

# Renegade Files®

**Episode Title:** Short Drives #4 – Subliminal Advertising – RFSD4

**MP3 File Name:** RFSD4-Subliminal

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Welcome to Renegade Files Short Drives #4 – Subliminal Advertising.

This is number 4 in our *summer series* of 13 shorter episodes called “Short Drives,” which look into strange stories, come out every Friday all summer long, and are ***in addition to*** our longer, regular episodes which still air twice a month.

These 13 short drives episodes are my presents to you for being a fan.

So come with me now as we get into Renegade Files, Short Drives #4 – Subliminal Advertising.

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Here is the link to the Business Insider Article with Subliminal Messaging photos mentioned in the episode: <https://www.businessinsider.com/subliminal-ads-2011-5?op=1#the-words-coca-cola-supposedly-engraved-in-the-one-ring-to-rule-them-all-3>

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### **Episode Text**

Hello and Welcome to Renegade Files Short Drives #4 – Subliminal Advertising.

I’m your host, Lex Gordon, Broadcasting from the Jungle Villa Outpost, Deep in the Uncharted Tropics. You are now in the company of Outcasts.

This is number 4 in our *summer series* of 13 quick episodes called “Short Drives,” which look into strangeness, come out every Friday all summer long, do not replace our regular episodes, and are bonus content gifts to you, for supporting the show.

If there is one fear shared by most of us, it’s the fear of being controlled by others. The fear of tyranny, dictatorships, and mind control is age old.

If someone else can make you do what they want you to do, you are not free. Pure Libertarians believe that any coercion should be illegal. And living in society at any level forces us to do a great many things. We are forced to work so we can pay taxes and not get arrested. We are forced to earn money because the necessities of life are bought and sold with currency.

We are forced to stop at the red light. The list is endless.

But most of us can suffer these forced behaviors for a few reasons: because the tradeoffs are logical and beneficial. At least most of the time. And because we know this going in. These things are a part of life that we are aware of, we are aware of the reasons, so we can put up with the norms of society. We go along to get along.

But how do we feel about being made to do something without any knowledge of the persuasion?

In general I think it makes us feel uncomfortable... we feel tricked and betrayed.

Advertise to us out in the open all day long. Tell us that we'll be safer if we buy your insurance, that we'll be happier if we buy your car, that our kids will like us more if we buy them your breakfast cereal, and that our spouse will stay with us if we take them on a cruise. Tell us that over and over Hundreds of times, and we're fine with it because we'll make the decision for ourselves in the end.

But flash a message quicker than we can consciously read it between the frames of a movie, and make us go by soda and popcorn when we don't really want it, and now we have a problem.

So is subliminal advertising a real thing? Is it something that works, and affects us everyday, without us ever realizing it?

Or is it just an urban legend, based on rumors that have become part of our collective consciousness, and nothing to worry about at all?

Come with me now into Renegade Files, Short Drives #4 – and we will explore the fascinating, controversial world of... Subliminal Advertising.

Tap the Patreon link in the show notes now, and subscribe to the Renegade Files Patreon Page.

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There are records that indicate subliminal messaging, at least in some forms, can be traced all the way back to the 5th century BC, when Greek philosophers and politicians would use subtle but persuasive language in efforts to influence others.

In modern times the idea got the attention of the public in the 20th century based on a few experiments that were rolled out at the time.

Some of the first instances of what we would today call subliminal advertising took place in 1943 As an effort to increase the sale of government bonds, which were being used to finance the war. One of the firsts that we know about was an animated short film featuring daffy duck Where the words “Buy Bonds” We're shown quickly on some frames of the cartoon.

A person watching the cartoon would never consciously see the words, and at the time officials didn't know if the messages would influence people or not, but the prevailing feeling was that it couldn't hurt, and it might help. Their goal of course... selling more war bonds.

This early attempt wasn't really tracked, and no data was collected before or after, and none of the people who watched the cartoon where ever followed up with because the whole thing was just a random throw it out there attempt. So we don't know if that subliminal messaging worked or not.

But then in 1957, a marketing researcher named James Vicary made several claims as part of his own self promotion campaign, to bolster his reputation as a savvy advertiser of the day, and by doing so created one of the most well-known and talked about instances of subliminal advertising In history.

James Vicary Claimed that he had worked with a movie theater, and embedded within single frames of the feature film, the words “Eat Popcorn,” and “Drink Coca-Cola.”

These words would appear for a fraction of a second between the action in the movie. By doing so James Vicary claimed that the movie theater increased their popcorn sales by 50% and Cola sales by 18% during the movies that featured the messages, when compared to the same movies when played at the same theater without the messages on other nights.

The story of his subliminal advertising success spread like wildfire, although not exactly in the way he had intended. Rather than making him a sought after advertising executive, his ability to influence people without their knowledge made him a villain in the eyes of the public, and fostered outcry from the citizens, which resulted in lawmakers raising concerns over the ethics and legalities of such subliminal advertising.

A few years after his initial claims, James Vicary came forward to publicly admit that he had actually faked the study. But the damage of public opinion had already been done, and debates ebbed and flowed for years, over whether or not he had really faked the study, or just said that he had, to cool down some of the criticism and judgment that the public was constantly dishing out to him.

Then we had a string of studies in the 60s the 70s, that mostly discredited the idea that subliminal messages could influence people's buying behaviors. These seem to be sort of knee jerk reaction studies to counteract the beliefs that the buy popcorn drink Coca-Cola messaging had worked in the movie theaters.

So for example one of these studies put the message, "Hershey's Chocolate," subliminally hidden in a series of slides during a college lecture, and then those students's buying behavior was recorded through surveys for 10 days. The researchers found that none of the students bought any more Hershey's chocolate than what would be considered normal, I guess, for those people in that period of time.

But as far as subliminal messaging goes, just the words, "Hershey's Chocolate," can't be considered a very provocative call to action. It's just the brand name.

So it's interesting because scholars will cite that study all the time in their claims that subliminal advertising doesn't work, but it doesn't seem like it was a very good attempt to begin with.

But the tide of professional opinion started to turn a little bit in the 1990s.

In one study from 1992 researchers had volunteers view photos of different people engaged in normal daily activities such as putting gas in their car, or buying coffee. After each image, the researchers would flash a photograph for a fraction of a second... too fast for the conscious mind to see.

Half of the viewers would be flashed a photograph of positive uplifting content, so like a baby smiling, or a happy teenager holding a puppy, or two people hugging.

The other half would be flashed a negative image after each picture they were shown, so like a woman crying at a funeral, dirty kids in the street of a war-torn city, or badly damaged automobiles roadside after a fatal crash.

When asked to describe the people doing the everyday activities in the photographs they had been shown before the subliminal images, the vast majority of participants who were subliminally exposed to positive images described the people in the previous photographs with positive adjectives. Things like successful, fit, or happy.

While the people who were shown negative images after these photos, described the same people as untrustworthy, depressed, or sad.

And studies continued to arise that seemed to indicate the efficacy of subliminal messages. For example in 2007 an academic study flashed hidden words to groups of students before an exam. Part of the students were shown words relating to intelligence, such as talent, knowledge, or genius.

The other half of the students were flashed words that had nothing to do specifically with intelligence, but at the same time we're not overtly negative. So words like tree, bucket, and bicycle.

Those who had been subliminally shown the words relating to intelligence, overwhelmingly performed better on the exams that were given a few days later, compared to the students who had been shown random neutral words.

Another really interesting exercise was performed by a university professor, and this doesn't exactly fall into the methods of subliminal advertising, but it is a strange situation so I wanted to share it. I originally came across this story while researching time slips for the previous short drive episode, the man from tarred, so be sure to go check that one out if you missed it. And be sure to tune in every Friday this year in June July and August for our 13 short drives episodes, but this story was a weird one.

So what happened was that throughout the semester a university professor would periodically give his class a pop quiz.

After some of the quizzes chosen randomly, he would give the answers aloud in the classroom after the students had finished the quizzes and turned them in.

And at other times he would not tell them the answers after the quiz, and they would just turn the quizzes in.

In both cases he would grade them at home and give them back in the next class.

What this professor found out was, that the vast majority of the quiz grades were far better on those pop quizzes where he would tell the students the answers **after** the quizzes had been handed in.

This suggests that the subconscious mind is somehow immune to the limitations of time, and is gathering these answers from the future before writing them down on the quizzes in the past. Of course there's no way to prove this, but this experiment has been successfully administered by other professors at other universities since, and the results are remarkably consistent.

Now like I said, this isn't exactly subliminal advertising, but it does speak to some mechanisms of the subconscious mind that we probably don't fully understand.

It seems that the latest studies have, in general terms, concluded that subliminal messaging can have effects on behavior, but maybe in more subtle ways than previously believed. We may not get up like zombies and go buy popcorn and

coke after seeing those words in a single movie frame. But that doesn't mean that subliminal advertising doesn't work at all.

And subliminal advertising messages go far beyond short phrases embedded in moving images. Some of the most famous subliminal advertising messages appear in the form of sexualized content hidden in otherwise benign components of print advertising.

Some examples include, a print ad showing a can of Coca-Cola, once again Coca-Cola making an appearance, and in the ad the coke can has clumps of ice clinging to its top edge. Look closely and you may see that the ice is in the shape of a busty naked woman lying on her back, the ice even forming her flowing hair as it's draped over the rim of the can.

While we're on the subject of Coca-Cola, it appears that the cursive script of the word Coca-Cola appears engraved on the one ring to rule them all, when Frodo sees the elvish words light up on the ring in the first Lord of the rings movie.

I'll put a link in the show notes to a [businessinsider.com](http://businessinsider.com) article where you can check out some of these images. Normally I would put these in the dark Intel files on Patreon, Haven't been putting up dark Intel files posts on Patreon for the short drives episodes, I may, but for now I'll just put a link to that article in the show notes because these images are pretty cool and I want you to see them.

Once I looked at a few of these I started to realize that this is one of those things that you could go way deep into. And what I mean is this is one of those situations where you could start seeing subliminal messages in everything you look at. And there are websites where people do just that, and draw little pixelated outlines around all manner of naughty words, private body parts, and depictions of boudoir activities, in everything from bowls of breakfast cereal, to the clouds in a car commercial.

That's not to say those images aren't there but you see what I mean.

There's an ad for a KFC chicken sandwich, which clearly shows a tiny dollar bill hidden in the sandwiches lettuce. Experts say that money hidden in ads like this convey the products as a way to attain power and wealth.

2 bottles of Heineken beer next to each other in an ad do look like legs and a naked butt... that is if you turn the ad upside down. That's a good one.

There's a not so subliminal ad for a Burger King sub shaped burger called the Super 7-incher We're a wide eyed girl with an open mouth poses in front of the elongated sandwich above a headline which reads quote "**it'll blow,**" (On the top line) and "**your mind away,**" On the bottom line. OK. That one is actually a bit shocking. It's so ridiculous that I had to look it up to see if it was real. Apparently

it is. It's probably from a while ago though, because it's advertising the sandwich, medium fries, and a medium drink for \$6.25.

Now-a-days that same thing would probably cost, what, I dunno... \$15 bucks?

So that's it for the images in that article, but if you look around the Internet there are Thousands of examples. One of the most famous is our old friend Coca-Cola which seems to be the champion of all subliminal advertising.

This is a pretty famous image from the 1980s and it comes to us in the form of a print advertisement for the new plastic Coca-Cola bottles, which were meant to replicate the old curvy shape of the original glass bottles of Coca-Cola, and the ad reads, "Feel the Curves."

The image in question here, is at the bottom of the ad where the bottle of Coca-Cola sits among a nest of ice cubes. In one of the ice cubes you can see the black silhouette of a, let's just say, sexual act, and it's very obvious when you know where it is and what you're looking for. So much so that when people pointed it out, Coca-Cola removed the ads and replaced them with new images that did not feature the subliminal sexual imagery.

In the 1977 animated Disney movie, the rescuers, there's a scene where the two main characters are climbing on to the back of the albatross to go on a flight. In that scene we can see windows in the wall of an apartment building in the background. In the original production, and for a fraction of a second, a naked woman appears in one of the windows. I'm really not sure why Disney insists on doing things like this. It's just kind of weird.

When people discovered this on their VHS home movie copies of the film, it became a huge public relations scandal for Disney, so much so that on January 8, 1999, Disney issued a recall of about 3-1/2 million VHS copies of the movie.

I have no idea how many they actually got back, but future releases of the movie had the naked lady taken out.

And there's a long list of sexual imagery that appears in Disney movies. I don't know if that's exactly subliminal advertising, but either way it's pretty creepy.

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So the question of whether or not subliminal all advertising is fully effective is up for debate. Some studies suggest that it is, while others suggest that it isn't. And the consensus seems to be that everyone agrees that it's not a good thing, because it leans towards sneakier manipulation than regular advertising in the 1st place, and that's saying something.

But in general terms most people agree that the effectiveness hasn't been proven enough for companies to risk the backlash of potentially being called out in a negative manner for using subliminal advertising. At least that's the party line in broad general terms.

But the fact is these things seem to constantly crop up over and over again. Part of that might be because there's no specific laws banning it. At least not in the US. Places like France and Australia have strict laws forbidding subliminal messages and advertising, but in the US it's just sort of a Gray area.

The FCC does not specifically revoke licenses for subliminal or deceptive marketing practices, but it has regulations against misleading advertising. If a company is found to be using deceptive practices, it could face penalties or sanctions from the FCC or other regulatory bodies.

There are no specific laws against subliminal advertising, but the FCC does have policy statements saying that the practice is against the public interest, and strongly discouraged.

There are, however, laws against deceptive advertising practices, and sometimes subliminal ads tread dangerously close to being deceptive. The catch is that any accusers have to prove intent, and the very nature of subliminal messaging causes the vast majority of that content to go consciously unrecognized by the public.

In the end our instinctive aversion to subliminal advertising is a manifestation of our fears about being controlled by others. Some of us hate being told what to do, but all of us hate being tricked into doing something.

Advertisers understand this and have no desire to alienate their customers. But if something works, and helps them sell even a small percentage more of whatever it is they're selling, you can be certain that they will take advantage of that method, if they can get away with it.

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ending sign off

Thank you sincerely for listening to Renegade Files, Short Drives #4 – Subliminal Advertising.

This is part of our *summer series* of 13 episodes called “Short Drives,” that look into strange stories, come out every Friday all summer long, and are ***in addition to*** our longer, regular episodes which still air twice a month.

Also be sure to check out our main Renegade Files Episodes, which are longer, come out about twice a month, and are deeper dives into esoteric subjects where logic clashes with the official narratives.

Come check out the RFA agency on Patreon through the link in the show notes, where you can try it out for free for a week, get bonus episodes and tons of additional content, and help me keep coconut cream on the rocks In my glass, with my feet up next to neo the tabby-cat, here at the jungle villa outpost, at the end of a long day of making the Renegade Files Podcast for you.

Until our next adventure, I'm your host Lex Gordon...

*Stay Wild, Analog Child!*