



Sleeping bears then holiday deals – a month of TV agony

Here's a question for you... and I want you to answer it honestly.

Has your Christmas

shopping this year been influenced in any way by the big budget TV advertising rolled out by all of the major chains?

Every year all of the major brands spend millions and millions of pounds on their Christmas TV advertising campaigns – which is all well and good as they need to fight to persuade us to spend with them rather than their competitors. That's what advertising is all about after all.

But is it just me, or have the major advertisers started to lose the plot?

When you have huge product ranges to sell, you can't mention every single one in a short TV ad, so the original concept behind them was to make you feel warm and fuzzy and well disposed towards that particular brand so you'd visit the store and spend your way to Christmas.

Over the years there have been some great examples of this. This year, not so much.

From the John Lewis sleeping cartoon bear, to the Tesco home movie, via the Asda snowmen and the Boots hoodie teenager, they're all pretty ordinary. And research this week by brand experts The Nursery shows that consumers find it hard to tell the difference.

Morrison's Ant & Dec ad gets mistaken for Iceland because they sponsor *I'm a Celebrity*... but

December is beset with Christmas TV ad spectacles, quickly followed by a deluge of holiday ads. **DICK LUMSDEN** watches in dismay.

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everyone knows that the ad with the knickers is M&S, even if they can't name the celebrity models.

Sainsbury's have been teasing us for weeks with the promise of the full 'Christmas in a Day' ad appearing on YouTube. But if you can be bothered to go online and watch the full three minutes and 30 seconds, I can guarantee it won't leave you feeling any more Christmassy.

The only one which still does it for me – and it isn't a coincidence that it keeps coming out year after year – is the arrival of the Coca Cola Christmas truck. Proper Christmassy that.

But never fear... these ads will only run for another couple of weeks now, and no sooner will the Brussels sprouts be bubbling away in your stomach than we'll be assailed on all sides by the 2014 holiday ads.

TV advertising is a relentless machine, no respecter of time or budget. Forget the fact that you've just maxed out every credit card in your wallet to pay for Christmas... apparently in just over two weeks' time we need to start thinking about next year's suntan.

The sleeping bear will be replaced by majestic fjords off the starboard bow. Rosie Huntington-Whiteley's knickers by an

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avalanche of dodgy bikinis on a conveyor belt of package holiday ads.

Those of us of more mature years have seen this ebb and flow time after time, year after year, we've become immune to the messages. Leave it to the youngsters to be suckered into a full-board package to Lanzarote and an all-you-can-eat 24 hour buffet.

One story did catch my attention this week though, and it was the emergence of a new animal in our ranks – the grey gapper.

According to the wonderful internet, the definition is someone over the age of 55, prepared to leave home and travel the world for up to a year at a time.

Really! I wonder how many of those there are in the UK right now. Am I being a bit cynical in seeing this as nothing more than a PR stunt?

Yes, I accept that the over-55s may have the disposable income to be able to buy long-haul holidays, and I accept that those who are in retirement may want to get away for longer than the traditional two weeks. But a year at a time?

I asked you a question at the beginning of this article, now I'll ask another. If you could do it, would you set off on a gap year now, leaving behind family and social life in order to scratch the travel itch?

I'm over 55 and I love to travel, but no way would I want to be pigeon-holed as a grey gapper. Half the joy of travelling is coming back and boring everyone with your stories and then starting to plan the next trip.

Besides. By the time the year was up you'd face the prospect of watching Christmas TV ads in a foreign language wherever you were... now that really would be torture. Pass me the remote control!

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■ Dick Lumsden is managing director of Owl Marketing Solutions, a specialist in marketing and advertising to older consumers.

If you have any views on this article, or are over 50 and would like to take part occasionally in some gentle consumer research, please contact him on dlumsden@owlms.com