

Many consumers ignore commercial advertisements. In response, advertising companies have started using a new tactic, called “buzzing.” The advertisers hire people—buzzers—who personally promote (buzz) products to people they know or meet. The key part is that the buzzers do not reveal that they are being paid to promote anything. They behave as though they were just spontaneously praising a product during normal conversation. Buzzing has generated a lot of controversy, and many critics would like to see it banned. First, the critics complain that consumers should know whether a person praising a product is being paid to praise the product. Knowing this makes a big difference: we expect the truth from people who we believe do not have any motive for misleading us. But with buzzing what you hear is just paid advertising, which may well give a person incorrect information about the buzzed product. Second, since buzzers pretend they are just private individuals, consumers listen to their endorsements less critically than they should. With advertisements in print or on TV, the consumer is on guard for questionable claims or empty descriptions such as “new and improved.” But when consumers do not know they are being lobbied, they may accept claims they would otherwise be suspicious of. This may suit the manufacturers, but it could really harm consumers. And worst of all is the harmful effect that buzzing is likely to have on social relationships. Once we become aware that people we meet socially may be buzzers with a hidden agenda, we will become less trustful of people in general. So buzzing will result in the spread of mistrust and the expectation of dishonesty.

Now listen to part of a lecture on the topic you just read about. Hi, my name is Bill. Uh, I was talking to your professor in the subway about the great phone service I use, and it turned out we're both interested in marketing. So he asked me to talk to his marketing class. You see, I'm a a ‘buzzer’, part time, you know—during the day I'm a student just like you. Now I read that piece attacking buzzing. It is really misleading. How it describes buzzing leaves out a lot and it gives the wrong impression. First, it makes it sound like buzzers don't tell the truth about the products they're buzzing. That's not true. How buzzing works is this: Companies find people who use their product and who really think the product is good. So buzzing is not like ordinary advertisement where an actor is paid to read some lines. Uh, yes I get paid for telling you what I think--but you get the truth from buzzers—I really do think my phone service is great. That's why the company hired me. Second, the reading makes it seem that when a buzzer talks to someone, the person believes whatever they hear from the buzzer. Not true. In fact, the opposite is true. People I talk to ask a lot of questions about the products I buzz. They ask about the price, service, and how long I've used the product. If I don't have good answers, they won't buy the product. Finally, if you believe what you read, buzzing will destroy civilization. That's stupid. If a product is bad, the company can't recruit buzzers. So, what you hear from a buzzer is not only sincere, it's likely to be about a good product. If you try the phone service I use, you're gonna love it. So people who try buzzed products, are going to have a good experience, so they'll end up being more trustful and open to people.

Summarize the points made in the lecture, being sure to explain how they challenge the specific points made in the reading passage.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statement? In order to be well-informed, a person must get information from many different news sources. Use specific reasons and examples to support your answer.