

EH 101-106

12 February 2025

“Brands Are Not Our Friends” Evaluation

Dr. Ian Bogost suggests that companies use the “surprise and delight” tactic to trap customers into giving out free publicity (275). Bogost believes that the surprise and delight tactic is meant to get under your skin and when the feeling of the surprise disappears it is a lot less delightful. In the article “Brands Are Not Our Friends” published by *The Atlantic* in 2018, Bogost brings up manipulative strategies used on customers. In the article, he explains that brands have developed a way to bring joy to a person’s life using gifts to gain favor. Through these gifts, they are meant to bring about a sense of obligation to give something in return. Dr. Bogost discusses that it is used as a way for a brand to develop a relationship with its customers. He also explains that this tactic is not limited to just big brands or limited to people with a big social media presence. He believes this would allow a brand to come off as a friend who you are willing to give cheap publicity to. In the article, it is revealed to the audience that he had a run-in with Comcast that ultimately led to the creation of this article. Bogost’s point is in turn proven showing the effectiveness of this manipulative tactic that the companies employ (275-277). Even so, in the article, Bogost fails in his pursuit of explaining why brands are manipulative due to his poor evidence and his overly inflated ego.

Initially, Bogost’s poor evidence takes away focus from the main argument he is attempting to make about brand manipulation. In the article, his evidence comes off as word of mouth which would lead someone to question the validity of his evidence. Most of his evidence

is not something that can be found easily or at all in some cases. They are mostly personal accounts or stories that he has heard from someone who works at the companies in question. For instance, “Dickman cites the time a man asked Comcast how a friend’s son, who was in the hospital, could watch a Chicago Bears game, and the company gave him tickets” (Bogost 277). He then acknowledges that “Nobody saw any of this and the resulting publicity is just a bonus if it happens” (Bogost 277). Bogost uses this evidence to describe how Comcast used Chicago Bears tickets as a way to gain favor from a customer. Yet even with this evidence, he leaves out important information that would help bolster his claim. For this to work, Bogost would need to add documented proof that the people who received these tickets fell into a branding trap which would serve as extra ammunition for his declaration. Given that Bogost himself states that no one saw this take place, his lack of observable evidence causes his credibility to be questioned which is counterproductive when persuading a reader to their beliefs. He also asserts, “The fire victim was probably appreciative, but will he later feel indebted to a frozen-meat company? Likewise, Evan Wilt and Haley Byrd’s union is now forever bound to a chocolate bar” (Bogost 277). Within this evidence, he makes only assumptions as to how the other people who have experienced these things would feel. Bogost basing his argument outcome on probability is a poor choice when trying to sway the audience to be wary of brand manipulation. When he decides to ask a question he risks the possibility of alternate responses that don’t align with his own.

Meanwhile, Bogost’s persona comes off as self-inflating which can make a reader lose interest in the topic at hand. In the article, Bogost references his many encounters with a variety

of different companies. He uses this as an attempt to increase his reliability in the eyes of the reader. Notably, he states, “DiGiorno Pizza was my Twitter buddy for a while, although we seem to have fallen out of touch” (Bogost 275). In this statement, he is using his encounter with DiGiorno as a way to improve his image in the face of the reader. Bogost using this form of boasting is not necessary to the overall point that he is trying to make. It only serves the purpose of boosting his image to seem like he is larger than he truly is. He also states in the article that, “I once scorned Jolly Ranchers, only to have the brand chat me up moments later” (Bogost 275). This statement in the article also leans into the overall gloating nature that he tends to use when speaking about his social media conversations. When placed in the article, it can distract the reader from the overall message that is trying to be made. Due to this fact, Bogost loses sight of being objective and spends time boosting himself up which could be spent making his argument stronger.

However, the opposition might make it known that his argument was successful due to his sources. Bogost uses “Matt Dickman who does digital communication for Comcast” (276). Through him we get a type of insider knowledge of their branding Strategies. This source that he uses provides insight on what the purpose of surprise and delight is used for from Comcast's perspective. Bogost uses this useful source to enhance his case due to Mr Dickman seeing firsthand what types of things are done. His use of this source establishes his credibility with the reader showing that he is well connected with people in these spaces. He also cites Anna Lingeris who is “a Hershey’s brand-publicity representative” (Bogost 277). Bogosts use of Lingeris adds another source who works for an entirely different brand. He does this to show that it is not a one-time occurrence. Bogost shows that this is practically a fundamental piece of every

company's marketing. He uses her since she would be very hands on with employing these marketing strategies. Yet even with these valuable sources, his argument still falls short due to the possibility of bias. All of these sources he mentions are representatives of the companies in question. Bogost's use of these sources is not very helpful since it can be inferred that they would never speak poorly about their company on record. Ultimately, his argument still fails to prove the fact that brand manipulation is forceful in nature.

All things considered, Bogost is unsuccessful at persuading the audience to be wary of a brand's attempt at getting cheap publicity. He fails due to his inability to show his audience the deceptiveness of a company's tactics. In this way, Bogost is unsuccessful in his attempt to express the power of brand manipulation.

Works Cited

Bogost, Ian. "Brands Are Not Our Friends." *Reading Critically, Writing Well*, edited by Rise

B. Axlerod, Charles R. Cooper, Ellen C. Carillo, Macmillan Learning, 2023, 275-277.