

Subliminal Perception - Fact or Fiction?

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The 1988 movie, “They Live,” by John Carpenter and starring Roddy Piper (former professional wrestler), illustrates the idea behind subliminal perception. You can view excerpts from the movie by going to the webpage on the [Propaganda Matrix](http://www.propagandamatrix.com/291103theylive.html) website focusing on movie, “They Live”; [<http://www.propagandamatrix.com/291103theylive.html>]. You can also rent or buy the movie, if you want to view the entire movie.

A discussion of the concept of subliminal perception can be found in the [Encyclopedia of Psychology](http://www.psychology.org) [<http://www.psychology.org>] - A. E. Kazdin (Ed.), Encyclopedia of Psychology (Vol. 7, pp. 497-499), New York: Oxford University Press, 2000 - type in the term, *subliminal perception*, in the search area once at this site - or use the following direct link to access the subliminal perception section: <http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~pmerikle/papers/SubliminalPerception.html>. This reference also discusses the classic “study” on this topic that was conducted by James Vicary (1957), a study that was set in a movie theatre.

Questions:

1. Using the relevant theories/concepts, evaluate what is happening in this movie.
2. Discuss the basic idea underlying this movie as it relates to the area of marketing in general, and to the areas of advertising and consumer behaviour, in particular. Incorporate the relevant marketing theories and concepts in your discussion.
3. Why was the use of subliminal advertising banned in the U.S. in the 1950s? (See McCarthy era literature)
4. Is there such a thing as subliminal perception?
5. What is your view of the effectiveness of subliminal advertising?
6. Roddy Piper makes use of semiotics (use of signs) at the very end of the movie (but we won't go there!).