



MIDDLE SCHOOL | UNIT 5

Making Major Financial Decisions

Title

Who Has Your Back: Understanding Product Information Sources

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- **discuss** how they would decide what product to buy.
- **research** products by looking at reviews, advertisements, and social media.
- **evaluate** which products are the best buy—reasonably priced and work well.

Content Area

Social Studies

Grades

6–8

Overview

Where can you find reliable information about the products you want to purchase? Students will learn to evaluate sources while gathering information about a product from sources such as manufacturers' websites, retail websites, and consumer review websites. Students will explain what information is most helpful when making their decision in whether to purchase the product.

Themes

Personal Finance: Deciding where to spend your money

Social Studies: Evaluating sources of information

SS: C3 Framework for Social Studies Standards

D3.1.6-8: Gather relevant information from multiple sources while using the origin, authority, structure, context, and corroborative value of the sources to guide the selection

D3.2.6-8: Evaluate the credibility of a source by determining its relevance and intended use

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Connect

How does this connect to the student?

Students will purchase many items throughout their lives. Knowing how to evaluate a product based on reviews, advertising, and social media will help them make better decisions about spending their money.

How does this connect to careers?**Marketing Associate:**

Who develops a company's sales strategies to promote its products, services, or ideas? This is the work of the marketing department. A marketing associate is a common entry-level job in this field. The goal is usually to increase profits and boost customers' knowledge of the company.

How does this connect to technology?

More and more people are buying goods and services online. Unfortunately, some manufacturers and stores have been known to use deceptive advertising, social media influencers, and fake reviews to help promote their products. Learning how to identify these marketing practices will help students become better consumers.

Key Terms

Personal Finance: Advertising, marketing, influencer, bandwagon, call to action, fear tactics, testimonials, manufacturer's website, online retail

Social Studies: Evaluate sources, reliable, bias

Prepare

Background: With an increase in the popularity of online consumerism, customer reviews, **social media influencers** (someone with fame or credibility in a certain area who uses social media to persuade others to buy or use something), and advertising have a ubiquitous impact on students' decision making. Advertisers have several techniques they use to get people interested in their products. There are companies that businesses can pay to post reviews, and influencers are often given products for free so they will share something on their social media to help promote them. There are many ways that companies can use advertisements, reviews, and influencers to promote their products, and sometimes these methods include false claims. When students look at online reviews, advertising content, or social media posts by influencers, it will be helpful for them to know how to evaluate the source in order to determine if the information is reliable.

Advertisers sometimes use techniques like **bandwagon** (making you believe everyone else has a product), **call to action** (telling you what to do with commands like, "Buy now!"), **fear tactics** (claiming the product will solve something you worry about, like bad breath), and **testimonials and appeals** (users and celebrities showing drastic results) to convince consumers to buy their products. While the use of these or other techniques does not mean that the information is false, it is helpful for students to recognize when advertisers are playing to their emotions.

Some online retailers have figured out very intricate ways of posting fake reviews to increase their product ratings. Encourage students to be thorough when researching products by checking the reviewer's profile to make sure they are legitimate, paying attention to 3- and 4-star ratings as well as 5-star ratings, ignoring short or one-word reviews with excessive punctuation, and comparing reviews on large online retailers to those on manufacturers' websites.

Lastly, when considering a product promoted by a social media influencer, it is important that students consider the details. Was this person forthcoming about whether they received compensation or free items to promote a product? Is the review

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detailed and balanced, or is there a clear bias? Is the person promoting a product for its own merit or simply using celebrity to influence others?

Materials:

- **Buyer Beware Unit 5 Student Video**
- **Product Research Student Handout**—one per group
- **Computers with internet access**—at least one per group

Engage

- Share the following scenario with your students:
 - You have saved \$50 to buy a pair of wireless headphones or earbuds. Understanding that you will not have enough to purchase the most expensive name brand, you need to do some research to decide the highest quality product you can afford that will work with your device.
- Instruct students to turn to a peer and discuss the following:
 - How would you decide what pair to buy?
 - Where would you first look for information?
 - How would you know that the information you found was reliable?
- On the board, record the following categories
 - Manufacturers' websites (i.e., Apple, Beats, Bose, Sony)
 - Retail websites (i.e., Amazon, Best Buy, Target, Walmart)
 - Consumer review websites (i.e., Consumer Reports, CNet)
 - Social media
 - Friends and family members
- By having students raise hands, tally the number of students that would consult each category for information.

Teach

- Show the student video **Buyer Beware**.
- Reinforce the importance of acting on reliable information when making purchases. Explain the concept of **evaluating sources** (analyzing or evaluating information for credibility, reliability, accuracy, authority, and timeliness, and potential bias).
- Ask students to consider which of the categories on the board might be most reliable? Choose a few volunteers to share their thoughts.
- Divide your students into five groups. Assign each group one of the following product categories:
 - Hoverboards
 - Wireless speakers
 - Sunglasses
 - Cellphones
 - Sneakers

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- Distribute a **Product Research Student Handout** to each group. Instruct students to complete online research with their group to complete the chart.

Conclude

- Have each group share its product recommendation with the class. Students should explain what information they used to reach their conclusion and how they evaluated their sources.
- Direct students to submit an exit ticket answering the following question: Does knowing how manufacturers try to influence your buying decisions make you a better consumer? Explain.

Extend

- **Content:** Social media influencers are becoming much more important to marketing and advertising. There are even companies that help match products with the correct influencers. Challenge students to identify a social media campaign that was successful in promoting a product and another one that was unsuccessful.
- **Technology:** Challenge students to identify and evaluate mobile apps that encourage consumers to compare products and find information about products or services.
- **Family:** Invite students to utilize the techniques and resources learned about in this lesson to plan a family outing or meal out.

Product Research

Directions: Conduct online research to find the information needed to complete the chart.

Assigned Product Category:	
Search for “Best _____ of <current year>” and list the top three products:	1. 2. 3.
Visit the manufacturer’s website (i.e., Apple, Bose, Sony) for each product. Which would you buy based on the information and reviews found?	
Do you feel that the information and reviews you found were reliable?	Yes / No
Did you see evidence of false advertising techniques?	Yes / No
Visit a large online retailer’s website (i.e., Amazon or Walmart) and search for each product. Which would you buy based on the information and reviews found?	
Do you feel that the information and reviews you found were reliable?	Yes / No
Did you see evidence of false advertising techniques?	Yes / No
Search through social media sites (i.e., Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, etc.) for the product. Which would you buy based on the information and reviews found?	
Do you feel that the information and reviews you found were reliable?	Yes / No
Did you see evidence of false advertising techniques?	Yes / No
Based on your research, which product would you purchase?	