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## **TV ADVERTISING AND ITS INFLUENCE ON CHILDREN BRAND PERCEPTION. RESULTS OF QUALITATIVE STUDY**

*The paper seeks to explore children responses towards TV commercials and brands presented. It examines the impact of advertisement on children's perception that varies with their age. Present study was based on a focus group survey with 30 children chosen from different schools in city of Lodz. The study demonstrates that children have a negative opinion on the advertisements regardless of their age. However, children are exposed to the advertisements all the time and present an impressive awareness of the advertised brands, goods and commercials itself. As a result, they often create images of the products and logos in their minds based on what they saw on TV. It was noticed that older children are more independent taking also their personal experience into account whereas younger rely rather on somebody else's comments. Although the research has reached its aims, the limitations related to the size of the interview group occurred.*

***Key words:*** TV advertising, children's perception, consumer behavior

### **Introduction**

Children attraction towards television increases with age. Children react to advertisement in different manners. It can be influenced by many factors, such as grown-ups, intervention of parents, media literacy and experiences. Such determinants play a key role in understanding television advertisement and process its content. In the cognitive development children are passing through the stages helping them to distinguish advertising from program content, recalling and awareness of advertising, recognizing and understanding persuasive intent of advertising, liking and skepticism or cognitive defense to advertising<sup>1</sup>.

Advertisement is one of the main instrument used by businesses to communicative and persuasive effect. It is efficient when target audiences received, processes and accepted the advertising message. Perception is this element for human beings that helps them exist in reality and has significant role of processing information received by sensory system. The process of perception has been associated with the process of the evaluation of the advertising messages.

Consumers differ each other from the ways how they perceive the information of particularly advertisement and brands shown in such advertisement. The differences come out of their previous background, experiences and situations. These factors determine information choice, its processing and the way of evaluation of the brand. Moreover, the factors have been shaping since the early childhood and can be resulted by perception of consumer behavior taken place in that time.

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<sup>1</sup> S. Singh. , P. Kaur: the Impact of Advertisements on Children and Their Parents, Buying Behavior: An Analytical Study. The IUP Journal of Marketing Management, Vol. X, No. 3, 11, pp. 19.

Research evidence shows that family, peers and media play a key roles in process of socializing<sup>2</sup>. It is shown that children are attracted to the advertised brands and products due to their features. The impact of advertisements on children is depended of their knowledge of the brand, parental attitudes and supervision and mode of advertisement delivery<sup>3</sup>.

The present study investigated children's responses to advertisements and brands shown in these advertisements. It is an attempt to answer the research question whether TV advertisement influences the perception of the brand of product. Furthermore, the consideration has been undertaken to examine how age, families and peers can related to the research problem.

## Research methodology

This study was conducted utilizing focus groups to determine attitudes towards brands and analyze the influence of advertising on a child's perception. One of the attributes of this type of method is the dynamics of the group. The participants not only answer questions, but also exert influence on each other, they can reveal the interactions that affect not only questions answered consciously, but also unconsciously revealed attitudes<sup>4</sup>. There were three group discussions, during which the children watched TV commercials. Children expressed the opinions about the advertising messages and brands watched in the advertisements.

The research was conducted on three groups of children (10 children each). The samples were selected from elementary and secondary students in two schools in Lodz in April 2012. Schools were randomly selected from those that are located within the city limits. A total of 30 young participants were recruited by random sampling from those whose parents agreed for such research. The sex distribution factor was not taken into account. The first group comprised the youngest children of I-III classes, the second group of IV-VI classes, both from the primary school. Finally, the third group comprised oldest children of I-III classes from the high school. Distribution of children by age group was due to the cognitive and consumer development<sup>5</sup>.

All sessions were recorded on a camera after a parent's permission. The experiment was designed to last 45 minutes, what is equal to the one lesson. This research includes few methods that have been used however this paper states those parts related to perception of advertisement.

Each meeting started with a moderated discussion that meant to collect the information about the attitudes toward television and commercials. During the research, children were exposed to the TV advertisements presenting the most popular smartphones on the Polish market. Children talked about their habits, how much time they spend watching

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<sup>2</sup> C. Grossbart: Parental Style and Consumer Socialization of Children. *Journal of consumer Research*, Vol. 15, 1988, pp. 77– 94.

<sup>3</sup> G. Mukherjee: Advertisements- Shaping a Child's Future: An Indian Insight. *Advertising Express*, October 2007, pp. 27-30.

<sup>4</sup> R. Wolny: Metody badania rynku młodych konsumentów – problemy metodyczne. in: *Metody marketingowe. Metody, tendencje, zastosowanie*. Wydawnictwo Akademii Ekonomicznej im. Oskara Langego we Wrocławiu, Wrocław 2003.

<sup>5</sup> G. Antonides, W. F. Van Raaij: *Zachowanie konsumenta*. Podręcznik akademicki. Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003, s. 469 - 474

TV and what kind of programs and commercials they like best. Participants were also asked whether they and their families have mobile phones.

Moreover, the research was based on projection methods. It focused on drawing of dream phones before and after broadcasting a commercial and was meant to demonstrate whether there is direct influence of a commercial on the children's perception. Children were given a plain A4 sheet of paper and a pencil. Firstly, they were asked to draw their favourite mobile phones. Then they watched the TV advertisements presenting six various smartphones<sup>6</sup>. The objective was to choose products not directly targeted to children. This was motivated by the fact that children were at different ages, having mobile phone is the common situation even among children and that how big role TV advertising of adult products can play in the children consuming behaviour<sup>7</sup>.

After that children were provided with the crayons and could correct the initial drawing according to they wish. The drawing method was chosen because individuals in this age may hold most of the information in their memory in visual form<sup>8</sup>. What is more the unconscious can be expressed through symbolic communication. It means that to access to the children's unconscious motives, a simple technique of expressing the inner part of the psyche such a drawing method has to be used. In fact, development of the ability of painting or drawing follows basically the same path for every child<sup>9</sup>. According to Dennis, children with enough freedom draw what they find satisfying and valuable, not what they dislike<sup>10</sup>.

The recorded children speeches, both verbal and non verbal expressions and drawings were analysing in the taken study to resolve the main problem of the research. Although the research has reached its aims, the limitations related to the size of the interview group occurred.

## Study results

Study was carried out to analyse the children attitudes toward commercials and advertised brands. There was an attempt to answer the question whether the ads have an impact on the perception of their brands.

According to children opinions, they declare that they often watch television, which exposes them to frequent contact with advertising, both conscious and subconscious. Regardless of age, the children underlining the annoying character of ads displayed in the time of film or program. In each age group children mentioned their favorite ads. Interestingly, the study results that despite the critical attitude of children to advertising, the respondents had a very good knowledge of the various ads and campaigns and were able to spontaneously cite their content and even the whole slogans and phases contained in the text of commercial.

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<sup>6</sup> The most popular smartphone's brands have been chosen based on the Brand24 surveys.

<sup>7</sup> G. J. Gorn, R. Florsheim: The effects of Commercials for Adult Products on Children. *Journal of Consumer Research*, Vol. 11, March 1985, pp. 962-967.

<sup>8</sup> G. Zaltman: Rethinking marketing research: Putting people back. , *Journal of Marketing Research*, Vol. 34, 1997, pp. 424-437 after O. Azura, J. Kamaruzaman: Brand Perception among School Children. *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 4 no. 7, July 2008, pp. 159.

<sup>9</sup> [http://www.medico-pedagogy.org/childrenpicturesummaryJ\\_Ewp.pdf](http://www.medico-pedagogy.org/childrenpicturesummaryJ_Ewp.pdf).

<sup>10</sup> W. Dennis: *Group Value Through Children's Drawings*. John Wiley and Sons, New York, NY 1966 after O. Azura, J. Kamaruzaman: Brand Perception among School Children. *Asian Social Science*, Vol. 4 no. 7, July 2008, pp. 159-160.

Child from secondary school: If there is any advertising that I like; ... this thing I cannot have, for example such a nice car advertising, I still send it to my colleague a link to it .....because these ads amuse me, and I can talk non-stop about it at school.

Sample statement

During the interview, it was observed that the older children, the more they talk about commercials among themselves, besides even a bad attitude towards advertisement. Younger children did not declare such needs of information exchange with their peers about their experiences of the advertisements.

Children are aware meaning, what advertising is and of its persuasive nature, regardless of age. It can be sustained by the following statements:

Child of the classes I- III: Commercial is in order to advertise things..., to buy more. Child of classes IV - VI: To encourage to buy this thing. My dad explained to me the other day as an example of breakfast cereal that is promoted .... Well, if I go to the store and it returns my attention but not some other cereals, which I've never heard and never seen on TV and anywhere. A child from secondary school: To broaden consumerism within society.

Sample statement

During the study children images of mobile phones were projecting. In the first stage, the task of the participants was to draw his or her dream mobile phone (children drew with a pencil). Then the children were exposed to six commercials of different mobile phones brands. In the last stage, they were asked to have changed their drawings and added elements that they consider the telephones should include (children applied the changes in the drawings with the crayons).

Children's drawings imagining their own phones:

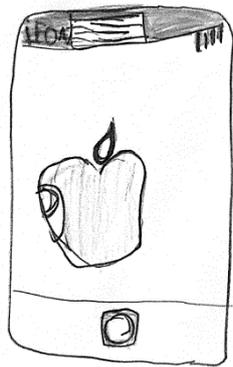


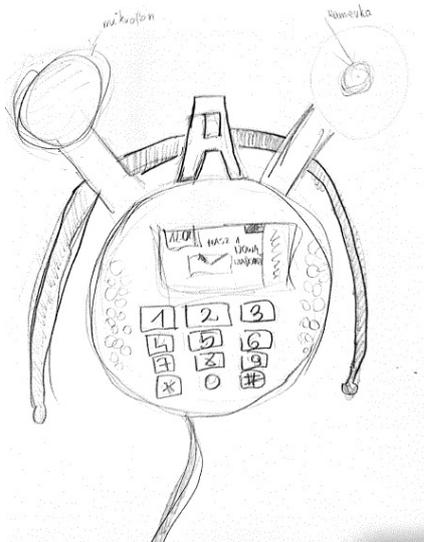
Figure 1. Drawing of Child from class I – III  
Source: based on the study



Figure 2. Drawing of Child from class IV – VI  
Source: based on the study



**Figure 3.** Drawing of Child from class IV – VI  
Source: based on the study



**Figure 4.** Drawing of Child from Secondary School  
Source: based on the study

Analyzing the first stage of making drawings it can be seen that the brand awareness among children is high. In most cases there dominated drawings, which concerned the specific brands of phones. This was evident by drawing the logo and its components. Moreover, it was underlying in children talks. There was also a difference noted between the drawings of children from primary school and high school. While the first ones drew only smartphones, the children of the secondary school drew the older generation phones, even with the antenna.

Table 1: Children's behavior during the drawing experiments

Children of the classes I-III	Children of the classes IV-VI	Children of the high school
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- draw more collectively than alone,</li> <li>- express or cite the opinion of their parents or the leader of the group,</li> <li>- drawings after seeing the ads do not differ from the previous ones,</li> <li>-there appear only characteristic features for smartphones, rather than conventional mobile phones.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- draw more collectively than alone,</li> <li>-the figures show acknowledge and awareness of phone functionalities, eg. a keyboard,</li> <li>-the figures show characteristic features of the well-known brands,</li> <li>-after seeing advertisements added noticed items</li> <li>-drew mostly phones that were used or approved by people known to them (eg, friends), supported by their talks.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- focus on the functionality of the phone and personalized its features,</li> <li>- identify the phone with their own person, by added own initials and names</li> <li>- pay attention to the capabilities of the phone: headphones, stylus, microphone,</li> <li>-draw equipment, which they own and are happy with them or those who belonged to person known by them, eg. family members.</li> </ul>

Source: based on the study

Analyzing the recorded children talks and expressions carry very interesting insights. In all three groups, positive emotions were expressed while watching the advertising mobiles in such cases when the child or his parent or peer was in possession of such a phone.

Children from classes IV-VI: Yes! We have seen it. Our friend has got it!

Sample statement

According to the study it was observed the critical attitude to viewing messages. The oldest children undermined some elements of the watched ads as false, unrealistic or inconsistent with established standards.

....they have much money..... or: Actors do not need loans.

Sample statement

The study shows that the youngest children are guided in their opinions to the authority of parents which plays a very important role. It was similar among older children. In high school, where the children showed a greater individuality, it was noted the impact of advertising within the drawings. The most noticeable evidence was added large, characteristic for one of the viewed brands, headphones, which have not appeared on any of the drawings.

Children of Class I-III: But Extra! So!. My dad has such a phone...!!".  
After seeing the competitive mobile advertising: ' This one was worse than my dad's phone".

Sample statement

With the age children provided the desire to confirm their opinion based on real facts or product features.

Child of classes IV -VI: The ad just showed an interesting life, but X wasn't shown earlier this X so I do not know whether this X provides cool life ...

Sample statement

Child of high school: 'If someone is not so beautiful [as shown in the ad] why he cannot have such a phone.

Sample statement

The high school children try to think for themselves, they are more critical to the opinions of others, unless it coincides with their own court or it can be logically explained.

## Discussion

There are many stimuli in humans' environment. Process of perception depends on how all that elements and motivations are connected to each other within our perceptual field. The research provides the evidence that the development stage of the perception is correlated with the age. It shows the three stages of cognitive development of children, in which each has a different approach to advertising, product, brand, or other knowledge of purchasing processes. Children under two years of age are only focused on satisfying their basic instincts. Even by the time they reach their schooling age, they are not able to recognize objects and use some of the symbols. Even children of school age still have problems with abstract thinking, which results in difficulties in distinguishing advertising from television programs and advertising intensions existing in some of them<sup>11</sup>.

One of the factors that determine process of perception among young people are mass media, including television advertising. The age and the other stimuli, as family or peers, influences humans' perception. It is also believed that it impacts perception of the advertised product or brand. The process of advertising perception will can be named as fully mature, when there occurred three assumptions: the recognition of the advertising and identification of its nature, then understanding and assignment of the persuasive nature of the advertising, and finally the skepticism towards the commercial. These features occur in the young age and affect the perception of products<sup>12</sup>. Children that took part in the study research understand or at least know the meaning of the commercial and using it to confirm their opinion on the product gained from home or peers.

At the age of about three years, children begin to see the relationship between reality of television and real life. Despite this, their self-centered attitude does not allow them to understand persuasive nature of advertising even up to eight years old. What makes them more susceptible to it than older people. Decreasing confidence in relation to advertising

<sup>11</sup> J. Piaget: Jak sobie dziecko wyobraża świat. Wydawnictwo naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2003, pp. 470– 471.

<sup>12</sup> A. Jasielska, R. A. Maksymiuk: Dorośli reklamują, dzieci kupują. Kinder marketing i psychologia. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2010, pp. 32.

is a function of the age of the children<sup>13</sup>. It was confirmed in the research taken. While all children expressed their enthusiasm during watching TV ads, only young children told researchers that they enjoy watching them and talk about them with their peers. The oldest children were the most skeptical ones.

With the understanding the persuasive nature of advertising, children between the ages of eleven to sixteen become aware of differences of brands for both adults and children. They understand not only the symbolic importance of consumerism, but different categories of products and brands. They begin to evaluate a product on the basis of abstract reasons, such as their own preferences, the brand's share in the market or social attributes<sup>14</sup>.

Children build their identification with brands in very similar way to adults. On the other hand, it is less likely to them to build an emotional attachment to the brand. According to literature, older children are able to distinguish which brand has more advantages to offer, just like their parents do that, but they do not build such strong relationships<sup>15</sup>. Lindstrom's study showed that adolescents do not build very strong relationships with brands or products. They were mainly focused on personalization of 'their' smartphones, while younger children were much more focused on brands (during research one group that was strongly engaged with one of the brands). There is a possibility that the loyalty to the brand is stronger if it is supported by reference groups, not only if the child is older.

It is proved that children often encourage their parents to buy products of a particular brand just because of the attached gadget. However, the more often a person is exposed to contact with a particular brand, the more and stronger connections are formed. People do not have to realize that they are exposed to a brand, but still it will put its impact on them. Even children as young six months create first mental logos' images and trademark<sup>16</sup>. Exposition impacts also the perception of the product. Children exposed only on the TV advertisements of the smartphones (not old version of the mobile phones), drew only new generation mobile phones (big touch screen, with branded operating system) whereas older children drew buttons and even with antenna<sup>17</sup>.

Design of advertising targeted at children and adolescents, should be preceded by a thorough analysis of the distinguishing factors of their perception. These include not only being youth, but also a significant susceptibility patterns and excessive credulity. While the most important for children are their parents and peers, TV commercial is used by them not only as information about products or brands, but also as an aspect strengthening their ingrained views and opinions. It is more likely that children want to have those product that they saw in the commercials and that any person of their acquaintances have than to want something that they only have seen on television.

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<sup>13</sup> D. Doliński, *Psychologiczne mechanizmy reklamy*. Gdańskie Wydawnictwo Psychologiczne, Gdańsk 2010, pp. 63-64.

<sup>14</sup> A. Jasielska, R. A. Maksymiuk : *Dorośli reklamują, dzieci kupują. Kinder marketing i psychologia*. Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2010, pp. 38-40.

<sup>15</sup> M. Lindstrom : *Dziecko reklamy*. Świat Książki, Warszawa 2005, pp. 78.

<sup>16</sup> J. McNeal , *The Kids Market: Myths and Realities*. Paramount Market Publishing, USA 1999, pp. 115.

<sup>17</sup> Market penetration for smartphones in Poland equals less than a third of the whole market. There is only a small chance that all parents of those children have smartphones and that is why they drew such phones. <http://hatalaska.com/2012/02/13/penetracja-smartfonow-w-polsce-dane-za-2011/> (February 2012) according to research of GfK Poland.

There is the scientific evidence that advertising has an impact on children's preferences, purchase behavior and consumption. As it was previously described, children come up very directly in relation to advertising. Therefore, it can be concluded that advertising affects not only the way how the awareness of the presented products are built, but also how they are perceived.

## Conclusions

The study made it possible to draw conclusions about the role of advertising in the consumer development of children and its impact on perception of the brand. The children's attitude to watching advertising is not clear, as the declared during the study. Although they stated that they are bothered with commercials but in the same time they seemed to like them. The study confirmed the awareness of children to particular brand and provide the insight in children perception in the circumstances of TV advertising exposition. Children are conscious of the main aim of advertising and realize the different functions advertisement can have. The strength of the role of advertising and knowledge of its persuasive character is a function of age. In conclusion, it should be noted that the child's contact with the advertisement has a direct impact on brand perception by children. They can learn from advertising the information of the brand and associate the sensoral signals to the way how they assess the brand. It is still worth to underlie that such way of perceiving the brand stimulated by the advertising usually should be enriched by families and peers opinions and consuming behaviors. Moreover, the way of perception the particular advertising is dependent either by parental and social environmental impacts and that it impacts the perception the advertised brand. It can implicate the practical guideline for marketers to the way of creation of advertisement and brand promotion.

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16. [http://www.medico-pedagogy.org/childrenpicturesummaryJ\\_Ewp.pdf](http://www.medico-pedagogy.org/childrenpicturesummaryJ_Ewp.pdf)

Celem niniejszej pracy jest przedstawienie reakcji dzieci na reklamy telewizyjne, jak i na ukazywane w nich marki. Zbadano wpływ reklam telewizyjnych na percepcję dzieci w zależności od ich wieku. W tym celu przeprowadzono wywiady zogniskowane na grupie 30 dzieci z wybranych szkół w Łodzi. Badania wykazały, że dzieci niezależnie od wieku wygłaszają negatywną opinię o reklamach. Jednakże mają one nieustanny z nimi kontakt i wykazują się szeroką o nich wiedzą. W rezultacie, oglądając reklamy telewizyjne tworzą w swoich umysłach ślady pamięciowe dotyczące widzianego produktu oraz logo marki. Spostrzeżono także, że starsze dzieci są bardziej niezależne w opiniach, biorą pod uwagę głównie swoje doświadczenia i przemyślenia, podczas gdy młodsze opierają się głównie na ocenach innych osób. Przeprowadzone badanie osiągnęło swoje zamierzenia, choć należy również zwrócić uwagę na ograniczenia wynikające z wielkości badanej grupy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** reklama telewizyjna, percepcja dzieci, zachowania konsumenckie

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