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In the Name of Science

Lumosity is a company that has been advertised in many forms of media. Like many other brands, they try to capture the attention of potential buyers by advertisements, user reviews, and other forms of media. While this is a necessary tactic for companies to gain success in a very competitive market, it is not uncommon for these promotions to get carried away. A group of 70 researchers, gathered at the Stanford Center on Longevity, claimed that Lumosity is one of these companies. They argue that there is no actual proof to support what Lumosity is selling. In the United States this is classified as “false advertising” or “deceptive marketing”. The FTC has to subsequently investigate Lumosity and deliberate in a federal court to decide if Lumosity should be charged with such claims.

Lumosity is a large, [brain training company](#) that does all of its interactions on the device the games will be played on (computer or smartphone). The brand is viewed largely, and therefore judged, by the content of their website, app, and games. Just like other competitive companies, the content presented is very calculated. Lumosity has to put a lot of effort into deliberating how to present itself, since there is no real face of the company that the consumers can associate with. With such pressure to present the product in a favorable way, many companies will try to stretch the truth. The effectiveness of the product, manufacturing of the product, and reviews of the product can all be exaggerated in order to increase marketability. These forms of false advertising are what Lumosity is being charged with by the [FTC](#). They advertise scientifically based games which aim to increase cognition in daily life. Also claiming to aid in mental ailments like ADD/ADHD and help the early onset of Dementia. The games consist of relatively

simple concepts that try to challenge the brain in various cognitive areas. Being the only product that offers these results, over 70 million people have subscribed since the company launched in 2007. Many of these users are elders suffering from a deteriorating brain or people trying to cope with with a mental disorder. This is the image Lumosity is trying to sell. The two tangible people faced with the charges, in addition to Lumosity/Lumos Labs as a whole, are [Michael Scanlon and Kunal Sarkar](#). Michael was a PhD neuroscientist student at Stanford and has a A.B. in psychology from Princeton. Kunal has a B.A. in economics from Princeton. Both were Co-founders of Lumosity, the reason why they were blamed for the deceptive advertising. Michael was the Chief Scientific Officer at Lumosity, taking responsibility for the exaggerated laboratory conclusions. Kunal was the chairman of the board of Lumos Labs, in charge of various business decisions, including what to emphasize in commercials and other forms of advertisements.

The basis for the charges placed by the FTC stem from the research conducted by a group at the [Stanford Center on Longevity](#). The center is part of Stanford University, located in Northern California. The group consists of 70 researchers in various disciplines, mainly those of neuroscience and psychology origins. All of these researchers were gathered under the research center, founded by Laura L. Cartstensen PhD. She approached Richard Rainwater, an investor in Texas, to fund the center in 2006. Although the center is an essential part of exposing Lumosity, the 70 researchers that participated in the experiments are the true voices that speak out against the false advertising of brain training. The research center simply supplied the researchers with the resources to conduct their work. The actual conclusions and findings are reflections of the actual 70 scientists involved. The origins of the scientists span across the country. The vast majority of them come from state universities, where most of them are either professors, assistant professors, or senior researchers. Many of these people were involved in research that *supported* brain training games, similarly to Lumosity. As described by the Stanford Center on Longevity's [list of signatories](#), some scientists, “(have) a current conflict of interest, defined as having financial interests

(research funding, stock options, or stocks) in the brain gaming or competing (e.g., pharmacological) industries.” This shows how much these scientists want legitimate research to be done. The conclusions they made would serve no other purpose than to find the truth in cognitive research/training, ignoring their personal stakes in the matter.

The enforcer of these allegations is the FTC (Federal Trade Commission). Since their job is to protect the public from any form of false advertising, all of the investigation and subsequent statements are made public, in order to adequately inform the consumers. The FTC is a section of the government responsible for protecting consumers from various forms in which companies or other entities try to cheat the system. Since the FTC is a governmental department, most of its relationship to the public exists in legal documents and its own official website. While the website will give a more comprehensible explanation for the public, the official documents have more legal terminology. These documents are also where the FTC states [its official claims](#). There is an extreme focus on policy. There is also never one "spokesperson". Since the FTC remains unbiased, there is no room for opinion. The department rather acts as a collective enforcer of governmental policy. The FTC decided that since Michael and Kunal were the co-founders of Lumosity, and were responsible for the violations in both research and advertisement, they would have to face the 2 million dollar charge. The charge focuses on the fact that Lumosity did not have sufficient scientific evidence to back up their advertisements and how the testimonials on their website were solicited through incentives, including prizes like trips to San Francisco. The final settlement mandates Lumosity to pay the FTC 2 million dollars and send the subscribers an email explaining exactly what the charges were. Lumosity was also required to supply an easily accessible way to cancel subscriptions.

Even after the lawsuit has been settled, Lumosity still defends its product, stating Lumosity has made, “strong contributions to the scientific community, including our work with the Human Cognition Project initiative.” With Lumosity never actually admitting to purposefully deceiving consumers, it is hard to tell

whether or not the actions were calculated or accidental. Either way, it is important for scientists like the 70 researchers at the Stanford Center on Longevity to keep questioning this type of cutting edge research. The people who paid the monthly \$14.95 fee or the \$299.95 annual fee, deserve to know that the product they are buying is legitimate and worth their time and money. This is especially important when claims are made such as improving mental cognition and ability in areas like work and school. This particular case of false advertising means more than just a useful product. People looking for help in simple daily activities were investing time and effort in order to receive it. Since 2007, subscribers had the impression they were saving themselves from age-related memory loss, ADD/ADHD, and other mental disorders. In reality they were wasting money and time. Not only does the work done at the research center allow the consumers to stop wasting these resources, but also pushes forward the research in mental cognition as more legitimate work is done.

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