

ARE WE AS GULLIBLE AS EVER?

The media love to make us laugh by showing us ads from bygone times that supposedly demonstrate how our simplistic ancestors would believe anything the nasty manipulative advertisers told them. Amazing panaceas in Victorian times that would cure anything from a head cold to arthritis. Smiling housewives with perfect families on early TV ads like the Oxo series starring 'Katie' and 'Philip'. Everything revolved around dinner as Katie informed Philip that "Oxo has nine good ingredients and 'gives a meal man appeal'." Also we were told by Bernard Miles that Mackeson 'looks good, tastes good and, by golly, it does you good'.

Since the first UK television ad in 1955 for Gibbs SR toothpaste ("tingling fresh"), marketing has come a long way. Marketers understand that we are now so clever that we will assimilate the selling message even when the creatives do their utmost to hide any hints of the product their ad is supposedly tempting us to buy. Possibly epitomised by the John Lewis Christmas ads such as the boy and the penguin or the bear and the hare which made no mention that they might be promoting a department store let alone John Lewis! They seem to have gone one step further this year, accused of traumatising children with their £7 million excitable Edgar the dragon ad, though they will no doubt argue that the social media uptake makes it all worthwhile.

Brian Palmer, creator of that revolutionary SR ad in 1955 says there's now a lot of

TV advertising he doesn't understand, and I'm with Brian on that one!

But are we really any more sophisticated than when we rushed out to buy the latest cure—all in the 1890s or Oxo cubes in the 1960s? According to Which? magazine's latest research into so-called Black Friday deals, definitely not.

Which? says that in 2018 95% of the Black Friday deals were bogus.

The websites concerned, including Amazon, John Lewis and Currys PC World promoted offers at higher prices than they sold the products in the weeks before or after Black Friday. Examples given by Which? were that "at John Lewis, a De'Longhi coffee machine was offered at £399 on Black Friday, but it was then discounted to £368 on at least 35 occasions in the following six months. Meanwhile, Amazon put its Echo (2nd Gen) on offer as 39% cheaper on Black Friday, when it had been cheaper on at least 13 occasions before that date".

Although the Which? findings were widely reported during the week leading up to Black Friday it didn't seem to put us off. Barclaycard, which was monitoring real-time transaction data for Black Friday, and processes almost £1 in every £3 spent in the UK, reported seeing a 12.5 per cent increase in the volume of transactions. Retailers also had a strong preceding week according to Barclaycard's transaction data, with many beginning Black Friday sales early.

Last year, the British Retail Consortium reported that retailers had their worst Christmas in a decade and the Office for National Statistics attributed this drop in sales to Black Friday. This is supported by research from McKinsey which shows that just 19 per cent of UK consumers participated in Black Friday in 2015 — but by 2017, this had soared to 54 per cent.

So why is this happening? The answer is clearly that millennials, Britain's first digitally native generation, are getting older



and wealthier. In fact, they're now starting to out-earn their parents. Millennials now have an average household income of £40,000, slightly above the £36,000 for Baby Boomer households.

Driven by the growing functionality of smartphones, they spend 60 per cent of their shopping time online. They want information to be quickly and easily available — research shows that a one-second delay in mobile load times can impact conversion rates by up to 20 per cent. So is it possible that they're a bit more sophisticated than us crusty old baby boomers like to think? Cash rich but time poor they know that not everything on Black Friday is the best bargain ever but it's a quick, easy and relatively low cost way of getting the Christmas shopping done and dusted rather than battling round the high street and still not getting everything they wanted. And if Edgar doesn't transparently promote John Lewis or some of their prices are not their best bargains, who cares? If their website doesn't load on your phone in less than a second you won't be buying anything from them anyway.

