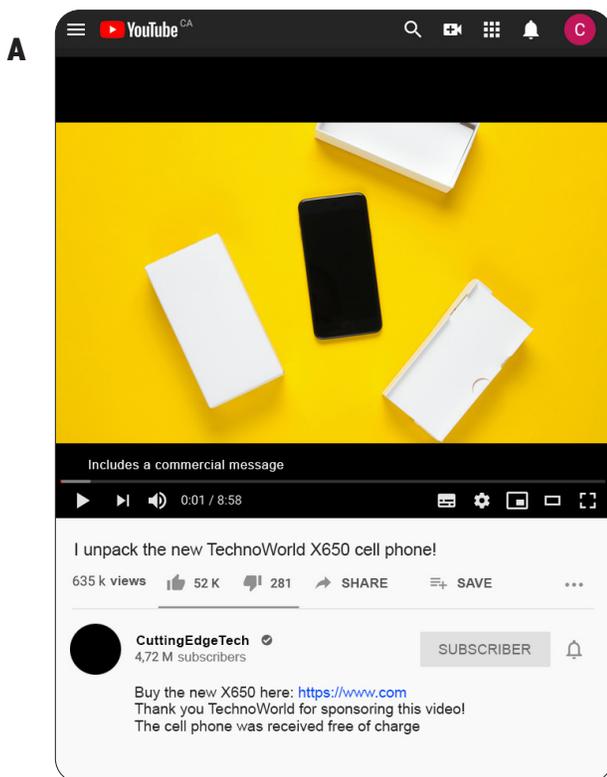
## EXERCISE 3

**Do paid posts affect your perception of the media and the influencers you like? Explain.**

**Suggestion:** Use Instagram, for example, and target the influencers young people like. As a group, analyze the posts that contain sponsored content. Present some examples on the interactive whiteboard (IWB). Get the students to react on their relationship with the ads. What do they like more or less about this kind of content? Do they consider they can be easily influenced by these posts? What elements in an ad attract their attention more? Do they find there's too much sponsored content on Instagram or any other social media they visit?

## EXERCISE 4

**These two YouTubers were paid to talk about a company in a video. Which one follows good practices? Explain your choice.**



**Suggestion:** The students can reproduce this activity. But this time have them create video content with the Clips (iOS) or Funimate (Android) app.

# ANSWER KEY

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1.

**Possible answers:**

- Deceptive advertising: legal consequences;
  - Media: may lose the trust of its audience, damage to its reputation, conflict of interest;
  - Public: may be exposed to advertising without knowing it and be guided in their purchases by a false feeling of journalistic neutrality
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2.

**A**

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3.

**N/A**

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4.

**A**