

Fallacies in Advertisements

Manufacturers have both the need and the right to advertise their products. Magazines, newspapers, television shows, Internet sites, and radio programs depend on the revenue from advertisements. And yet, as a field, advertising is filled with the use of logical fallacies. Moreover, it will most likely remain that way because fallacies can be effective ways to sell products.

Study Tip

The type of fallacy in the ad in Example 5 is called *appeal to authority or celebrity*. It often takes the following form.

- **Premise:** A says that P is true.
- **Premise:** A is authoritative.
- **Conclusion:** Therefore, P is true.

To use an authority legitimately, check for the following.

1. The authority has competence in an area, not just popularity.
2. The judgment must be within the authority's expertise.
3. The authority must be interpreted correctly.
4. Direct evidence is available.

EXAMPLE 5 Analyzing an Advertisement

In 1953, Marilyn Monroe was named “the Most Advertised Girl in the World” by the Advertising Association of the West. Is the advertisement a logical fallacy?

not original ad

LUSTRE-CREME is the favorite beauty shampoo of 4 out of 5 top Hollywood stars... and you'll love it in its new Lotion Form, too!

A shampoo so rich you only need to 'lather once'!

SOLUTION

Here is one way to look at the logic in the advertisement.

- **Premise:** If Marilyn Monroe uses a product, then you should use it.
- **Premise:** Marilyn Monroe uses Lustre-Creme shampoo.
- **Conclusion:** Therefore, you should use Lustre-Creme shampoo.

This is a valid syllogism. The problem is that the first premise is questionable. As such, this type of *appeal to celebrity* is considered a logical fallacy.

✓ Checkpoint

Help at Math.andYOU.com

Do you agree with the following policy? Explain your reasoning.

China has passed laws banning celebrities from appearing in ads for drugs. A government spokesperson stated: “The move is to eradicate illegal drug advertisements that exaggerate drug’s benefits and mislead customers.”