

Online advertising to children & teenagers: Perspectives of youngsters, advertisers and parents

Date: 31 August 2018

Venue: University of Antwerp, Promotiezaal Grauwzusters - Lange Sint-Annastraat 7 - 2000 Antwerp
(route: UAntwerpen, Stadscampus)

Time: 5 PM

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Short description: PhD defense Kristien Daems - Faculty of Applied Economics

Abstract

Nowadays, advertising lurks around every corner and is literally present everywhere, on offline, online and mobile media. As a result, children and teenagers encounter advertising messages on various – and increasingly online – media. Advertisers specifically target their advertisements directly to youngsters whom they consider as a specific, relevant and important target group as they are the consumers of tomorrow, by using specific ad characteristics and strategies.

Integrating a commercial message into entertaining or informative media contexts (e.g. games, television programmes) and making these commercial messages interactive are two main features that distinguish online contemporary advertising formats from traditional ones. Gathering personal data from the message receivers which can be subsequently used to adjust future advertising campaigns (personalisation of advertising) is an additional purpose of online advertising.

The main objective of this dissertation is to study the effects of contemporary online advertising formats on children and teenagers as a target group for advertising in five different studies. This objective is explored from different angles by investigating several actors involved: children and teenagers as target groups of contemporary advertising (investigating the effect of integration, interactivity and personalisation of advertising) and two key stakeholder groups: advertising professionals and parents. Additionally, this dissertation explores how youngsters can be reached to inform and educate them about contemporary advertising tactics in order to make them advertising literate consumers. The topic of this dissertation is investigated by means of a multi-method approach by combining experiments, surveys, in-depth interviews and co-creative research techniques.

Results show that children and teenagers do not critically process contemporary commercial messages, leading to positive ad responses and positive outcomes for the advertiser. Parents and advertisers have a traditional view concerning the effects of contemporary advertising formats on children and teenagers and overestimate the capabilities of youngsters to cope with advertising. These results show that frameworks and theories often used in research on advertising aimed at children (such as the persuasion knowledge model and consumer socialization theory) should be updated and that the central focus of public policy should be on raising awareness on this topic among youngsters and parents, in order to make children and teenagers well-informed, critical consumers. Advertisers should be informed as well in order to fully understand the impact of these advertising messages on youngsters.