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**THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING MESSAGES ON SCHOOL CHILDREN  
THROUGH AGE, BRANDED PRODUCTS AND TRUST**

**Abstract:** Advertising towards children confirms the importance of marketing communication, as they are important for companies that offer a range of products and services. We study the influence of advertising messages from traditional media on different children's age groups, via the observed branded products and the examined credibility of advertisements, seen through the children's eyes. In total, 481 pupils from two primary schools, aged 9 - 12, participated in the research. We find that children over the age of ten recognise the persuasive influence of the media. Also, the findings indicate that the number of children who like to follow advertisements decreases with age. In addition, comparing the advertising message and real life can lead a child to overall dissatisfaction. An optimistic 75% of the answers favour the fact that children do not believe everything shown in the advertisement forwarded to them.

**Keywords:** advertising, branding, school children, media.

**JEL Classification:** M31, M33, L82

**Conflict of Interest:** None

### Introduction

Children belong to the most sensitive target groups on the market, because they are already existing customers with clearly defined desires and wishes that they imply through their parents, but they are also the future target market. Companies that earn the trust of children still in the period of childhood can count on them as customers at a later age. Precisely for the mentioned reason, advertising is present in children and adolescents' lives, and it is even considered that the budgets of companies that target this population with advertising are constantly growing (Blades et al., 2014). Children and young people have a tremendous impact on the direction of the family budget. Sometimes parents find themselves in a very complex dilemma - they want to protect their children from the bad influence, and at the same time, they want to have the latest and most popular products, so that their offspring follows the fashion of new products. Also, due to the faster pace of life and work, parents try to compensate for the time they do not spend with their children by purchasing branded items/services (Krajnovic et al., 2019). Communication through modern technologies takes place in everyday private and professional relationships, so the digital

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environment brings many changes in the field of interpersonal relationships. Communication is an indispensable tool for maintaining healthy relationships between people (Dogan, 2019).

Although various forms of online media are available to children and young people nowadays, television is at the top of their popularity, especially for the age of six to twelve. It is believed that television viewing of children of the mentioned age is their predominant media-related activity. On average, 62% of American children under the age of eight watch television daily (Common Sense Media, 2020). Already after the age of ten, as they enter the world of teenagers, the influence of television decreases and the focus on social networks grows (Apestaartjaren, 2016).

In Serbia, in 2019, extensive research was conducted on the topic of children and traditional and new media, which gave interesting results. Namely, in Serbia, most children use television (89.3%), followed by radio (52.7%), and print media (42.9%). For the most part, the youngest population watches movies and series, followed by quizzes, as well as various educational shows. They think that there is not enough interesting content intended for their age, and on the whole, they are not very enthusiastic about advertisements (www.decaimediji.com, 2019).

In principle, the media are very uninterested in children as the target group of users of their programs, unlike advertisements, and this is best illustrated by the fact that television broadcasts less than one article intended for the youngest (average - 0.89 articles), as well as less than one text per day in the observed dailies (average - 0.94 texts). Most of the articles about children on televisions with a national frequency are broadcast in the morning programs. It has been noticed that articles about children are rarely broadcast in central news programs (CEPROM, 2018). "Almost the general presence of television and radio in all homes and its large ratings imply the gathering of a very diverse audience of minds by age, education, occupation, gender, place of residence, experience, language, religion, worldview, etc." Therefore, television must focus its program on meeting all their needs, especially the needs of children and adolescents. Its responsibility is great in that, and it must pass it on to all those who participate in the program or work on its preparation." (Children and Media, 2019, Article 7).

It is interesting to note that the media can never particularly influence the value patterns of children and young people. Namely, it is the family that establishes and builds the identity which, in addition to school and friends, will form a certain value system in which the later value orientations placed by traditional media such as television, radio, press, etc. fit. In the general psychology literature, the hypothesis of social support as an effective protection of children is accepted. Namely, when the person is exposed to stress, social support serves as protection and allows stable operation, while its lack additionally contributes to the negative consequences of stress, especially in high-risk circumstances (Stambuk et al., 2015).

In addition to their educational impact, they are an important aspect of children's socialisation process, especially for the youngest ones who do not attend preschool before school. Media, via the system for commercial advertising, influences the formation of a reaction and the attitudes in children (Burgund Isakov et al., 2019). Parents found themselves competent in using media tools to support their children's education (Kardes & Dokumaci, 2021).

Advertising to the youngest ones is considered part of the process of economic socialisation of children, in terms of their education with all the meanings that shopping is associated with. Preston (2005) rightly has a dilemma about whether social responsibility is the behaviour or business activity of a company that should promote its products for the youngest. Like all ethical issues, this largely depends on the individual point of view. The central question on the subject of children and advertising revolves around the extent to which children can process advertising at a conscious and critical level. In order to be able to think responsibly and consciously about advertising: a) children

should be able to distinguish advertising from other media content (for example - regular television program/regular Internet content); b) children should understand the attempt of market communicators to influence their purchasing decisions and c) children should be aware that marketing experts through the influence of advertising unequivocally try to influence their desires and attitudes (Rozendaal et al., 2011).

The relevant literature and selected hypotheses will be provided in the next chapter. Following the discussion on the methodology, our findings will be analysed. The study concludes with conclusions and recommendations.

### **Assessing Children's Attitude towards the Advertising**

Researchers have found that children have so-called selective attention when it comes to following a certain medium, in terms of maximising the use of cognitive abilities that help them understand the program content, with the aim of improving skills. The child's attention will not always lead to an understanding of the program content, while understanding will significantly encourage the child's greater orientation towards the media.

Marketing communication with the youngest consumers is different from that with the adult population in terms of 'sensitivity' which is manifested in the following forms (Beauchamp et al., 2009):

- 1) *physical sensitivity* (there are physical or biological preconditions that make the product that is placed on the market cause physical sensitivity of children - allergies, for example);
- 2) *cognitive sensitivity* (children are not able to cognitively process certain marketing information, as a result of which they can be manipulated);
- 3) *social sensitivity* (children due to belonging to certain social groups, for example - groups of the poor or immigrants, are not able to rationally perceive certain marketing messages and consequently represent a vulnerable category of recipients).

After five years of age, children begin to intensively monitor the more vivid program content and more often require programs suitable for their age. At this age, children still do not completely differentiate the reality from what is presented in the program content or advertising that are addressed to them. Therefore, marketing experts suggest a simplified scene in shows that abound in comic life situations and a multitude of musical elements, to which the youngest react very positively. As the youngest ones gradually master their mother tongue, it is recommended to avoid programming/advertising content that emphasises movement, because it will probably not stimulate children to follow them. Program content based on fairy tales is suitable for this age of children, where the victory of good over evil is emphasised.

Children in the period from the age of five onwards already know the difference between program schemes (Manohar, 2011). Thus, *'real' programs* are those that have a wealth of real-world information (news programs and documentaries that are not usually in the sphere of interest of the youngest); *'realistic' programs* are programs interpreted by actors in, for example, comedies of situations that are closest to children's age; *'unreal genres'* that represent stories with heroes that do not exist in reality (usually fairy tales, science fiction children's films, animated films, etc.). In that sense, it is extremely difficult for children to understand advertisements because they consciously hide the differences between the real and imagined world, which the child cannot understand.

In the period between the ages of five and eight, children generally like programs with topics within which they can express their need for independence, and that is all related to the development of motor skills at this age. On the other hand, children who have already started primary school have enough prior knowledge to understand the thoughts and actions of their peers, and their ability to reason is much more flexible.

Children between the ages of eight and twelve are interested in stories with well-developed characters, logical action, so they are already beginning to identify with real-life situations whose actors are their peers or slightly older children. At the same time, children of this age prefer content with fantasy, humour and science fiction, although they are still in the realm of animated films, series dedicated to endangered animals and hobbies. Thus, already at school age, children are able to recognise the differences between the classic program and advertising block, in the sense that they understand that the essence of advertising is to sell certain products, while they are not yet skilled enough to discover the manipulative function of that same advertising.

### **Aims of the Study**

It is interesting that so far in the literature, the focus has been mainly on the so-called children's education regarding advertising, which was mainly reduced to the phenomenon of distinguishing advertising from standard media/program content. The literature mentions as many as six basic marketing tactics used by communicators in order to achieve a more intense impact on children through advertisements: repetition of advertising messages, demonstration of the advertised product, peer support, humour, participation of some public figures, gifts ... (Calvert, 2008).

A group of authors investigated that children as early as the age of seven demonstrate some knowledge of the impact of marketing messages (Thyne et al., 2019). It is believed that children become sceptical of commercial advertising messages only after the age of 11, and from that age, they can be even more critical than adults (Gevorgyan & Manucharova, 2012). It is believed that the youngest cannot develop significant cognitive defence systems in relation to a commercial advertisement before they turn twelve (Nicolini et al., 2017). Later in adolescence, they already gain enviable knowledge of marketing tactics through messages that convince and 'put pressure' on shopping.

In accordance with the above, the first of three hypotheses in the research was derived.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** In accordance with the cognitive development of the youngest, children up to the age of ten will have a more positive approach to advertising (believing and enjoying it) than will be the case with children over the age of ten. Moreover, children older than ten will better recognise the persuasive influence that the media has on them, i.e. there should be a link between trusting advertisements and the respondent's age/grade. This hypothesis will be tested via a Chi-square test.

The unethical attitude in advertising towards the youngest emphasises children's vulnerability when it comes to understanding and interpreting advertising messages, especially the power of persuasion, which is a handful in commercial advertising (Spotswood & Nairn, 2016). Even in situations where parents refuse to buy the required item in the store, the youngest ones are still, in other places, exposed to external influences, such as extended family members, peers, and certainly the mass media. In addition to numerous negative effects, the current desire to own certain brands and products is especially emphasised, which significantly encourages materialism in the earliest years (Watkins et al., 2016). The fact is that in many purchases, in addition to parents, children also participate, which parents consult when shopping, but also have a direct influence on them in terms of forming attitudes and future preferences in adulthood (Aldea & Brandabur, 2015).

The authors Krajnovic et al. (2019) point out that children very successfully remember the brands advertised to them during childhood. Usually, these are some brands gladly used in the earliest years of life, whether it was food, a popular toy, a cartoon and the like. Interestingly, children have the incredible power to copy logo images of certain brands used with those seen in commercials and vice versa (Aktas et al., 2016).

In an effort to make the companies they represent successful, marketing professionals strive to target the youngest customers and are constantly searching for new marketing techniques to gain the attention of both children and their parents. The problem with big and well-known brands is that they often cross the line of ethical behaviour. Therefore, it is extremely important that integrated marketing communications do not harm the self-confidence of the youngest, and this can only be done with respect to codes of ethics (Popovic Sevic, 2016). Brands should not abuse the youngest's trust and inexperience when it comes to media literacy and knowledge of the characteristics of the product/service (Ferbokovic, 2015).

**H<sub>2</sub>:** Children who own or buy branded products will prefer to follow media messages that promote the mentioned products and be more influenced by them than children for whom branded products are not in the focus of possession or purchase.

Children up to the age of seven take the marketing message from the environment literally and are not in a position to distinguish the meaning of the metaphor as well as the meaning of individual media statements. This may further imply that vague, for children, forwarded messages can lead to a completely inadequate image of the advertised products, so that children can easily find themselves in a state of disappointment and dissatisfaction after the purchase (Zitorada, 2005).

As it is known that children are generally inclined to imagine everything they see and hear in advertisements, marketing experts should pay special attention to protecting the youngest populations. This means that their attention is necessary in situations when the impossible functions of a certain product stand out. It is also considered that extremely young children can hardly distinguish between the standard program and the advertising block, and it is even more difficult to assess the value of the content of what is placed through the message. Unfortunately, children are often used for advertising purposes when they want to draw parents' attention to the purchase of certain products.

As children's cognitive abilities are impaired, they can hardly assess the presented advertisements. Interestingly, suppose we start by assuming that children do not understand advertisements and what they want to be told. In that case, the question of deceptive advertising is not asked, because then every advertisement for them is actually - deception (Bergada, 2007).

The background of the media market has changed dramatically in the last decade. Instead of sitting in front of the family TV, millions of young Europeans, children and teenagers, now watch content online, mostly at their request and via mobile devices. World Internet video share rose from 64% in 2014 to an incredible 80% in 2019 (European Parliament, 2019).

The process of mass commercialisation with the support of digitalisation has led to an enormous discrepancy between the actual product and what the child sees/detects in the advertisement. Many children and young people are bombarded daily with often oversized messages that brands display, such as how they can greatly improve their lives quickly and how they can be happier, which directly leads to an impulsive and mostly unnecessary type of shopping. The consequences of all the above are children's dissatisfaction, aggression, misunderstanding towards parents, misunderstanding and non-acceptance of the outside world and finally, giving in to narcotics, tobacco, and, unfortunately, a tendency towards depression (Linn, 2010).

**H<sub>3</sub>:** Comparing the world in the advertising message with that in real life leads the child to overall dissatisfaction.

### Research Methodology

The study aims to analyze the impact of advertising messages on school children from the aspect of their age, what kind of relationship they form towards branded products, and to what extent they trust the advertisements addressed to them. The specific goals are to determine and define the forms of unethical approaches to advertising messages tailored for children (in the subject of the research, the focus is on school children, who are classified by different age categories, i.e., classes). The age range from nine to twelve years is covered, i.e. schoolchildren of elementary school's third, fourth, fifth, and sixth grades. The field research was carried out in a quantitative form (survey), which was carried out in two elementary schools, Elementary School "Svetozar Markovic", Vracar and Elementary School "Milena Pavlovic - Barili", Visnjicka Banja. Mentioned schools were chosen as a convenient sample where all research permissions from school principals, psychologists, and parents were received within a reasonable time. In our quantitative study, teachers for lower grades, that is, teachers for higher grades, were mediators when filling out the questionnaires, but only in situations where an additional explanation was necessary.

Numerical coverage of the entire population - to study 481 pupils from two elementary schools. Mediators, in this case teachers in the lower grades of school, and teachers in the upper grades of the school visibly influenced the motivation of schoolchildren when it comes to filling out a questionnaire for which one school lesson lasting 45 minutes was set aside.

In the original survey that covered various aspects of a child's perceptions about advertisements, pupils initially responded to fifteen questions that had fill-in-the-blank options, binary choices such as yes or no, or were asked to select any or all provided responses depending on their preference. In the second part of the survey, they responded to another range of fifteen questions on a five-point Likert scale. Moderate internal consistency has been achieved with Crombach alpha being above 0.7 for all entries, and for validity, Pearson correlation indicated that all values were larger than the assigned critical value. Initial comprehensive results have been published in Popovic Sevic et al. 2017. In the current study, we shall refer to two yes/no questions from the first part of the survey and questions eight and fifteen, respectively, from the Likert-scale section. For the latter approach, Chi-square has been used to examine the differences among respondent groups.

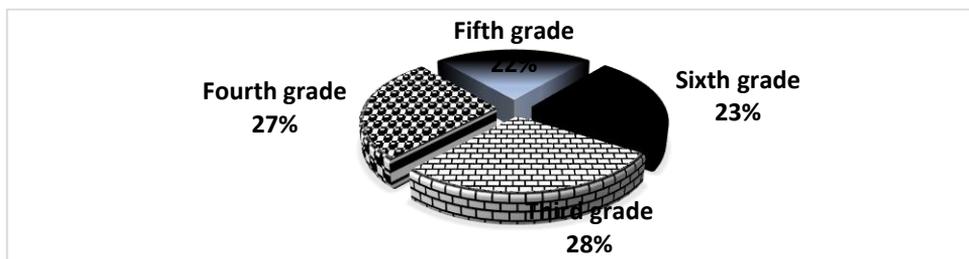
Sample selection - the research plan is to examine a similar number of children in both schools, in order to be able to compare the findings of both samples. The subsample of children is uniform according to the gender and grade that the children attend. The mentioned schools were contacted thanks to the appropriate sample method, which had the assumption that the most accessible members of the target population of schoolchildren, pupils of lower and higher grades of two primary schools were selected. The data obtained in the empirical research were processed using the SPSS statistical package.

**Table 1.** The number and percentage of respondents across school grades

| Grade  | Percentage | No. |
|--------|------------|-----|
| Third  | 28,08      | 135 |
| Fourth | 26,81      | 129 |
| Fifth  | 22,26      | 107 |
| Sixth  | 22,87      | 110 |
| Total  | 100        | 481 |

Source: the authors' study

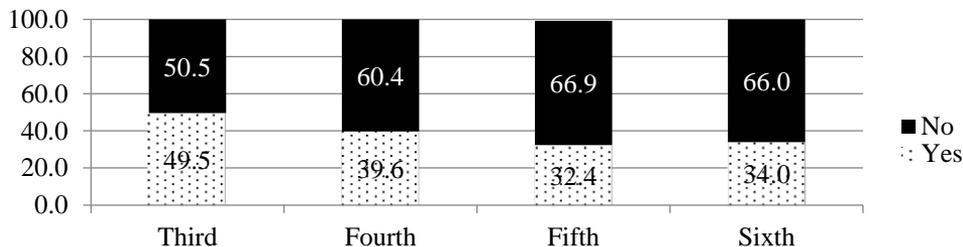
The questionnaire for children - schoolchildren, pupils of III, IV, V and VI grades of the mentioned two primary schools consisted of two parts: the first part consisted of a questionnaire of 15 questions, while the second part consisted of an appendix of 15 sentences - a statement where the child should have chosen one of the five options offered. The questionnaire for schoolchildren was printed in colour, and at the end of the questions, it had an additional part for entertainment - as a small incentive for schoolchildren who would fill it out ahead of time. In accordance with the objectives of the research, in this paper, we have chosen questions related to the examination of the impact of advertising messages on children up to 10 years of age and on children older than ten years of age, the purchase of branded products under the influence of advertising messages and the dissatisfaction of children as consumers due to unethical advertising.



**Figure 1.** The size of the sample across school grades  
Source: the authors' study

It is important to mention that before the survey, the necessary permits were obtained from the principals and psychologists of these schools in order to respect ethical principles during the process of researching children. Moreover, in the introductory part of the questionnaire, a precise explanation is given for what purposes the research is conducted.

### Data Analysis



**Figure 2.** Pupils' preference to watch/listen to commercials  
(per grade - legend: third grade - nine years, fourth grade - ten years, fifth grade - eleven years and sixth grade - twelve years old child)  
Source: the authors' study

Most children do not enjoy watching/listening to commercials (65.7%). Also, with age, the number of children who like to watch commercials decreases slightly - younger children generally prefer to watch commercials compared to older ones. Girls and boys, on the other hand, equally like to watch advertisements.

The degree of attractiveness of a certain product in children will not increase with the frequency of display of a given advertisement, indicating the importance and significance of the initial impression after the advertisement. In other words, the development of critical thinking in children when it

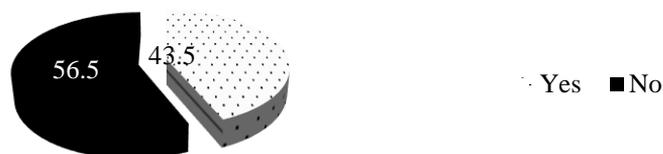
comes to advertising should not diminish the effectiveness of the same message in order to create a desire in toddlers to buy the product that is being advertised.

When it comes to attitudes towards the purpose of advertisements, the largest percentage of children believe that advertisements influence them more to ask their parents to buy the products shown in the advertisements (about 48%). Approximately every third child believes that commercials help to learn more about what is being advertised. About 12% of children think that advertisements make them believe what the advertisement shows.

It is considered that the information in advertisements intended for children is generally insufficient and inadequate when it comes to educating the youngest about the advertised product/service (Bandyopadhyay et al., 2001). Children are very often unaware that certain information is missing within the advertisement, so that their ability to gain a complete picture of the advertised product is limited. Interestingly, children who watch the targeted advertising message choose the advertised product more often than those who did not watch the advertisement. Research has shown that the effect of an 'advertised product' does not linger long in a child's mind after he or she has seen an advertisement (Arendt et al., 2015).

There are certain differences in the understanding of the purpose of advertising, when it comes to children of different ages. With age, the frequency of understanding that advertisements serve to learn new things decreases slightly. In later childhood, after the 10th year of the child's life, she/he is considered to be in a state of a better understanding of the effect of advertising. At that age, children can already understand the convincing effect of advertising (Rozendaal et al., 2010).

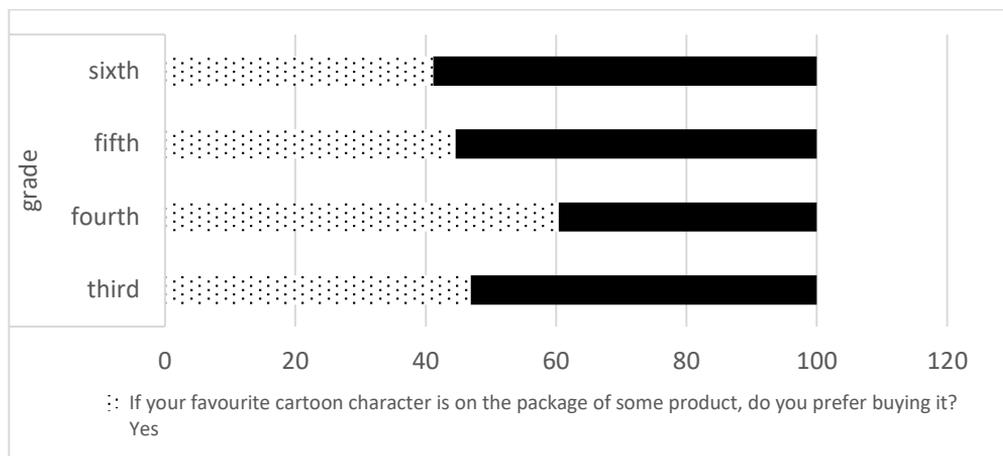
On the other hand, pupils in the fifth year of study stand out because they feel to a lesser extent that they learn basic information about products through advertisements, compared to third-grade pupils. Also, children who attend the fifth grade believe more that advertisements primarily aim to convince them to buy the advertised product (compared to children attending the third grade).



**Figure 3.** The preference of pupils to purchase the product if a favourite cartoon character is on the packaging of one of the products.

Source: the authors' study

Modern propagandists today extremely 'trade' children's emotions and turn them into profits for the companies they work for. One experiment with children aged 7 to 12 showed that children are more likely to respect and love a particular product they have come across through some interaction (e.g. video games) than they would if they were just watching an ad for that same product. On the other hand, if the interaction precedes the advertisement, i.e. has a combined effect on children's awareness of a given product, the child will continue to show interest in the promoted product (Reijmersdal et al., 2012). In recent times, brands require additional promotion and confirmation of small consumers on social networks as well. Namely, it has been proven that through the confirmation of a favourite product through social networks, children and young people strengthen their identity and sympathise with all the symbols that a given brand publicly proclaims (Bernritter et al., 2016).



**Figure 4.** The preference of pupils across various grades to purchase the product if a favourite cartoon character is on the packaging of one of the products.

(per grade - legend: third grade - nine years, fourth grade - ten years, fifth grade - eleven years and sixth grade - twelve years old child).

Source: the authors' study

Most children do not prefer products with their favourite cartoon character on their packaging (56.5%). Girls and boys alike prefer products with their favourite cartoon characters. However, the analysis of age differences shows that with age, this preference decreases slightly; younger pupils prefer to buy products with the favourite cartoon character on their packaging, compared to older pupils.

From a marketing point-of-view, there are different forms of relationships that a child forms about well-known brands that often use some of the above-mentioned cartoon characters in the promotion. Research has confirmed that the strongest relationship is in the situation when the child independently decides on the purchase of the desired branded product - without the influence or under the discreet influence of parents, peers or teachers (Rodhain & Aurier, 2016).

Some authors sharply criticise marketing experts who in advertisements create the world of consumerism as directly as possible and promote consumption for the world of the youngest (Potts et al., 2012). Lack of life experience and cognitive development level significantly affect the fact that children are confused or do not even fully understand the advertising message sent to them. Some of the commercials go so far as to openly suggest through an advertising message the following: "Ask your mom about ..." or "Your parents are unfamiliar with this toy. You have to tell them ...". All these tactical, very-well-thought-out buying suggestions only create additional pressure for both sides, both children and parents. Developing a materialistic and consumerist attitude as a value in the youngest increases the rate of dissatisfaction due to unfulfilled expectations and can produce various risky behaviours in children (Matovic, 2012).

Through commercial messages, children gain the belief that they need various advertised products, all in order to be popular among their peers and happy. The impression is that the ultimate goal of the advertising message is manipulative information through which the child should feel the need for and want the advertised product. It is hard to believe in the reality of the opposite that any other industry would invest money to convince the youngest through an advertising message that none of the advertised products in the field of children's industry should be happy, healthy and smart.

Constant exposure to shopping pressures within advertising messages creates a very intense correlation with material values (Malik & Wojdyski, 2014). On the other hand, it is assumed that the child's previous consumer experience leads to a better product/service choice with each subsequent purchase. Materialism also influences the making of the most optimal children's decision, but only when impulsive purchases from the youngest are excluded (Cakarnis & D'Alessandro, 2015). This type of shopping for children can even lead to the possession of a product that is harmful to health (Blades et al., 2014).

Toddlers are often in a situation to reject a product whose purchase they were previously very interested in, so they express their feelings through visible disappointment, anger, sadness and frustration. This is because everything is indicated in order to have a product that will make the child's world more beautiful, better, more creative and tucked away. Children react positively when a certain product makes them popular or even a favourite in society, when they are beautiful, praised and happy.

Advertising is thought to affect children in a way that often makes them feel disappointed (Lemis, 2008): i) by presenting social, spiritual and material achievements for which it is not realistic for the child to fulfil them (regardless of the fact how much money would have to be set aside for the purchase of the desired product); ii) in the way they portray children who are placed in one of the subordinate positions (an example is the placement of children in relation to adults, members of a minority in relation to the majority group, etc.), and iii) in a situation when the characters shown in the advertisement are presented as incomparably more beautiful and successful than those who follow them through some of the media.

Numerous psychologists warn of an increase in children's materialistic values and an increased anxiety rate due to unfulfilled expectations (unrealised purchases of advertised products despite pressure on parents).

It has been reported that perceptual skills develop in early childhood and adolescence periods (Aykanat, & Omeroglu, 2021). Recent experiences regarding children and the media indicate that the focus is gradually shifting from media-centric to experiential-centric in the youngest, which aims to point out the overall diversity in the multimedia offer (Woodfall & Zezulcova, 2016). Educational studies and pedagogical practice are considered today among the most effective tools for children's engagement on media issues in general. Only in this way can trust in the media be credibly restored and a significant interactive dialogue be established between the sender of the message (media house) and the recipient of the message - children and youth (Parry, 2014).

The answers from Table 2 unequivocally show that as many as 203 (42.21%) surveyed children confirmed that they completely or partially disagreed with the fact that the world shown in the advertisement corresponds to the world in reality, and as many as 120 (24.95%) children were undecided about the answers, which leads to the conclusion of dissatisfaction and disappointment after watching the commercial.

**Table 2.** The world depicted in the advertisement completely corresponds to the real world

|                    |        | The world depicted in the advertisement completely corresponds to the world in reality |                      |               |                    |                     | Total (%) |
|--------------------|--------|--|----------------------|---------------|--------------------|---------------------|-----------|
|                    |        | Completely inaccurate  | Partially inaccurate | I do not know | Partially accurate | Completely accurate |           |
| Grade of the child | third  | 31   | 14                   | 29            | 15                 | 12                  | 100       |
|                    | fourth | 28   | 19                   | 30            | 19                 | 4                   | 100       |
|                    | fifth  | 18   | 21                   | 21            | 30                 | 10                  | 100       |

|                               |       |     |    |     |     |    |     |
|-------------------------------|-------|-----|----|-----|-----|----|-----|
|                               | sixth | 22  | 19 | 22  | 31  | 6  | 100 |
| <b>Total no. of responses</b> |       | 115 | 88 | 120 | 118 | 40 | 481 |

Source: the authors' study

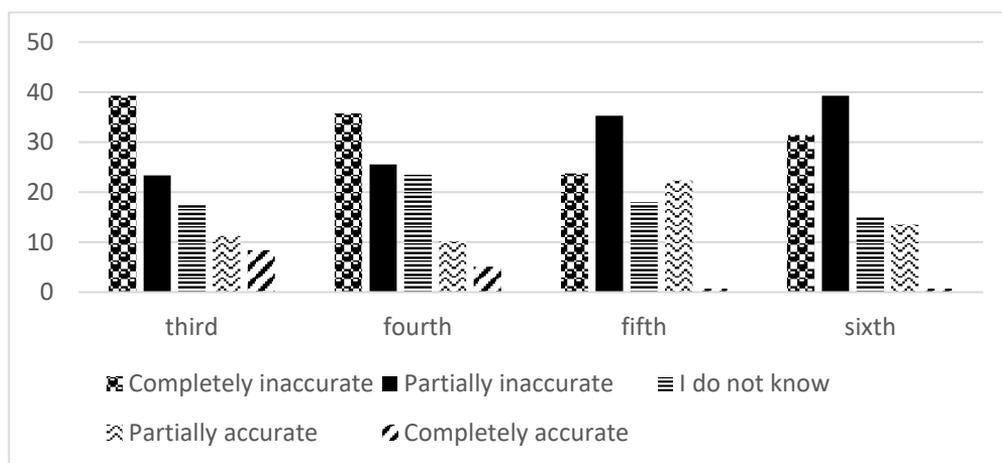
**Table 3.** Results of the Chi-Square Test

|                                     | Value  | df | Asymptotic Significance (2-sided) |
|-------------------------------------|--------|----|-----------------------------------|
| <b>Pearson Chi-Square</b>           | 23.814 | 12 | 0.022                             |
| <b>Likelihood Ratio</b>             | 24.623 | 12 | 0.017                             |
| <b>Linear-by-Linear Association</b> | 3.109  | 1  | 0.078                             |
| <b>No. of Valid Cases</b>           | 481    |    |                                   |

Source: the authors' study

The chi-square statistic is 23.8138, while the p-value is .02156. The Chi-square test confirms that variables are not independent of each other and that there is a difference across pupils' grades and the level of trust they have in commercials.

It is believed that this type of feeling develops in children when there is an inability to buy the desired and previously advertised product/service. Melancholy that leads to disappointment in the youngest is mainly manifested in the following circumstances (Nicolini et al., 2017): when the child cannot come into possession of the product he personally believes he needs and when the child bought a certain product after the expressed motivation, but in the meantime, it turned out that the product did not meet something stated in the advertisement.



**Figure 5.** The level of trust in advertisements evaluated when a pupil is asked if he/she completely believes in it  
Source: the authors' study

About 18.2% of the total surveyed children have confidence in the veracity of the advertisement, which is the exact percentage accounted for by neutral respondents. In comparison, the majority (63.7%) do not believe what they see or hear in the advertisement. We conclude that the vast majority of respondents do not believe in or are indifferent vis-à-vis advertisements. Moreover, approximately one-third of children believe that everything shown in advertisements is false. Materialism is already widely seen as part of consumer society, while advertising is a supporting tool. Through advertising messages, various forms of potential consumption and the way of life are promoted. Advertising message scenarios are consciously based on consumption, where it presupposes a solution to some of the needs in everyday life. In that sense, advertising messages addressed to the youngest can skilfully conclude that the only way to live a happy and fulfilled life is to buy and consume advertised products and services.

### Conclusion

Verification of the hypotheses presented in the research can be provided. Our study shows that children over the age of ten are independent consumers and are cognitively able to recognise the persuasive influence that the media can have on them. They can react violently if the product does not respond to the image shown in the advertisement.

The purchase of branded products (56.5%) is not of special importance to children. However, a more detailed analysis that can compare the results of younger and older pupils, speaks in favour of the fact that younger pupils (children aged nine and ten) compared to older friends (children aged eleven and twelve) prefer to buy branded products. Also, the results of the research showed that with the increase in age, the number of children who like to follow advertisements decreases, namely younger schoolchildren do it more often than older peers.

Comparing the world in the advertising message and the one in real life can lead a child to overall dissatisfaction. About 15% of the surveyed children of primary school age believe that the world shown in the advertisement is very real and corresponds to the one in real life. An optimistic 75% of the answers favour the fact that children do not believe everything shown in the advertisement sent to them.

The manuscript explores the possible impact of a branded product during the final purchase, monitoring, and selection of media by children, the attitude towards advertising by the youngest consumers, and examines consumerist and materialist attitudes in children especially caused by advertising. Creating a unique communication strategy of a company operating in the market of children's products and services makes an important difference in relation to the general communication strategy. The application of the model of integrated marketing communications to the youngest implies respect for ethical principles, rules, and codes in performing all marketing activities aimed at the youngest.

The limitation of this study is that we examine only two schools, and the sample includes schoolchildren of only four grades. Future research should deal with the influence of other interactive media in advertising by focusing primarily on the dominant role of social networks on the Internet. In addition, a parental role could be evaluated when their children access media from the viewpoint of selecting media/media channels or temporal monitoring of the same.

It is recommended to start media education at primary school age in order to achieve adequate media literacy. Only after the possible media influences are precisely defined, it is possible to analyse the proper reception, recognition, and interpretation of the media influence. The Law on Consumer Protection in paragraph 16, which refers to consumer education and information, advocates that the curriculum of primary and secondary education includes media literacy (Law on Consumer Protection, 2014).

The research on the impact of advertising messages on school children through age, branded products, and trust has confirmed the significance of intensifying media literacy in schools. Media education is essential for children and young people, primarily because of media demystification via positive critical attitudes and the evaluation of media messages. Thanks to pedagogical support, children in schools would be provided with an adequate understanding of action media in today's diversified society.

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