

## **A CHILD AS TARGET AUDIENCE OF COMMERCIALS**

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### **1. Introduction**

Nowadays it is supposed that television is the most effective medium and it builds the viewer awareness much faster than other media [1, pp.87–93]. Television plays a vital role in a child's life. Since young age, children begin their contact with television and it is watched systematically and every day for hours. Time spent watching TV every day is quite important. At the age of two or three children have contact with TV for about 45 minutes and that amount is rising notably with age. More than 90% of children aged four to twelve watches TV every day for many hours. In USA, primary school students spend more time in front of TV sets than books.

However, children in Switzerland within ten years of education devote 18 thousand hours watching TV, which is three times more than time at school. In contrast, in Italy 81% of children between the age of four and ten watch TV every day and 72% do not check what programs are available before switching the TV on. In Poland, children spend in front of TV two to three thousand hours before starting their school work, but children aged 8 to 12 watch TV from two to five hours every day [2, pp.58–69].

Undoubtedly, television has engrossed children completely subduing other activities, so we can say it has a huge impact on children's timetable. What is more, it divests children of time which could be spent more productively. There are a large number of TV channels which enable the child to choose and change them if he or she finds them uninteresting or wants to check what other channels have to offer. Children willingly watch programs which are not aimed at them. However, they include their favorite elements such as adventure, action and suspense. These kinds of programs can be easily found in the morning and early afternoon as well as in the evening [3, pp.76–79].

Children's attitude towards television according to Lindstrom [4, pp.76–79]:

- television plays an important role in a child's life – it is a benchmark in judging other media;
- television is watched by children attentively; a child has an eye for details and may be better than an adult in noticing particular aspects, even if they are only commercials, which were not aimed at them;
- children are keen on commercials, in comparison with the adults, twice as many children declare that they like a particular commercial;
- children do not carry the burden of everyday matters just like adults do; they find shopping pleasant, not a mandatory and unpleasant duty.

Television has a negative influence on a child. Criticism of television in this area is really severe. The research conducted in that field proves that television destroys the family life and the ability of thinking independently; it may impair the development of brain; weakens the imagination and language abilities; it replaces the normal interaction in a society; distorts the real world [2, pp.58–69]. Television has also many advantages. It provides us with information and connects the visual elements essential for a child with humorous music and sounds; watching TV is a pleasant experience, which can be shared with others. Young viewers can watch television in a broad group of people which enables commenting the programs that are being watched; television can easily reach both parents and children [4, pp.76–79].

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Currently, television plays a vital role and it has become an irreplaceable and basic source of information reaching children. As it has been noticed by Kupisiewicz [5, pp.89–96], in the future, in the course of constant advancement of mass media, the monopolistic position of school as the source of information will weaken significantly.

## 2. Research methodology

The main aim of the empirical investigation was to explore the role of commercials in a child’s life. The primary method of gathering information, essential to achieve the foregoing goal, was a free-form interview aimed at two groups of respondents: I–III class students and IV–VI class students. The interview gave the opportunity to state the opinions and express emotions from the research point of view. The advantage of this method is the direct contact of the interviewer with a respondent.

It is also possible to modify the language, change the order of the questions or help with the interpretation of the question. This technique allows observing both the reaction to the questions asked and the environment in which the research is conducted. 81 students from one of the primary school in Olsztyn participated in the research, including 38 students from classes I–III and 43 from IV–VI. The research was conducted during form period hours. The research was done in pleasant atmosphere. Form teachers offered invaluable help during the research. Students were not inhibited and replied to questions willingly.

## 3. Commercials vs. children’s consumption awareness

Children are full-fledged buyers and have a growing influence on household budget spending. Therefore, the crucial issue was the evaluation of the commercials usefulness in the respondents’ opinions. The attempt has been made to determine whether commercials are absolutely necessary for children, or their knowledge of the products on the market is of no concern to them. When analyzing the data juxtaposed in tab. 1 it can be affirmed that 60% of the respondents think that commercials are necessary.

Taking into consideration the separate age groups, one may notice that I–III class students have a more favorable attitude to commercials, and 63% are of the opinion that they are necessary. The next age group presents a more skeptical point of view of this kind of advertising, because 10% fewer respondents gave the affirmative answer to this question than in a younger group. The results presented support the fact that marketing message from commercials exerts a greater impact on younger children.

**Tab. 1. Children’s opinions on the need of commercials**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Yes, commercials are necessary	48	59,26	24	63,16	24	55,81
No, commercials are not necessary	33	40,74	14	36,84	19	44,19
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

An adult is a person who likes to share opinions and observations with others. Despite the young age, children show eagerness in discussions about the surrounding reality. According to the data included in Table 2,56% of students in each age group admit to talking with their peers about products presented in commercials. It indicates a high level of preoccupation with the current issues in the media. Regardless of their age, children have their own opinions and they are eager to share their views with others.

**Tab. 2. Respondents' discussions with their peers about advertised products**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Yes, I am likely to discuss	45	55,56	21	55,26	24	55,81
I am not likely to discuss	36	44,44	17	44,74	19	44,19
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

Commercials are emitted in order to persuade recipients, even those young, to buy the advertised products, or to induce the child to be “pressure force” on the adult purchaser. Analyzing the results presented in tab. 3 it can be ascertain that a vast majority of children interviewed admits that they persuade adults to purchase products advertised on TV. 77% of respondents gave such an answer. The presented behavior is more common in the younger age group. It can be linked to the fact that older children have their own savings. However, younger children's shopping is dependent on adults. Without doubt, in case of both age groups, the television has become an advertising medium, and what is more, it is trying to influence the extended amount of shopping.

**Tab. 3. Children's persuasion to purchase an advertised product directed at adults**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Yes, I persuade	62	76,54	31	81,58	31	72,09
No, I do not persuade	19	23,46	7	18,42	12	27,91
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

It has been known for a long time that a good commercial is an effective commercial. The responses that were given indicate that children's persuasion at adults to buy an advertised product are not very effective. 43% of respondents confirmed that they occasionally decide to buy a product after children's persuasion. It must be stressed that just over 27% do not succumb to such whims at all. It may depend on the financial means that adults have. Each parent would like to make a child happy, and give them something which bring happiness, but not everyone can afford it.

Analyzing in more detail the above mentioned results, it can be established that younger children's parents are more likely to succumb to their persuasion. In this age group, 16 in 38 people interviewed, which is 42%, admit that they usually bow to the pressure and purchase the desirable product. It may happen due to the fact that, it is easier to refuse younger children explaining the lack of money or that they cannot have everything. In the older group the situation is slightly different. Parents who often decide to buy a particular product after having been persuaded by children make up only 18% of all the respondents in this age group (tab. 4).

Commercials are aired in one particular reason which is the viewers' encouragement to purchase a product as it results in boosting the sales. It is known that children persuade adults to buy goods which they want to own as they have no financial resources. An interesting question would be whether children would buy an advertised product if they had their own money. This data is presented in tab. 5. It shows that 75% of primary school students would buy a product that had been advertised if they had their own financial sources. It has become clear that commercials exert a huge influence on children's desires and dreams. Commercials evoke a materialist style of life in

children and it results in longing for various material possessions. Only 18 in 81, which are 22% of all the respondents, admitted that they would buy a product but not the one seen in a commercial. It can be linked to the fact that children have already planned to buy the product and only strive to get it. However, it does not mean that when the purchase has been fulfilled, they will not want to buy something new that has been presented in a commercial. The data collected indicate that commercials influence younger children in a greater extent.

**Tab. 4. Effectiveness of children’s persuasion of adults to purchase advertised products**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Often succumb	24	29,63	16	42,11	8	18,60
Occasionally succumb	35	43,21	12	31,58	23	53,49
Do not succumb at all	22	27,16	10	26,31	12	27,91
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

**Tab. 5. Respondents’ purchasing reaction to commercials in the situation they have their own financial means**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Yes, I would buy the advertised product	61	75,31	32	84,21	29	67,44
No, I would not buy anything	2	2,47	0	0	2	4,65
I would buy something else	18	22,22	6	15,79	12	27,91
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

Nowadays, the quality of the offer is very important. The advertised goods are often perceived as ‘good products’ because television can manipulate viewers reactions. According to the data presented in the table below, 86% of respondents are of the opinion that the advertised products are better than others. The substantial minority, which is only 14%, does not hold this opinion.

**Tab. 6. The perception of the advertised product in comparison to those unadvertised**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
The advertised product is better	70	86,42	36	94,74	34	79,07
The advertised product is not better	11	13,58	2	5,26	9	20,93
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

The data collected in the research indicate that I–III class children are more convinced that the advertised products are much better than others. That is why, one may assume that the younger the children are, the more susceptible they are towards media manipulation. They simply lack the life experience as they are learning how to live. They are unaware that the quality of the product does not always mean that it is better. They are not acquainted with the variety of products available on the market. They only know the products they have seen on TV. That is why the other products are not so important and they are treated as inferior.

We watch the world goes by. It undergoes a constant development and we participate in this process. Nobody wants to stay behind. We respect other people’s opinions about us because everyone wants to be perceived as a good person. Analyzing the data presented in table 7 it may be noticed that a little more than a half (53%) of the respondents thinks that when buying an advertised product they will not look more fashionable or more liked than before.

**Tab. 7. Opinions of people buying advertised products and its social perception**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Having an advertised product will make me more liked	38	46,91	26	68,42	12	27,91
Having an advertised product will not make me more liked	43	53,09	12	31,58	31	72,09
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

As to I–III class children, they are convinced that due to the advertised product they will be “more liked” and “more fashionable”. 26 in 38 respondents chose such an answer. As to IV–VI class students only 12 in 43 children are of this opinion. The so called “rat race” can be the reason for this kind of behavior.

Having analyzed the data, it can be assumed that younger children do not yet know the values, which are important and crucial in social relations. They live with the belief that possessing fashionable products will influence their better perception by the peers. It has also been observed that children’s most basic criterion in judging others is material possessions.

Another important issue in the research, which depicts the way the commercials are perceived by children, is the question whether commercials show the truth or falsify reality. Data concerning the analyzed area is presented in tab. 8.

**Tab. 8. The credibility of commercials in the respondents’ opinions**

Type of response	Respondents					
	number	%	including			
			I–III class children		IV–VI class children	
			number	%	number	%
Commercials always tell the truth	21	25,93	14	36,84	7	16,28
Commercials usually tell lies	60	74,07	24	63,16	36	83,72
<b>Total</b>	<b>81</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>38</b>	<b>100,00</b>	<b>43</b>	<b>100,00</b>

Source: Own elaboration

These results show that only 21 in 81, which are 26% of all respondents, are of the opinion that commercials always show the truth. As it has been proved by the previous analyses, children have a frequent contact with television, and therefore they are under influence of commercials. It is one of their favorite pastimes. Not always do they watch television under the supervision of adults. It can be assumed that those children, who claim that commercials always tell the truth, have not been informed by adults about the secrets of commercials, and what is more, they might not have heard any negative opinions about commercials voiced by adults.

The data collected allow assuming that I–III class children are more uncritical. Almost 37% of those children believe commercials uncritically whereas only 16% of the older children share the same view. The data gathered in the above table prove that trust in advertising decreases with age.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The conducted research allowed defining the role commercials play in children's lives. The main area of the research has been to determine to what extent a child is attached to commercials, and what attitude is adapted to this form of advertising and whether one can trust commercials. Based on the data collected it can be assumed that more respondents show huge interest in this kind of advertising. Commercials stimulate the unnecessary needs as well as promoting longing for possessions. As a result, children persuade adults to buy them their favorite products. They talk about them with their peers. They think that possessing the advertised products will make them more attractive among friends. If children had their own money, they would buy the advertised products themselves because they think that they are much better than others. To some extent, it may lead to conflicts within peer groups. Some children will feel strong acceptance in a group whereas others may be influenced by negative emotions such as jealousy and inferiority. Commercials can be blamed for creating materialist style of life among young people.

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#### **Summary**

Commercials exert a strong influence on children. It results in yearning for advertised products. This phenomenon has also some disadvantages. Commercials influence children so strongly that they force adults to buy particular sweets, toys and other advertised products. The contents of television programs are usually received very literally by children. Children attach huge emotional importance to that fact. The reason for that is that they do not have as much experience and knowledge as adults. They know that commercials do not always reflect reality, but they usually desire to possess the advertised products.

**Key words:** advertising, children attitudes, perception of TV adds.

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