

Should audiences be warned about "hidden" or "stealth" advertising?

The Writers Guild of America, with backing from the Screen Actors Guild, has called for a code of conduct to govern the growing trend of hidden advertising in TV shows and films.

According to a released statement, the WGA said the new code should mandate full disclosure to viewers of all product integration at the beginning of each program where such placement exists. This would prevent audiences from being "subject to hidden or stealth advertising."

The bigger question is not that brand owners are contributing to the costs of film and television production in return for the opportunity of brand recognition, but whether audiences would pay the hiked ticket or license fee to cover the cost of production in another way. We risk becoming a nanny state if full disclosure means a warning before and after information is offered that advertisers have contributed to the production costs. Rather, audiences should take it for granted that they're being manipulated in some way – does it matter if heart-tugging emotional content makes them cry or a taut thriller has them on the edge of their seat any more than if they aspire to owning a BMW because James Bond is driving one in his latest movie?

Now that PVR's are available in this market and the power of the TV commercial is under attack – the alternative is branded content which engages rather than interrupts – surely a better alternative for consumers?

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