Understanding the YouTube Generation: How Preschoolers Process Television and YouTube Advertising

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* Internet usage, practices and engagement
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## Sample

62 preschool children (4–5 years of age; 53% boys and 47% girls) recruited from four preparatory schools

# Abstract

Preschool children are generally assumed to lack the skills to critically respond to advertising despite being exposed to a high number of advertising messages while watching videos on YouTube. However, research on how preschool children process YouTube advertising is scarce. This study conducts an experiment to examine how preschool children’s (4–5 years old, N = 62) responses to video advertising (20-second toy commercial) vary between YouTube and television viewing. The results suggest that almost half of the children were able to distinguish advertising from regular media content, and almost 70% of the children could correctly identify that the video was advertising. No differences were found between the two media. Children were not
skeptical toward the video advertisement. With regard to ad effects, the results show low brand and product recall, whereas aided recall was higher (around 40% of the children could correctly recognize the product and brand shown in the advertisement). These findings suggest that 4–5-year-old children already have a proper understanding of advertising, but lack a critical attitude. Furthermore, children’s advertising literacy does not vary between YouTube and television advertising.

# Outcome

"In contrast to adults, preschool children did not have different advertising processings on YouTube and TV. Although consumer socialization researchers often assume that preschool children lack advertising literacy skills, this study found that preschool children are fairly able to recognize advertising and to understand its intent. 70% of the children confirmed that the commercial was advertising, over 60% still thought that it was a part of the regular content. One plausible explanation may be that these children, due to their frequent exposure to embedded advertising, are accustomed to see advertising content being integrated into regular media content. Furthermore, preschool children scored low on attitudinal advertising literacy, as most of them scored high on advertising liking and low on advertising annoyance. This implies that preschool children are not able to critically process advertising.This would suggest that for this generation, the boundaries between entertainment and advertising are even further fading away." (Vanwesenbeeck et al., 2020, 430-431)