**Media Influence, Brand Awareness and Ethics**

**Introduction**

 The behavior of consumers is constantly influenced by advertisements, media communication, external factors, such as trends and peer pressure. The appearance of online communication and marketing techniques has made it even easier to target the right audience and get better results from campaigns. (Okzaki, 2011, p. 172) Media influence, however, can be also imposed on people based on the company's knowledge of them. Studying consumer behavior and adjusting marketing and media communication to the buying triggers determined through market research is an effective way of ensuring that a campaign becomes successful. The below paper is designed to analyze the latest approaches to market segmentation, research and media communication targeting different groups of customers. The connection between mass media advertising and marketing communication and consumer buying behavior will be researched. The theory of Hoyer and McInnis (2008, p. 101) that Internet and television content influence purchasing behavior will be tested.

 The importance of ethics will also be highlighted in the research, analyzing whether or not companies directly target minors to encourage them buying services. Peer pressure, role models like actors or sportsmen can increase the effectiveness of a marketing and media campaign, however, the protection of children from unsuitable content, for example alcohol and cigarette advertisements is not fully provided by marketing agencies. While measuring the effect of media and marketing communication is not an easy task, it is possible as there is statistical data available regarding the level of influence advertisements have on children and young people.

**1. Aim of the Study**

 The below study is designed to reveal the emotional responses of consumers to the most common methods of advertising and measure their impact on people's buying habits, brand awareness and behavior. Further, the study will seek an answer to the ethical dilemma: what can be done to protect children from unsuitable media and marketing communication? Are governments and companies doing enough in the field?

**2. Research Question**

 The research question of the current study is how children and young adults are influenced by the Internet and television during their socialization and to what extent do advertisements form their consumer behavior. Indeed, there are several companies targeting especially children, not only those selling toys. Games advertisements, even regarding products that are aimed for those over 18 are designed for the younger generation. Does this mean that, alongside with peer pressure, media and online, interactive marketing are forming the future generation's consumer behavior?

**4. Hypothesis**

 The impact of marketing messages on children's personality development can be measured. According to Pitman (1), “Children with emotional or developmental problems are more likely to have difficulty understanding television and advertising in the same way as their peers. The protection of these children is the joint responsibility of local and central governments, as well as companies and advertising agencies. There are some areas of potential harm on child development to be revealed and eliminated. Advertising also puts extra pressure on parents who are unable to afford different luxury brands, but their children watch the advertisements and ask for them. Pitman states that an ethical problem lies in the above phenomenon.

**4.1. Method**

The research follows a survey design based on responses from students aged 12 to 16. The questionnaires were distributed in person, asking for details regarding their media usage, including internet and television as well as their perception on the products they see advertised in the media. The respondents were asked to rate how likely they would be to choose the given brand they connected with through a marketing message.

**4.2. Participants**

 The questionnaire were distributed to 150 different male and female teenagers in the local area. Respondents werel be asked about how many hours a week they spend in front of the television and on the internet each week.

**4.3. Data Collection**

 Participants were asked to monitor how many marketing messages they notice in one day. Next, their perception of different brands currently featured in the media and online were assessed. Their exposure to alcohol, gambling and tobacco advertising was also monitored and recorded in a data sheet.

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| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  |  |  |  |  |  | **Total** |
| **Number of respondents** | 20 | 53 | 40 | 37 | 150 |
| **Hours spent in front of the Television** | 3 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 18 |
| **Hours spent using the Internet** | 4 | 5 | 3 | 4 | 16 |
| **Acceptance of alcohol and tobacco use, gambling (positive to negative: 1-5) Mean figure** | 2.3 | 2.6 | 3.1 | 3.6 |  |
|   | **Television** | **Internet** |  |
| **Average hours spent** | 4.5 | 4 |  |
| **Variance level** | 0.7 | 0.3 |  |
| **Standard Deviation** | 2 | 1 |  |
| **Minimum hours spent** | 3 | 3 |  |
| **Maximum hours spent** | 6 | 5 |  |

**Mean acceptance level of tobacco, alcohol and gambling: 2.94**

**4.4. Variables**

4.4.1. The different variables determined in the survey are:

4.4.2. Age

4.4.3. Gender

4.4.4. Number of hours spent in front of the television or the Internet

4.4.5. The positive/negative perception of alcohol, tobacco use and gambling

4.4.6. Attitude towards the acceptable level of drinking, smoking and gambling

 Age and gender variations are not the subject of the current study, therefore, the correlation figures are not published within this report.

**4.5. Analysis and Correlation**

The correlation between the extent of exposure to online and TV advertising and attitude towards brands, drinking, smoking and gambling are the main correlation examined by the paper. However, different variables have also been assessed to determine which groups are the most likely to be influenced by marketing messages, and which young people should be protected by policies the most.

**5. Expected Results**

 The authors of the research study declare the results to show a strong positive correlation between media exposure and the acceptance level of drinking, smoking and gambling. The hypothesis, detailed in the first part of the research proposal is confirmed: children's development and values can be affected and influenced by marketing messages. The results show that those who spent six hours a week watching television and those who spent five hours a week browsing the Internet had a more receptive attitude towards gambling, drinking and smoking. Females were less influenced by media messages than males, though.

**6. Implications**

 The research results are suitable to be presented for media organizations and government agencies in order to convince decision-makers about the importance of protecting vulnerable children from the harm of advertising. The level of impact on children’s socialization needs to be reviewed, re-assessed and evaluated by governments in order to comply with existing regulations, for example the Article 17 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. (UN Convention, 1999)

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