Adolescents’ advertising literacy and privacy protection strategies in the context of targeted advertising on social networking sites: implications for regulation

# Keywords

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* advertising literacy

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* Online safety and policy regulation
* Risks and harms
* Content-related issues

## Sample

374 Belgian adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age, who met the criterion of being active on social networking sites (and 469 young adults (18–25 years) as comparitive case)

## Implications For Policy Makers About

## Other PolicyMaker Implication

Fighting against targeted advertising on minors

# Abstract

This study aims to investigate the development of adolescents’ advertising literacy and privacy protection strategies in the context of targeted advertisements on social networking sites (SNSs). A survey was conducted among 374 adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age, and 469 young adults (18–25 years) served as a comparative benchmark. Results indicate that advertising literacy increases progressively throughout adolescence, and reaches adult-like levels only by the age of 16. In addition, adolescents have an inadequate awareness of commercial data collection practices. This awareness slowly increases as a function of their age until it reaches an adult level around the age of 20. Finally, findings reveal that adolescents take little action to cope with targeted advertisements by means of privacy protection strategies. This paper devotes much attention to the formulation of specific recommendations for EU policymakers and regulatory bodies. In addition, it also holds implications for advertisers (e.g. the need for more in-depth data protection impact assessments), social media providers (e.g. adolescent-friendly privacy policy) and social caretakers (e.g. achieving advertising literacy and privacy education). This paper fulfills the need to investigate adolescents’ advertising literacy and privacy-protective behaviors on SNSs, and, in turn, directly translates these insights into recommendations that can underpin the rationale of regulatory or policy decisions on a European level.

# Outcome

Advertising literacy was limited around the age of 12. Past this age, it gradually increased until it seemed to level off at the age of 16 reaching sophisticated adult-like levels. Adolescents may be very familiar with social media, but this does not necessarily transfer into being 'ad literate' on these platforms. The awareness of the collection and use of personal data were mostly unconsious and only matured by the age of 20. Respondents weren't entirely to determine which pieces of information companies and third parties can use. Thus, adolescents aren't sufficiently aware of how data are being collected, aggregated and eventually used to target them with personalized ads. It makes it difficult for them to engage in critical online privacy assessments. Additionally, a high age treshold places too much responsibilty in the hands of parents who might lack knowledge or skills to make an informed decision. Regulators should therefore a lower age treshold for consent combined with additional specific protective measures when it comes to the processing of their personal data in (targeted) advertising. (Zarouali et al., 2020, pp. 361-363)