

Children and advertising: A study on advertising understanding and effects on children

Georgia Komodromou

**PROJECT REPORT SUBMITTED IN PART REQUIREMENT OF THE
BACHELORS DEGREE IN BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION
OF
THE NEAPOLIS UNIVERSITY**

Spring 2015

Acknowledgements

First I would like to thank the children who with their collaboration helped me to collect enough information about the way they think in terms of advertising. Their participation was valuable in gathering information which was a necessary element in the development of my research.

I could not omit to thank the parents and the school of the children who gave me their consent to conduct my research.

A big thank you also deserves to my lecturers

And finally a big thank you to my parents who believed in me and constantly supports me on me both at good and bad times.

Abstract

This study explores how children understand television advertising and it concentrates on how differently each child responds according to his/her age (6 to 11 years old). It is essential to mention that 36 focus groups were selected. The results showed that all 6 years old children spend most of their free time watching television. Therefore, it has been observed that young children find difficulty to distinguish advertising from the other TV programs. Older children (7 to 11 years old) could easily distinguish advertisements from programs. When children grow up, they increasingly comprehend television advertisements. It becomes clear that children are confused regarding the source of television advertisements. More particularly, it is more confusing for younger children between 6-8 years old. On the contrary, older children who are 10 and 11 years old were able to state who pays in order for advertisements to appear on TV.

Moreover, this study examines the effect of advertising on children from the age of 6 to 11 years old. It becomes obvious that advertisers concentrate on children because they have no the emotional or cognitive experience to evaluate effectively the products that they advertise. While TV is a way to transmit knowledge and education at the same time it may also be harmful due to the bad effects it has upon children. In this particular study it has been found that children affect the purchasing decisions of their parents. Furthermore, the results show that if parents refuse to fulfil their children's desire they react by complaining. This often results to conflicts between children and parents.

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1 Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

In our days the effects of advertisements on children increase rapidly because of the increased intensity by which children are targeted by marketers. Children are considered a frequent consumer target group mainly because of their role as consumers, influencers on family purchases and as a future market. Advertisers use traditional methods of promotion like television advertising extensively but they are also rapidly adopting new advertising venues, such as children's websites and games.

To be able to understand how advertising works with children it is important to look into different aspects of how children understand advertising and how they are influenced by advertising. This study investigates the cognitive effects of advertising on children from the age 6 until 12 years old. These particular effects include the level of attention given to advertisements, the child's ability to distinguish between advertisements and programmes and child's interpretation and memory of the advertisements (Gunter et al. 2005). According to some studies (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003) children understand advertisements depending on their age. However in this study we will investigate children's ability to understand the intent of advertising. If children do not fully understand the intention of television advertising, they may need "protecting" from those advertisements. Such protection may be restricting the number, type, or content of advertisements, or even banning particular advertisements.

It is true that some advertisements could affect children in a positive way. Children can become more aware of the product in the market that interests them (Gunter et al. 2005). On the other hand other advertisements send messages that have negatives effects on children. For example they may make them more materialistic, they can create pestering and conflict within the family or they can lead children to unnecessary purchases (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003). The advertisements that have children as a target

audience use lights, sounds, happy atmosphere and famous people in order to attract children's attention.

Children constitute a particular target of advertising firms. Through television children are bombarded with thousands of useless and harmful products and they become addicted in unwise consumerism. They also become materialistic through advertisements since they are constantly exposed to products they "must have" in order to be happy (Buijzen and Valkenburgh, 2003). So children that watch these advertisements ask from their parents to buy these particular products. If their parents refuse, their relationship might develop in a very negative way e.g. disagreements, quarrels between children and parents (Gunter et. al., 2005) or even conflict (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003).

1.2 Research purpose

The purpose of this research is to study the cognitive effects of advertisements on children from 6 to 12 years old. Also my aim is to understand how they distinguish the intention of advertisements. With the children's help I gathered information on how they understand advertising.

Many times behind the presentation of advertising messages there is hidden a dishonest nature of advertising messages. This is something that children often do not understand or do not recognise and it may lead to a series of unwanted effects. Finally I studied the emotional response of each child in relation to advertising. For example what children like or do not like, to what specific stimuli do they respond to and what kind of advertisements do they prefer.

1.3 Research question

As mentioned above, this study investigates children's understanding of advertising and the existence of unintended effects of advertising on children from age 6 to 12 years old. The research question formed for the purpose of

this study is “How does advertising influence children?” and it is broken down to three major areas:

- a) the understanding of advertising.
- b) the emotional response of a child in relation to advertising
- c) the influence of advertising on children's behaviour

1.4 Research objectives

To be able to answer the research question a number of specific objectives needed to be set. These objectives concentrate on the three areas of the research question as mentioned above. The objectives are:

- To discover how children understand the purpose of advertising.
- To explore which aspects of advertising children understand
- To examine whether children of different ages are able to distinguish advertisements from television programs

1.5 Thesis outline

This thesis consists of six chapters. Chapter one includes the research question and main aims and objectives of the current study. Chapter two includes a comprehensive review of the literature review. Chapter three includes the methodology of the research. Chapter four includes the results and finally chapter six includes the conclusion and recommendations.

Chapter 2: Literature review

2.1 Introduction

Advertising is a promotional tool which usually utilises mass media and it is used by many companies in order to persuade their readers, listeners and viewers to buy a product or receive a service (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). It is one of the most important marketing tools for a business to increase the sales of their products. It is important to state that the marketers need advertisements because they have in their minds that a consumer will buy a product because he/she needs it (Shimp, 2008).

As we know before we start making an advertisement we should identify our target audience, and then understand the consumer's behaviours and their habits based on their purchases. Also, we should focus on their needs and wants. Advertisements are created depending on the target audience (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). Children as a target audience are in the centre of debate mainly because of the fact that they are considered to be a sensitive and vulnerable segment of the population which needs special attention (Gunter et al. 2005).

Advertisements can appear in newspapers, magazines, radio, television, films, websites, billboards, posters, back to event tickets, cars, taxicabs, buses, trains, subway platforms, airplanes, shopping carts, supermarket receipts, coffee cups and mobile phone screens (Shimp, 2008). With regard to children advertisers typically use television advertising (Gunter et al., 2005) even though newer media are now used to reach them.

Endorsement is an important tool for advertisers through which they can persuade the consumer. Advertisers are willing to pay huge salaries to celebrities who are respected by the target group and who will favourably influence consumer's attitudes and behaviour towards the endorsed products. The celebrity endorsers must have specific skills, knowledge or abilities in

respect to the brand. Advertisers use people which draw the attention of audience. Usually they are models, football players and singers (Rozendaal et. al., 2011). It is very important as an advertiser to feel and to think like a customer. In other words, to try to be in the customer's position and try to approach each advertisement from their perspective. Advertisers targeting children usually use endorsers that appeal to them like cartoon characters, singers, other children or animals (Gunter et al., 2005)

The most important step is to have an accurate and clear advertising message that will easily be received by the target group. In this way they will understand your marketing object, product or services and you will make them trust you. Finally, a marketing communicator should always send the right message to the right audience (Rozendaal et. al., 2011).

2.2 *Ethical issues in advertising*

Ads to be moral must not be misleading and but they must be true. By saying misleading advertisements I mean when they contain false information and are therefore untruthful. Misleading advertisements have a purpose to deceive consumers to buy the advertised product. The promotional pictures make their products look better than they actually are and thus can influence consumer's behaviour without even noticing it (Gunter et al. 2005).

For many human beings advertisements are positive. Many believe that advertising manipulates the general public. Through the hidden messages they can influence consumer's behaviour and consumer's choice. Also, ads use famous people to send messages to the subconscious mind of human.

These messages are nothing else but messages emitted while advertisement are on, without hearing or seeing but consciously apprehending and are perceived by the subconscious. This is because the message is sent to the listener without even noticing his/her senses directly. So the conscious knowledge and desire cannot analyze it, to judge so as to accept or reject it.

Sometimes ads can be offensive for human intelligence, vulgar and generally unfair for many consumers. The ads concentrate most of the times on practices such sexual explicit or implied, bizarre humour and excessive repetition of the same ad. Advertising and the media should try to be sensitive to consumer's objections (Gunter et al. 2005).

Advertising is a very powerful marketing tool that communicates with the mass audience using the media. Businesses use advertising to maximize their profits and so they convey misleading ideas simply to attract the market and increase their profits. The weakness of the human mind is often exploited by such advertisements by influencing people to buy things that they do not actually want to buy.

2.3 *Effects of advertising*

Children are not capable to perceive advertisements in the same way that adults do. Because of this, children are very vulnerable and advertising affects them (Rozendaal et. al., 2011). This problem appears mostly in children under eight years old because they tend to believe that advertisements always present the truth. Children's behaviour is influenced through what they see. As a result they buy the products that they see in advertisements on their own or by asking their parents to buy them (Rozendaal et. Al., 2011).

Many times disagreements exist between children and their parents. Parents refuse to buy the products that their children want because they have seen them in an advertisement on TV or somewhere else. In many cases children's requirements affect the decisions of the whole family when it comes to shopping (Buijzen et. al., 2003).

In nowadays media has spread to the extent that never existed before. Children become subjects to a large number of advertisements. Except from

the television at home, there are advertisements in their schools and in their classrooms. It has been estimated that a child sees an average of 40,000 advertisements on TV each year. Advertisements that concentrate on children are relevant with products such as toys, chocolates, cereals, snacks and other sweets (Singh and Kaur, 2011).

Because children cannot understand the advertiser's intention which is to convince them, they become easy targets. As a result advertisers become very powerful (Rozendaal et. al., 2011). Often the products that are advertised, especially from television are not healthy for children. This contributed to the deterioration of obesity that appears between children.

As mentioned above children are an important target for food companies. This means that their food preferences and habits could change as a result of too much exposure to unhealthy food. As a result advertising to children is often linked by researchers with overweight and obesity (Halford et. al., 2007; Halford et. al., 2004).

Intended effects can be divided into three categories. First we have the cognitive effects, including the awareness of children about the brands. Second we have the emotional effects, such as children's preferences for particular products. Finally the behavioural effects, including children's purchase request. The intended effects relate to children's brand recognition, preferences and request for purchase and the unintended effects relate to the materialistic orientation, parent – child conflicts and unhealthy eating habits (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003).

The unintended effects of advertising are enmity, conflict, unhappiness, materialisms and purchases without permission (Singh and Kaur, 2011)

2.4 *Unintended effects of advertising*

Nowadays children spend most of their free time watching TV. While TV is a good medium for the transmission of knowledge and education at the same

time it may be harmful depending on the impact that it leaves in the children's brain. Marketers are trying to plant the seeds of brand recognitions in the minds of young children, hoping that the seeds will grow into long-term relationships (Singh and Kaur, 2011).

Almost every aspect of children's lives is negatively affected by recent trends of advertising and marketing. Results from previous studies have shown that advertisements are associated with the increase of violence, obesity (Halford et. al., 2007) and eating disorders in children as well as increased levels of conflict in the family (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003) and negative value. In earlier times advertisements which were concerned with children were made directly to parents but today they address directly the children. This trend creates ethical questions about whether it is appropriate or not to directly target children as studies have shown that especially younger children are not as able to appreciate what the marketers are trying to sell (Singh and Kaur, 2011).

Children have a huge impact on their parent's lives (Nadeam and Bradley, 2012). They often influence a wide variety of the family's purchasing decisions. Their influence ranges from the purchase of cheaper, daily consumed products like cereals and past to more expensive and complex products like the choice of holidays or even the purchase of a car. For this reason it is particularly interesting for marketers to utilise the influence that children have on their parents and also to other family members regarding their purchasing decisions of the family (Nadeam and Bradley, 2012)

2.5 Cognitive effects

The intent of advertising is to inform, teach, entertain, sell and persuade (Kapoor and Verma, 2005). Advertising not only offers information but facilitates towards further learning for the nature of the product. You can learn something about the product just from advertising. Advertising also offers you information on what is available in a shop. Apart from television

advertisements children can see advertising in games, in websites, in newspapers, in magazines, in cinema and posters. This concept of television advertising having an information role is consistent with Preston's (2000) observation that advertising may seek to give children information about products or else have purchased for them (Adronikidis and Lambrianidou, 2010).

An important question is to on what extent the child is able to process the advertising in a conscious and critical way. First we should be able to differentiate advertising from the content of other media (television programs, editorial web content). Second we must understand that the ads are trying to influence their purchasing behavior. Third children need to know that advertisers try to influence their behavior by changing attitudes or cognition for a product on advertising. And finally children need to understand the ways advertisers use in order to convince them to buy the advertising product (Adronikidis and Lambrianidou, 2010).

If children know all these then he/she is able to process advertisements and so are less likely to undue influence from them. Advertisers attempt to change their attitudes, cognitions and behaviors. Developmental theories suggest that the most important changes in children's advertising literacy occur before the age of 12 (Shimp, 2008).

The cognitive effects of advertising on children are the level of attention given to advertisements, the child's ability to distinguish between advertisements and programs and finally the child's interpretation and memory of advertisement (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003). The child can understand sometimes the intention of the advertisement.

According to older investigations there are many disagreements on how advertising affects children. This disagreement can be based in various ages that were studied but also on the methodology that was used to collect information (Lawlor and Prothero, 2003).

Children cannot analyze and evaluate the information they receive, analyze the agenda of the advertiser and distinguish advertising from the other television programs at all ages. Children from the age of four, start to distinguish between advertising and television programs. Children of 8 years old can understand the convincing attitudes of advertising. And finally children from the age of 12 have less confidence to the advertisers (Kapoor and Verma, 2005).

In previous surveys children have been asked what the purpose of advertising is and they provided few answers. Children of 6 years old said that the purpose of advertising is to inform us, to have a break from the TV program and to inform us what programs there are on TV during the week. The older kids of 8 years old replied that the purpose of the ads is to inform, to have a break from the TV program and to encourage their consumers to buy the advertising product. And finally children of 10 years old responded that the purpose of the ads is to inform, to have a break from the TV program, the advertising companies make profits and convince the consumer to buy their products .Consequently, as the child grows up, his/her cognitive abilities increase (Oates, 2003).

According to previous studies that were conducted in Sweden, children under the age of 12 years old do not understand the intentions of advertising (Oates, 2011). That was the main reason for which Sweden banned advertising directed at children below the age of 12 years. According to previous investigations, cognitive development intervenes in children's understanding of television advertising and their reaction to it. There are other factors such as parental intervention, media literacy, consumer experience and program/ advertisement separator which are very important factors that help a child understand the intention of the TV advertisement addressed to them. Children slowly, but gradually, can develop their understanding of the intentions of advertising that can be conveyed both in linguistic and formal elements (Buijzen and Valkenburg, 2003).

The knowledge of a child can be expressed through their verbal answers. At the same time a big part of children's knowledge cannot be explained verbally

or consciously. However, this knowledge can influence the thinking and the behavior of the child (Shimp, 2008).

3 Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Research design

Children are a group which presents researchers with challenges as to how to collect data. A quantitative approach is not considered appropriate when researching children's attitudes, knowledge and behaviour. Questionnaires may provide misleading information when used with children because of children's limited linguistic and written abilities (Lewis and Lindsay, 2002). Since this research depends on children's participation the most appropriate method of research approach is qualitative (O'Sullivan, 2005). In our case we take into consideration children's opinion and perceptions on various aspects of advertising. We considered that this is the best research approach because with this method it gave us the opportunity to have a conversation face to face with the children and encourage them to feel comfortable share more information with us.

The qualitative research is a more open ended research and flexible method compared to the quantitative approach which is another advantage when doing research with children. Through this approach we were able to Also we choose the qualitative research because we want to communicate better with our sample. Another advantage of this method is the ability to register non-verbal reactions. Specifically, we could understand children' feelings about various topics through their reaction or facial expression.

There are three types of data collection in qualitative research, which is the observation, interview, and focus group (Burns and Bush, 2010). Each one possesses advantages and disadvantages. For the purpose of this study and taking into consideration the fact that the respondents were children focus groups were chosen as the best method of data collection. The choice of tool is further discussed in the sections that follow.

3.2 Research tool

The ideal research tool for the specific research given that we needed to deal with children is focus group research (O'Sullivan, 2005). Focus group deals with small groups of people that discuss various topics so as to gain information relevant to the research problem. The goal of the focus group is to obtain insights, feelings, thoughts, and knowledge through the interaction of the participants in a tolerant and non-threatening environment (Porcellato et al., 2002).

When putting children in a focus group you automatically give them the incentive to speak and make them feel comfortable as well. The fact that they are in a group with their peers makes them feel more at ease and assists in a better interaction between them. This interaction is very beneficial for the data collection as it assists in gathering richer data. Children also tend to be more willing to share information and opinions when dealing with issues in a group as opposed to directly answering questions in a personal interview setting (Lewis and Lindsay, 2002). In other words in the focus group research when a question is asked a child can begin to answer and another child could continue the conversation adding more information in the data collected. As a

consequence a superior quality and quantity of data from diverse children will be collected in a short period of time.

3.3 Sample

Since my purpose is to understand the impact of advertisements on children, the ideal sample for this survey is children between 6-12 years old. Children start becoming more independent and start having pocket money for their personal purchases at these ages and it is interesting to study their purchasing behaviour regarding the advertised products. They are also freer to watch various media and are more prone to persuasive messages. Understanding children and helping them at these age groups assists them in being better able to defend themselves against promotional attempts. Children above the age of twelve are teenagers which is a separate age category and falls outside the scope of this study.

This age group was also able to understand the meaning of the research and was able to contribute to the data collection more than would younger age groups.

Regarding gender it would be great to use boys and girls as well. The reason for the selection of the two genders is due to the fact that both have the same research importance in the study of advertising

A total of 180 children aged 6-12 years took part in this study. Data analysis showed that this number was satisfactory for the purpose of this study as after a point no new data came up. According to the focus group method when repetitions start to appear and no new data are collected we can stop collecting information.

Concerning the recruitment of the research our participants they came from four different schools from four different cities Nicosia, Larnaca, Famagusta, and Limassol. In this way children from various areas were represented in the

sample. Each focus group consisted of 5-6 children of the same age each time. Groups were mixed gendered, i.e. they included both girls and boys.

It is important to take into consideration the characters of children that will be in each focus group. Children's characters consisted a fundamental challenge in the successful organisation of the focus groups discussion. For example very talkative children can benefit the data collection process but at the same time they might prevent more shy children to express their opinions. For this reason the role of the moderator (which is explained below) was very important.

3.4 Research process

In this particular research we have to deal with children from 6 to 12 years old, so we have to be very carefully of what issues we are going to raise. This is a vulnerable group and it is very important not to raise issues such as sexuality, violence, criminality and death because all these topics affect negatively the psychological world of a child. Because children are a vulnerable group we need the consent of parents and of the school management. This thesis was part of a wider project undertaken by Frederick University's Business Department on the effects of advertising to children with the purpose of developing an advertising education program. The first step was to acquire a formal permission from the Cyprus Ministry of Education who approved the project and the focus group guides. Once formal permission was acquired, permissions were also granted from a number of Primary School Principals and then we gave consent forms to the children to give to their parents to sign that they approve and agree for their children to join the research. With the agreement of the school principal, the interviews were conducted in a school classroom during school hours. Each group interview lasted approximately 30-45 minutes.

The interview started by inviting the children to talk about their television viewing practices and preferences. Then children were invited to discuss advertisements that they had seen on television and were then asked to

indicate how they differentiate between an advertisement and a programme. An area that was exhaustively discussed was their understanding as to the rationale of advertising or advertising intent. It was observed that children spoke very knowledgeable about television advertising and programming and an analysis of the transcripts illustrated a level of sophistication and familiarity across the groups, with advertising strategy and techniques. A number of general themes/questions were introduced into each discussion such as "tell me why there are ads on television" and then children introduced their own observations, for example, of a celebrity appearing in an advertisement, the facilitator probed using phrases such as "tell me more about that" and "why do these people appear in ads?" A key consideration in this research was the requirement not to 'lead' the respondents but instead to encourage them to discuss their experiences of advertising in their own words. The interviews were tape-recorded with the permission of the children.

3.5 *Ethical considerations*

When following appropriate ethical standards in qualitative research, respondents should be given the content, and purpose of the study so that they may make an informed judgment about whether they wish to participate. Any assurances, such as confidentiality, must also be kept by the researcher. There are several ethical issues that must be considered when designing research that will utilize participants who are human beings. Researchers must be sensitive to not only how information is protected from unauthorized observation, but also if and how participants are to be notified of any unexpected findings from the research that they may or may not want to know.

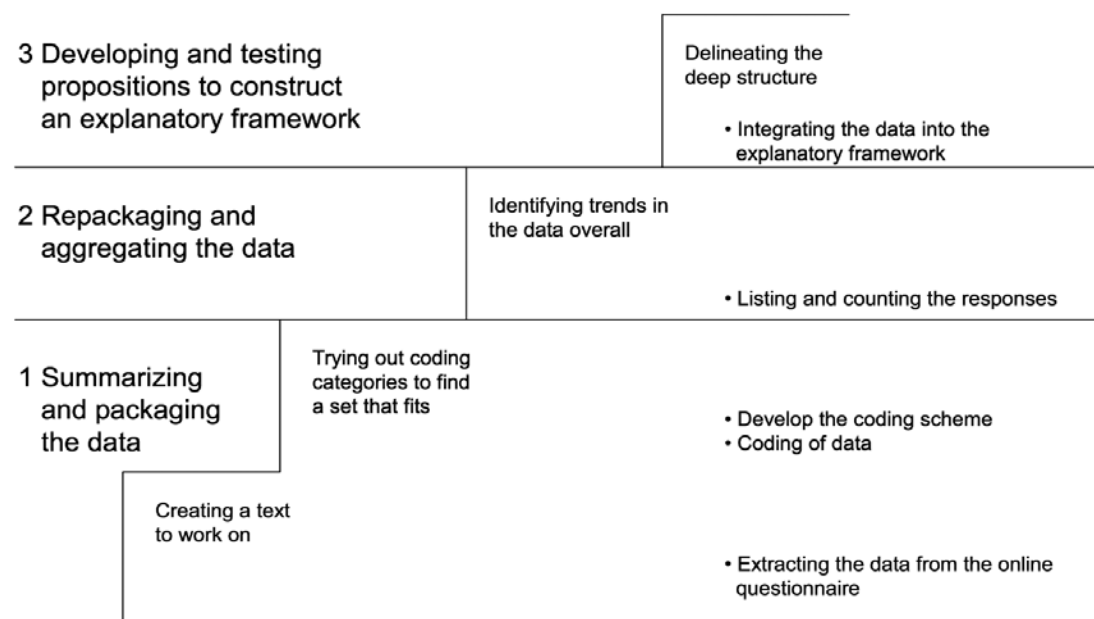
Especially when doing research with children, it is important to take into account the ethical considerations mentioned above. The first consideration in this case was to get parents' consent because they are the ones responsible for the welfare of their children. Then a detailed explanation was given to the children about the purpose and process of the focus group and finally children

were given the right to withdraw from the focus group discussion at any time they wanted.

3.6 *Method of analysis*

The data were analysed using template analysis. To assist in the extraction of results, the 'Ladder of analytical abstraction (Miles and Huberman, 1994) was used, see figure???

LEVELS



Source: Miles and Huberman (1994)

First I collected the information from children through focus groups. The conversation between children and me was recorded. When data was collected a transcription was created with their answers. A template analysis was used to guide along my research. Tables which included the coding of the data were also created. The tables were created to help me in better analyze of my results and identify trends in the data overall. Then I wrote my conclusions from the data and registered the results having to do with how understanding of advertisements influences children.

4 Chapter 4: Results and Discussion

4.1.1 Ability to differentiate advertising from television programs.

One of the topics that emerged through the discussions with the children was whether children between 6 to 12 years old can understand and distinguish between advertisements and a television program.

The results showed that the majority of children in all age groups had the ability to perceive that there were differences between advertisement and a television program. However, there were few children who could not distinguish advertising from a television program. Therefore it is clear that younger children in my sample (6 years old) were confused about the distinction of advertisements from television programs. Children of 6 years old were confusing advertisements with the news announcements and television programs. Therefore younger children were not able to tell why advertising is different from a program and children of 6 years old found it difficult to talk about advertising. On the contrary, children between 7 to 11 years old could more easily distinguish advertising from television programs. Children of 10 and 11 years old have had no difficulty distinguishing commercials from television programs and clearly expressed their like or dislike of advertisements. In general, older children could easily talk and give information about advertisements.

Examples:

“ An advertisement is when during a football match a fan of Apoel threw firecrackers and destroyed the stadium” (6 years old)

“ Advertisements show a product on television in order to make us go and buy it” (7 years old)

“ Advertisements for shops and products interrupt programs while I am watching TV” (8 years old)

“ When something new is out to the market they advertise it in order to make people go and see it and then buy it” (9 years old)

“ Advertisement stops a program in order to show an advertisement”
(10 years old)

“ Advertisement stops a program at the time when action and suspense exists so as to advertise something” (11 years old)

4.2 Type of advertisements children liked

The majority of children from the ages of 6 and 7 years old showed a positive attitude towards advertisements, stating that they enjoyed watching commercials and they believed that the information provided was true. More particularly, some of the 6 to 7 year old children declared that they preferred funny, interesting, and attractive advertisements, without, however, being able to identify them.

In general, throughout the discussion I had with the children I find out that 6 year old children tended to like advertisements. Also 7 year old children liked advertisements and saw them as a source of entertainment they liked them because sometimes they were funny and attracted their attention and interest.

Generally it seemed that most 8 year old children liked watching advertisements. However in some cases some children said that they did not like watching advertisements because they interrupted their favourite programs.

And finally children between 9 to 11 years old stated that they did not like advertisements. According to children of this age, advertisements interrupt children's favourite programs. Children change the channel when an advertisement appears because they are bored. However there are also few children who liked advertisements.

Examples:

“ I like when advertisements stop a program and then it continues”
(Children of 6 years old)

“ I like it when advertisements appear on TV.” (7 years old)

“ I want the existence of advertisements.” (8 years old)

“ I get bored of advertisements because they last 5 minutes and I lose the program”. (9 years old)

“ When advertisements appear the program is paused in a very critical point” (10 years old)

“ I do not like advertisements” (9 years old)

“ Advertisements are annoying” (10 years old)

“ Advertisements are nice” (11 years old)

4.3 Advertising definition.

Most children said that advertisements exist in order to promote their products. Children claimed that in this way consumers are prompted to purchase only the advertised products.

Younger children (6 years old) did not have clear opinions on matters concerning advertising, and only expressed vague opinions. Children of 6 years old could not express their opinion on what is advertising.

Generally children between 7 to 9 years old argued that advertisements promote some products to fool people and convince them that everything is fine and to trick them into buying advertised products. However in some cases children said that advertisements inform us about some products or stores. Children between 7 to 9 years old thought that one of the functions of advertising was to provide a break, both for the viewers and the people involved in the television program. Also a child of 8 years old said that

advertisements exist so we can have a break from watching TV and go to the toilet.

Children from the older age group (10 to 11 years old) were the only ones claiming that advertisements exist in order to encourage people to buy the advertised products.

Examples:

“ no answer” (6 years old)

“ Advertisements show us some offers to fool us into buying the advertised product”. (7 years old)

“Advertising exists in order to go to the toilet”. (8 years old)

“ Advertisements promote some stores in order to go and shop from there”. (9 years old)

“ Supermarkets use advertising in order to promote their products and make us go and buy them”. (10 years old)

“ Advertisements make us go and buy products that we do not need”. (11 years old)

“ When advertisements are on, the people who play in the program can rest”. (11 years old)

Children between 7 to 11 years old told us that advertisements inform us about what is new. Advertising helps the customers to learn about the new products of a shop and they inform them about the prices and offers of particular products. Also, some children stated that during advertisements they can have a break since they can go to the toilet.

However, there are some children who said that advertisements are not necessary and do not help us but instead mislead us. Also a small number of children expressed negative attitudes towards the usefulness for advertisements. They suggested that since advertisements interrupt the program, which is annoying, they should not exist.

Examples:

“no answer”(6 years old)

“Advertisements inform us for something”.(7 years old)

“Advertisements are good because they inform us for some facts”. (8 years old)

“Advertisements tell us what are the products of a particular store”. (9 years old)

“Advertisements inform us how we can go to a new restaurant” (10 years old)

“Advertisements mislead us and we buy some things that we do not need” (11 years old)

4.3.1 The selling intent of advertising

Another issue that emerged through the discussions that was relevant to whether children understand advertising was their ability to understand the selling intent of advertisements. The majority of children showed that they understood the intention of advertising. The older children from 7 to 11 years old believed that if there were no advertisements people would not know what products are available in the market.

Therefore it can be assumed that older children can understand the purpose of advertising better than younger children. They also understood the purpose of advertising which is to try to convince consumers to buy the advertised

product. The majority of children between 7 to 11 years old understood this particular function of advertisements and that the aim of advertising is to force people to participate in the buying behaviour and as a result people often buy products they do not need.

Examples:

“ No answer ” (6 years old)

“ Advertisements appear on television and have an aim to convince us to go and buy some unnecessary for us products”. (7 years old)

“ Advertisements promote some shops in order to make us go there and to give them our money” (8 years old)

“Things are advertised in order to catch the world’s attention and get money” (9 years old)

4.3.2 Source of advertising

Children of 6 years old could not answer the question of who pays for television advertising. This shows further support to the assumption that younger children have greater difficulty understanding advertising. Children aged 7 and 8 years old seemed to confuse the creators of the advertisements with the person who pays for an advertisement on television. The role that was more clear of the two for 7 and 8 years old was the role of who pays for television advertisements. The role that confused children the most was that of the creator of advertisements.

Children of the age of 7 years old said that advertisements are created by advertisers, advertising agencies, their parents, the sponsors, journalists, directors or channels. Many children considered that those who create or direct the programs also produce the advertisements. Some children said that advertisements are made by the television channels, while others believed that they are created by sponsors.

With regard to the 8 year olds, few of the children had a clearer view of who is the source of advertising in their mind. Again, the two roles of the creator and the financier of the advertisement were not clear in this age group, but those who were able to make the distinction gave satisfactory answers.

Although 9 year old children were confused about who pays for advertisements on television some of them began to refer to the product manufacturers. Older children mainly expressed two viewpoints regarding this subject: that advertising is the main source of profit for the television stations and that they contribute to the profits of the companies of the promoted products.

Finally 10 and 11 year old children were able to answer this question by saying that the manufacturers of the product are the ones that pay for television advertisements.

Examples:

“ no answer” (6 years old)

“Advertisements are created from those who create TV programs”. (7 years old)

“The television director creates the advertisements”. (8 years old)

“Advertisements are created by those who make the games or the owner of the shop”. (8 years old)

“My uncle creates advertisements who is an advertiser”. (9 years old)

“ Advertisements are usually created from the stores that want to advertise their shop”. (9 years old)

“Advertisements are created by the shop owner”. (10 years old)

“Advertisements are created by the manufacturer of a product”. (11 years old)

“The television channels make money”. (11 years old)

4.3.3 Advertisements’ influence on children’s purchase request and purchases without permission

Children often acted as consumers by doing personal purchases with their pocket money that their parents and grandparents gave them. Also children affected the purchase decisions of their families.

Generally the majority of children between 6 to 11 years old requested products they saw on television or they even bought the products they saw on television with their own money. The products, that even younger children bought with their own money, usually concerned cheap, more accessible (i.e. easier to buy) food products, like chocolates, crisps, ice-creams beverages.

It was obvious that television advertisements played a significant role in influencing the children’s purchase requests. Children of 6 and 7 years old rarely bought things without their parents’ permission or without their parents’ presence. In contrast to older children of 8-11 years old who had their own money to spend.

Parents start giving money to their children in order to buy something to eat at school. Yet children in this age start going alone to the kiosk and buy chips, chocolates, candies, ice tea, bubble gum, and sometimes games. But there are some older children who do not buy things without their parents.

The fact that most products children bought with their own money were unhealthy products creates concerns about the effect that advertising directed at children has on children’s eating habits. High consumption of unhealthy food products could lead to a series of unwanted effects on their health like, tooth decay, overweight, obesity or type two diabetes.

4.3.4 Desire

Another issue that arose through the discussions with the children was whether advertising influenced the feelings of children regarding the advertised products. More particularly if advertisements affected what they wished to buy.

Through the focus groups discussions we observed that children between 6 to 12 years old often reported wishing for things they saw in advertisements. Overall, most children indicated that they wished to obtain products like chocolates, chips, ice creams, soft drinks, juices and foods. However there were some children of 7 and 8 years old who wished to acquire videogames, pc games i-pad and whirligig.

4.3.5 Other forms of influence

Besides advertisements another factor which seemed to play an important role in children's desire to acquire a product is the fact that children in these age groups visit the supermarkets together with their parents. When children go to the supermarket with their parents they want to buy something that they see there. We therefore observed that the need of children to buy something increased when they went to the supermarket. According to the children the external appearance of the products (i.e. the package) attracted the attention and interest of children.

Examples:

“ when I see an advertisement on television related with food, I want to catch my father's car and go to the restaurant and buy it ” (6 years old)

“ sometimes I ask from my parents to buy me whirligig”. (7 years old)

“ I want to buy electronic games”. (8 years old)

“ I want my parents to buy me chips” (9 years old)

“ I want my parents to buy me chocolates” (10 years old)

“ I want my parents to buy me candies” (11 years old)

4.4 *Types of advertising*

Everyday children watch thousands of advertisements. Generally, most children from the age of 6 to 11 years old do not only watch advertisements on television but also in magazines, newspapers, computer, internet, email, facebook, radio, billboard, road, cinema. They also receive promotional messages on mobile phones and when discounts appear on a window of a shop. Younger children (mostly 6 and 7 years old) found it more difficult to identify advertisements on other media compared to older children.

4 Chapter 5: Conclusions

5.1 *Introduction*

This study plays an important role today concerning the issue of children and advertising. The current research is about the cognitive effects of advertisements on children, i.e. the ability of children to differentiate television advertisements from the other TV programs and children's ability to understand the intention of advertising. Younger children seemed to confuse the role and functions of advertisement. It can be inferred from the findings that children's ability to understand advertising develops as they grow up.

In general older children can understand the role of advertising more easily than younger children. However, only few of them have a full and clear picture of all functions. The findings of this study show that almost none of the younger children (6 years) could distinguish advertising from television programs and could not even distinguish the purpose of advertising. We also see that the majority of older children (7-11 years old) understand the purpose of advertisements and programs.

Without understanding children cannot clearly evaluate the messages received from advertisements. Thus children's understanding of the intentions of advertisements is very essential because children are more vulnerable to advertisements. The majority of children between 7 to 11 years old understood the persuasive role of advertisements and they said that the aim of advertising is to persuade people to buy things that they often do not need. In contrast to younger children (6 years old) were not able to express their opinion.

Also, the above research addressed some of the most important effects of advertising on children. We examined the influence that they have on the children's family purchasing decisions. The negative effects of advertising is the conflict between children and their parents, children are unhappy and become materialistic.

5.2 General Conclusions

Generally younger children find it difficult to distinguish advertisements from the other TV programs. In contrast older children could give us information and express their ideas on advertisements.

Most of the children have shown a positive attitude toward the advertisements. However, many children stated that they are angry when advertisements interrupt the program they are watching. In general this leads to a negative attitude towards advertising. Only older children (10-11 years old) challenged the content of information that derives from advertising. Some of them even stated that most advertisements were misleading. Another reason why these children did not believe in advertising came out from their personal experience as consumers.

The majority of children between 7 to 11 years old understood the persuasive role of advertisements and we saw that the aim of advertising is to force people to participate in the buying behaviour. Also children stated that people

often buy products which they see in advertisements on television that they do not need.

Another issue which seems to confuse children is the source of advertising. Children of 7 and 8 years old believe that advertisements are created by agencies, directors or the Channel. Even children of 9 years old are confused. Some children in this age group said that advertisements are created by the producer of a product and some children said the director. Only older children (10 -11 years old) understand that advertisements are created from advertising agencies and companies that advertise their products.

5.3 Recommendations

Advertising can affect children in many negative ways. Unfortunately most parents use television as a way to calm their children and do not realize what harsh messages are received by children. To avoid the negative effects we must all work together parents, teachers, politicians and children to protect them from advertising.

First the family should play a more active role in mediating the influence of television advertising on children. Parents should evaluate the programs their children see on television and set limit to how many hours per week the child watches TV. Moreover parents need to help their child to learn the difference between advertising (sell) and the program (to entertain, to inform, to educate). Also as the child grows, parents should talk with their children about their feelings or mental conditions that advertisements are trying to create. Another important point is that parents should be a good example to their children e.g. not watching television for hours. Furthermore, parents need to encourage their children to take part in educational and sports activities so as to reduce their dependence on television and deal with something more efficient. And finally parents should not have a TV in their children's room.

Secondly children should be able to judge constructively the advertisements and set up defences against them. They need to first understand that advertisements and viewers have different interests. Children also need to understand that the purpose of the advertiser is to persuade them. And finally children must realize that all message which have as a purpose to try and persuade them cannot be true.

Finally governments all over the world should create a well-defined and integrated policy on television advertising, especially with regard to children. They should pass laws that will ensure respect for ethics in advertising and should intervene to control the advertising company and must create and support specialized organizations for the protection of children.

Through these ways we can reduce the negative impact of advertisements on children and help them understand the world around them better, since the world of advertising diverges from reality.

5.4 Limitations and suggestions for future research

This study examines the influences of advertising understanding on the effects of advertising on children and can be a starting point for further change. We conclude with some suggestions for future research that can extend and improve this study. There are many more factors that can be examined, factors that were not included in this study mainly because of time constraints.

Second, a future research should address the question of whether children understand the tactics of advertisers. Moreover, a study could be created to explore whether children's views vary based on their gender,

Third it would be good in the future to do a research on the parents of children for their views on advertisements.

And finally in future research should be added with children's teachers. The teachers will express opinions on what age children begin to understand better and have a more complete way of thinking.

5.5 Concluding remarks

This study is very important especially in Cyprus. It considers how children perceive advertisements and the effect they have on children's behaviour. It is a very serious issue because children are sensitive and vulnerable.

As we saw children are affected by advertising. Children often ask for products just because they saw them in an advertisement. Advertisements lead children to the wrong consumption path since we cannot always distinguish the truth from false. Additionally young children absorb quickly and easily the messages of advertisements. Therefore we observe that it is necessary to teach children that advertising messages are not always valid or ethical, without at the same time rejecting the usefulness of advertisements. While they grow up we should help children to challenge and acquire critical thinking. This is necessary for adults too since the desire for products created because of advertisements does not only concern children.

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Appendix

Ερευνητικό Πρόγραμμα

Οι επιδράσεις της διαφήμισης στα παιδιά: πρόγραμμα επιμόρφωσης παιδιών σε σχέση με τη διαφήμιση

Οδηγός Συζήτησης Ομάδων Εστίασης

Η παρούσα έρευνα χρησιμοποιεί ως εργαλείο συλλογής δεδομένων τις ομάδες εστίασης (focus groups). Η φύση του συγκεκριμένου ερευνητικού εργαλείου απαιτεί τη χρήση πιο γενικής φύσης, ευέλικτων ερωτήσεων που επιτρέπουν στα παιδιά να αναπτύξουν τις απόψεις και τις σκέψεις τους. Οι ερωτήσεις που παρατίθενται πιο κάτω θα χρησιμοποιηθούν ως θέματα προς συζήτηση. Ο αριθμός των θεμάτων που θα τεθούν προς συζήτηση (από την πιο κάτω λίστα) καθώς η σειρά και η διατύπωση, των ερωτήσεων θα προσαρμόζονται ανάλογα με την ηλικία των παιδιών.

Γενικά θέματα προς συζήτηση

1. Τι είναι διαφήμιση;
 - Που μπορούμε να δούμε διαφημίσεις (σε ποια μέσα);
 - Αν αναφερθούν κυρίως στην τηλεόραση (παρατήρηση από παλαιότερη έρευνα) - Γιατί είναι στην τηλεόραση;
➤ Μόνο στην τηλεόραση μπορείτε να δείτε διαφημίσεις; Που αλλού;
2. Χρησιμοποιείτε ηλεκτρονικούς υπολογιστές;
 - Χρησιμοποιείτε το διαδίκτυο (internet);
 - Τι είδους πληροφορίες βρίσκετε σε μια ιστοσελίδα;
 - Τι μπορείτε να δείτε σε μια ιστοσελίδα εκτός από αυτό που ψάχνετε;
➤ Μπορείτε να δείτε διαφημίσεις;
➤ Για ποια προϊόντα;
3. Έχουν κάποιο σκοπό οι διαφημίσεις;
 - Χρειαζόμαστε τις διαφημίσεις;
 - Τι προσπαθούν να πείσουν τους ανθρώπους να κάνουν;
 - Τι μηνύματα στέλνουν στα παιδιά; (Τι προσπαθούν να τα πείσουν;)
4. Ποιος βάζει τις διαφημίσεις στην τηλεόραση (ή άλλα μέσα);
5. Τι είδους προϊόντα βλέπετε συνήθως στις διαφημίσεις στην τηλεόραση (ή σε άλλα μέσα); Μπορείτε να θυμηθείτε συγκεκριμένες διαφημίσεις;
6. Ποια είναι η γνώμη σας για τις διαφημίσεις;
 - Θα προτιμούσατε να υπάρχουν ή να μην υπάρχουν;
 - Νομίζετε ότι η διαφήμιση είναι καλό πράγμα ή όχι;
7. Πόσο μπορείτε να εμπιστευέστε τις διαφημίσεις (πόσο αξιόπιστες είναι);
 - Πιστεύετε αυτά που μας λέν οι διαφημίσεις;
 - Οι διαφημίσεις λέν ψέματα ή αλήθεια;
8. Θέματα σχετικά με το πως νιώθουν τα παιδιά για τις διαφημίσεις.
 - Σας αρέσουν οι διαφημίσεις;
 - Ποιου είδους διαφημίσεις σας αρέσουν;
 - Ποια χαρακτηριστικά των διαφημίσεων σας αρέσουν; (πχ μουσική, διάσημα πρόσωπα κτλ).
 - Τι κάνετε όταν δείτε κάποια διαφήμιση για ένα προϊόν που σας αρέσει;

Θέματα που αφορούν διαφημίσεις για φαγητό:

Πρώτα θα δοθεί εξήγηση στα παιδιά ότι με τον όρο φαγητό εννοούμε ο,τιδήποτε φαγώσιμο δηλαδή ακόμα και γλυκά, παγωτά, γαριδάκια, πατατάκια, δημητριακά, ακόμα και διαφημίσεις για εστιατόρια κτλ.

1. Μπορείτε να θυμηθείτε κάποια διαφήμιση για φαγητό;
2. Τι είδους φαγητά βλέπετε συνήθως στις διαφημίσεις;
 - Σας αρέσουν;
➤ Αν Ναι- Γιατί;
➤ Αν Όχι- Γιατί;

- Τι σας αρέσει ακριβώς σε αυτές τις διαφημίσεις; Αναμένεται από τα παιδιά να ζητήσουν τα ερεθίσματα που προσελκύουν περισσότερο την προσοχή τους, π.χ.
 -  Μουσική
 -  Χρώματα
 -  Διασημότητες
 -  Χαρακτήρες κινουμένων σχεδίων
3. Τι νομίζετε ότι λεν οι διαφημίσεις στους ανθρώπους για να τους πείσουν να αγοράσουν ένα προϊόν;
 - Νομίζετε ότι οι διαφημίσεις λεν την αλήθεια για το πόσο υγιεινό είναι ένα προϊόν;
 - Όταν δείτε ένα προϊόν (φαγητό) που σας αρέσει σε μια διαφήμιση τι κάνετε;
 4. Όταν ζητήστε κάποιο φαγώσιμο που είδατε στην τηλεόραση από τους γονείς σας, πως αντιδρούν; (Η συζήτηση αποσκοπεί στην καταγραφή των αλληλεπιδράσεων των μελών της οικογένειας ως αποτέλεσμα της έκθεσης των παιδιών στις διαφημίσεις -π.χ. να εξεταστεί αν προκαλούνται διαφωνίες ή συζητήσεις στην οικογένεια)
 5. Αν οι γονείς σας αρνηθούν να σας αγοράσουν κάτι που είδατε σε μια διαφήμιση στην τηλεόραση τι κάνετε;
 6. Πότε σας λεν ναι πιο εύκολα για κάτι που ζητήσατε; Γιατί νομίζετε; (πχ. Το προϊόν είναι φθηνό)
 7. Πηγαίνετε μαζί με τους γονείς σας για ψώνια στην υπεραγορά; (για φαγητό)
 - Σας επιτρέπουν να διαλέξετε προϊόντα που σας αρέσουν; Τι είδους προϊόντα;
 - Επιλέγετε φαγητά που έχετε δει σε διαφήμιση;
 8. Τι είδους φαγητά αγοράζετε με τα δικά σας λεφτά;
 9. Πιστεύετε ότι τα φαγητά που διαφημίζονται στην τηλεόραση σας κάνουν καλό;
 10. Ποιου είδους προϊόντα για φαγητό που διαφημίζονται στην τηλεόραση πιστεύετε ότι είναι καλά ή κακά για την υγεία;
 11. Έχετε ποτέ αγοράσει ένα προϊόν μόνο και μόνο επειδή το έχετε δει στην τηλεόραση;
 12. Θα θέλατε να συζητήσουμε οτιδήποτε άλλο σχετικά με τις διαφημίσεις;