

THE ANALYSIS OF CHILD YOUTUBERS' VIDEOS IN THAILAND TO DEVELOP APPROPRIATE YOUTUBE ADVERTISING

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Abstract

YouTube is a popular entertainment website among Thai users, especially young children and youths. The objective of this study is to analyze child YouTubers' videos in Thailand to develop appropriate YouTube advertising. The research method applied was the analysis of 108 videos by Thai child YouTubers with an age under 14 years old to analyze the videos' content presenting products. The selected videos were based on subscribers on YouTube as shown on Social Blade's ranking under the entertainment category in 2019. This study analyzed child YouTubers' videos based on a previous study by Pastor, Ongkrutraksa and Vizcaíno-Laorga (2020) in five categories; 1. Frequency or number of times brand names and products appear; 2. Types of products; 3. Formats of advertising; 4. Marketing resources used in the videos that are associated with the products; 5. Appearance of brand names in the names of the videos. The results demonstrate that child YouTubers usually feature brand names only once in their videos but show the product throughout the videos. The most popular product is food & drink. The advertising format mostly used is the use of a product for entertainment. In addition, the marketing information sources mostly shown is subscription. The use of brand names in a video's name was found to be unpopular. The results suggest that these child YouTubers' videos are not always identified as an advertisement, and this can be harmful to vulnerable children. Thus, to develop appropriate YouTube advertising, it is vital to focus on promoting ethical conduct, policies and regulations for child YouTubers' videos.

Keywords: *Child YouTubers, YouTube, Thailand, YouTube advertising, YouTubers' videos*

1. INTRODUCTION

YouTube is a popular entertainment website among Thai users, ranging from children to adults, especially young children and youths. The study found that 61% of Thai people watch videos on YouTube more than on television (Marketing Oops, 2018). This is because of their use of communication and electric devices facilitates access information they want in accordance with the Uses and Gratifications Theory, suggesting that users take part in the communication process and employ media to fulfill their intent needs (ETDA, 2018). Thus, children and youths are considered to be vulnerable to threats from online media usage, such

as copycat behavior or strong language as well as behavior related to gambling, drugs, sexuality and nudity, due to their lack of experience and ability to cope with technology they have been exposed to, which could lead to juvenile delinquency since online media such as YouTube allows users to upload videos as well as access and participate in them effortlessly through viewing, commenting, sharing and downloading for free. Most Thai youth are the heavy users of mass media, both traditional, like television, and new high-end media, like the Internet and mobile devices. (Patanaittikul & Ongkrutraksa, 2011).

Online video advertising is also a good way to build brand awareness and develop consumer understanding of products and services as it is easy to target an audience according to a specific age range, gender and interest. It is also easy to evaluate ad effectiveness through views with small marketing costs compared to those of marketing communication through TV (New Media Thailand, 2018). However, previous research on child YouTubers' in Thailand by Pastor, Ongkrutraksa and Vizcaíno-Laorga (2020) showed that there is possibly a commercial relationship between child YouTubers' videos and brands. The problem with these videos is they are not always identified as advertising. Regardless of any legislation that may be applicable, this practice is not ethical, especially considering the audience the videos is aimed at.

A promotional video not identified as advertising on YouTube could be described as product placement, which promises audience exposure, as consumers tend to skip traditional advertisements but not entertainment content that offers the potential to link the placement with an entertainment storyline (characters, settings) (Russell, 2007, 2019). This idea might be the reason why product placement is popular among YouTubers since making contents entertaining could better attract viewers, which has been proven by the large number of subscribers Thai YouTubers attract by their unique style of using brand integration. (Ongkrutraksa, 2019)

Moreover, nowadays, there is a growing concern for the lack of protection of children's privacy (non-consent data collection) as well as lack of control over unsafe content as some children's channels present pranks, for example, playing strange eating games that encourage children to do strange things (Ee, 2020).

As a result, recently, YouTube requires all YouTubers, or content creators, to inform whether or not their videos are made for children according to an agreement with the US Federal Trade Commission (FTC) to help content creators comply with the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and/or other applicable laws (YouTube Help, 2021). It is clear that YouTube will not ban children's content, but anyone who makes videos for children, only need to "update the conditions" and follow the regulations precisely (Nokyoong, 2020), Consequently, advertising ethical conduct concerning targeting children is needed to be considered crucial for advertising in YouTube.

The objective of this study is to analyze child YouTubers' videos in Thailand to develop appropriate marketing communication. This study aims to explore child YouTubers' videos based on a previous study by Pastor et al. (2020) in five categories; 1. Frequency or number of times brand names and products appear; 2. Types of products; 3. Formats of advertising; 4. Marketing resources used in the videos that are associated with products; 5. Appearance of the brand names on the name of videos.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Nowadays, more than 90 percent of Thai youth have access to the Internet, mostly through mobile devices, both smartphones and tablets, as they are convenient and can be used anytime, anywhere. The first activity Thai adolescents and young adults use the Internet for (98%) is to communicate on social media. Some of the more popular social media platforms are Facebook, Twitter, Line and Instagram. (Chaemchan, 2020)

Moreover, children and youths' preferred choices of media can be influenced by the YouTubers they like, making those YouTubers similar to public figures in traditional media, but even more popular and influential. A study of American youths found that YouTubers have influence over youths because they are similar to these young people based on the content they produce to gain the attention of viewers of similar ages. Hence, this audience may feel close to YouTubers as if they are friends, depending on interests, traits, abilities and creativities that aspire the young audiences. Most YouTubers start with just a few viewers who then subscribe and these subscribers will grow in number when attracted to content they feel is appropriate and credible (Westenberg, 2016)

A study by Pastor, Nicolás, Miguel and Salas (2013) that focused on TV commercials for toys and their sexual representation during three periods with variables of toy types, gender, importance, narration, duration, action and interaction among characters of 595 TV commercials suggests that there are more male characters and narration than female in toy TV commercials, especially toy cars and action figures, conveying a sense of competition, individualism, ability, body strength, creativity, power and masculinity while doll and jewelry TV commercials tend to focus on beauty, friendship and maternity.

A recent study of Pastor et al. (2020) stated that Kid YouTuber channels are a current reality in children's lives. This paper's main objectives are, first, to analyze the presence of brands and products in YouTubers' videos (YouTubers under the age of fourteen); and, second, to examine the advertising formats used in Thailand. The survey sample comprised six channels with 54 videos, of which approximately 795 minutes viewed from 2017-2018 were analyzed. The key findings reveal a gender-based correlation between the YouTubers and type of toy presented. In addition, they appear to be a form of advertising, even though these videos are not always identified as advertising and do not always cohere with the target audience.

From a study by Araújo, Magno, Meira, Almeida, Hartung and Doneda (2017) focusing on video styles, audiences and advertisements on YouTube channels for children to understand the influence of advertisements in the digital age over children and the demographics of a large group of YouTube users, from a sample of 12,848 videos on 17 YouTube channels in the US and the UK and 24 YouTube channels in Brazil, the research found that young YouTube users in the three countries have an average age of 13 years old. As the marketing on social media needs to capture young people's attention and persuade them to purchase goods and services, the advertisements should be entertaining. However, there are challenges as parents worry and want to restrict young people's YouTube viewing they see as inappropriate.

Moreover, Tan, Bao, Hoe Ng, Omar and Karupaiah (2018) conducted a study about YouTube content: a case study about food and drink advertising that targets children on social media by using SocialBlade.com to analyze the popular ranking of 250 videos with their categories and style noted. It was found that in 187 advertisements, 38% were about food and drink while 56.3% were about non-core foods. To sum up, YouTube advertisements are similar to TV commercials in terms of influence in non-core food commercials aimed at a young audience. Therefore, there should be policies and regulations for children foods'

marketing that govern social media content and restrict promotion of unhealthy non-core foods.

3. METHODOLOGY

The researcher conducted an analysis of 108 videos selected from six influential child YouTubers with an age under 14 years old (or child YouTubers with their parents) who had uploaded more than three videos per week. The child YouTubers were selected based on their YouTube subscriber numbers as shown on Social Blade’s ranking under the entertainment category in 2019. They were among the very influential YouTubers in the Top 100 YouTubers in Thailand under Social Blade ranking based on their subscribers and their number of views which were then given an A classification (or B+ with local ranking no greater than 100) Social Blade list rankings (A, A-, B+, etc.). If a YouTuber has an A+, A or A-, then that YouTuber can be considered as very influential. Video selection was based on the selection process used by Pastor, et al. (2020). Two reviewers coded the content; any disagreements were debated, and the video was reconsidered until agreement about the coding was settled. The process of analysis is described below:

1. Three videos are randomized each month (from videos uploaded during a period of six months, between November 2018 and April 2019)

2. Designated categories for analysis in various aspects based on the studies of Pastor, et al. (2020); Pastor (2017); Pastor, Nicolás O., and Miguel Salas (2013), which have been put into a table containing five categories listed below:

- 3.1 Frequency or number of times brand names and products appear
- 3.2 Types of products
- 3.3 Advertising formats
- 3.4 Marketing resources used in the videos that are associated with products
- 3.5 Appearance of the brand names in the name of the videos

Population and Sample

108 videos from six influential child YouTubers who uploaded more than three videos per week have been selected as samples for content analysis as listed below (table 1):

Table 1: Ranking table of six Thai child YouTubers with an age under 14 years old (or young Thai YouTubers with their parents)

YouTuber	Class	Ranking	Subscribers	Audiences	Weekly Video Uploading Frequency	Years Joined
1.	B+	71	3,750,353	1,011,293,346	4	4
2.	A-	22	3,465,397	1,292,794,022	5	2
3.	A-	20	2,309,589	635,419,705	3	2
4.	A	10	4,319,275	1,638,427,155	3	7
5.	B+	44	3,073,613	2,210,391,785	4	5
6.	B+	45	2,239,211	1,192,624,886	4	4

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Frequency of brand names and products that appear in the YouTubers’ videos

It was found that 18% of the videos had brand names appear only once while 15% appeared twice and 13% three times during the whole length of a video respectively. Meanwhile, 13% of the videos had products appear twice, 12% four times and 9% three times in the whole length of the video respectively.

2. Product types

The study found that products that have been advertised most were first food & drink (21%), followed by toys (18%), home appliances (16%), technologies and electric appliances (11%), stationary (10%), daily products (6%) and others such as ATM cards, financial transactions, flowers, music instruments and performances (5%), and clothes (3%) respectively, as shown in figure 1:

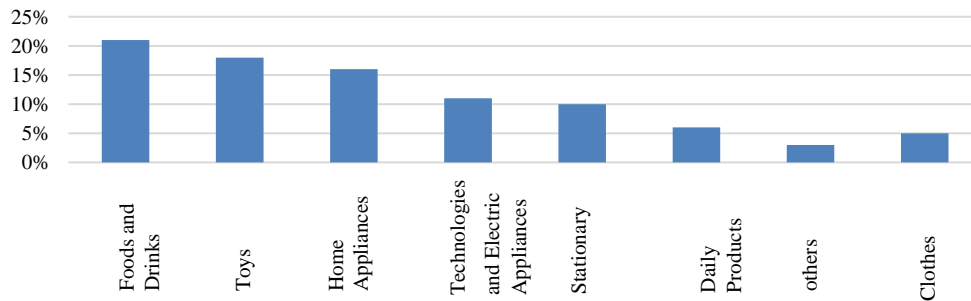


Figure 1: Product types

3. Advertising formats

It was found that 27% of the videos for entertainment used techniques like product placement, followed by 17% using a review format, 15% playing with a products, 13% testing a product, 9% presenting a challenge for a product, 8% products hacks, 7% products unboxing and 1% making a product comparison.

In addition, promotion in collaboration with other YouTubers and participation in certain activities were the least popular advertising formats among all advertising formats used by child YouTubers, as shown in figure 2:

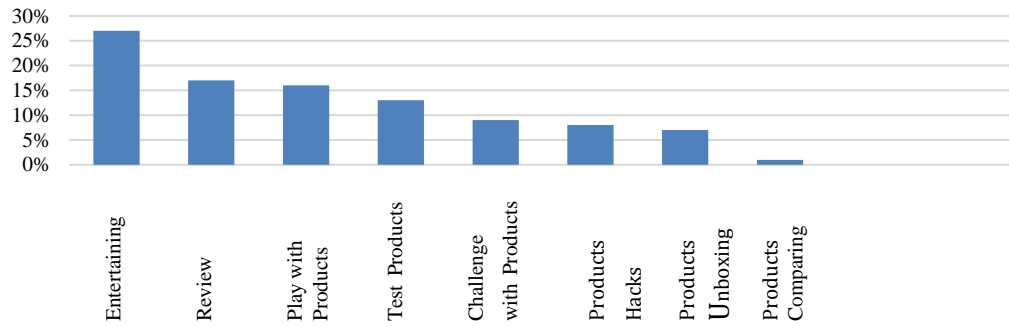


Figure 2: Advertising formats

4. Marketing resources

The most popular marketing resource was first subscription (33%), followed by promoting products or their activities (29%), linking to product website or social media such as Facebook or Line (29%), and supporting by products’ owner (6%). The marketing resources that was least popular was a collaboration with other YouTubers (4%) respectively, as shown in figure 3;

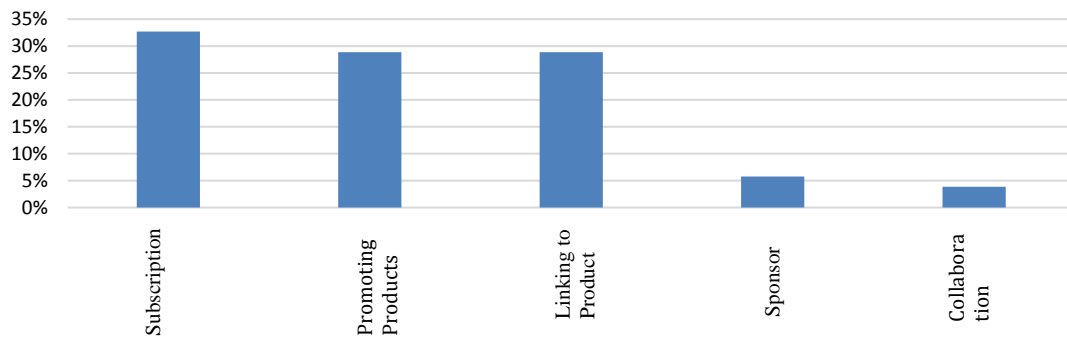


Figure 3: Marketing resources

5. Appearance of the brand names in the name of videos

It was found that a brand name was not in the name of a video 74% of the time while a brand name appeared in the name of a video in only 26% of those analyzed.

This study confirms that most child YouTubers feature brand names only once but show a product throughout their videos, and products that appear most in the videos were food and drink. The least popular product among the YouTubers was clothes. This result is in accordance with the results found in the study by Tan at el. (2018), which showed that most of the products aimed at children are food & drink. The result also shows that the most highly used advertising format is the use of products for entertainment, which supports the results from previous research by Ara’ujo at el. (2017) that stated that advertisements targeting children should be entertaining to make children interested and have fun during while they watch.

The results replicate the study by Pastor et al. (2020) which showed there is possibly a commercial relationship between child YouTubers' videos and brands. The problem is these videos are not always identified as advertising. The results support the suggestion from the study by Tan et al. (2018) that states there should be policies and regulations for the marketing of food aimed at children that govern social media content and restrict some unhealthy non-core foods.

The overall results show that the products and advertising format in child YouTubers' videos in Thailand are similar to findings in previous research. However, one problem that stood out is these videos act as advertising in the form of product placement which could be harmful to children who are still vulnerable. Since adults usually possess critical judgment, they should be capable of selecting those videos that best correspond to real needs. However, the same does not occur with children who are still developing and more vulnerable to persuasive messages (Projeto Criança e Consumo, 2009). Thus, the ethical conduct for advertising targeting children in child YouTubers' videos should not be overlooked.

5. CONCLUSION

Overall, most child YouTubers' videos in Thailand in this study would have the brand name appear in their video only once while the product they were promoting usually appeared throughout the video. The products most popular in these videos are food & drink, toys and home appliances while the product least popular was clothes. It was found the advertising format used the most is a product for entertaining, reviewing and playing respectively. Promotion in collaboration with other YouTubers and participation in certain activities are the least popular advertising formats. In addition, the most popular marketing resource is subscription, and the least popular is collaboration with other YouTubers. Lastly, it was found that brand names are not usually included in the names of the videos.

The results also suggest that to develop appropriate YouTube advertising, it is vital to focus on promoting ethical conduct, policies and regulations for child YouTubers' videos. Thus, in future research, it is suggested to stress the practice of ethical advertising conduct, policies and regulations for child YouTubers' videos.

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