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Advertising to Children: A Qualitative Investigation of the Effect of Different Advertising Formats on Children's Attitudes towards Sports' Brands

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Abstract:
This paper aims at investigating the different advertising formats, which children are exposed to and how children perceive these formats, in addition to, drawing a comparison on how each of these advertising formats affect children's attitudes towards the advertised brand. The paper is an exploratory research that follows a qualitative approach by conducting in depth interviews with a convenient sample of 20 children and two focus groups to provide insights about children's exposure to different advertising formats and how they affect them. The findings showed that children are exposed to various formats of advertising such as TV, online advertisements, and product placement in games and movies and are attracted more to creative media advertising, which are the product placement techniques and that children have high influence on their parents' decisions, also they formulate their own brand preferences and the characteristics of the brand they want to own. Finally, children above 12 years can formulate critical arguments about the advertising formats and messages. This paper contributes to literature by providing insights and comparisons on how different advertising formats may have different effects on children. It is also conducted in almost unresearched context, which is sports brands. It also provides insights from Egypt, which is likely to generate unique findings being an emerging market.

Keywords: Advertising, traditional media advertising, creative media advertising, children attitudes, product placement

1. Introduction

Children constitute a fast growing and attractive market for marketers of many products due to the increasing effect they have on their parents, the changing characteristics of today's children and the accessibility they have to various media and information platforms raise their demand for many products. Children are exposed to advertising for a long time and advertising to children has encountered important changes and improvements whether in the media used to target children or the design of the advertisements, this in turn attracts the attention of both marketers and researchers on how this can have an effect on children and also on the advertised brands (Blades et al., 2014).Advertising is defined as any non-personal communications of product related information directed from a specified source which is the brand's marketer to the consumers to create awareness, trigger purchase intentions or create brand identities (Belch and Belch, 2017). Marketers are giving high importance to advertising for the role it can play in improving their brand by giving more emphasis on how to improve their advertising techniques to cope with the increasing competition and the changing interests of their target segments (Bamfoet al., 2019). Advertising media is encountering many changes that led to the development of new creative advertising formats that depend on creative media strategies such as product placement and in game advertising to grab audience attention and to help marketers overcome the cluttered advertising environment, moreover, there is a shortage in the studies investigating the effect of the new advertising formats on consumers' attitudes (Rauwers, et al., 2018).

Children are becoming a target audience for a variety of advertising formats from the traditional TV advertising to branded entertainment techniques that include different types of product placementwhich integrate the advertising messages in entertainment contexts aiming to grab children's attention and create favorable behaviors towards the placed brands (De Paw, et al., 2018). Nowadays children are presenting an important target market they are responsible for billions of dollars of spending annually in addition to their influence on their parents purchase decisions. According to statista.com (2018), advertising expenditure in the Middle East and Africa would amount to 24.25 billion U.S. dollars in 2017, up from 23.1 billion a year earlier, which would constitute a growth rate of five percent annually. In addition, data on advertisement expenditure in the Middle East and North Africa in 2017 by medium according to Zenith Media in 2017

showed that television advertisement spending in the Middle East and North Africa amounted to 740 million U.S. dollars. On the other hand, kids digital advertising spending in 2016 amounted to 0.6 billion U.S. dollars, while non-digital ad expenditures that year reached 3.4 billion. This increased the importance of studying how children exposure to this wide range of advertising formats can affect their attitude towards the advertised brands to aid marketers in identifying the most effective formats when targeting children and to provide insights about the Egyptian children's attention to advertising and the way it affects them as despite the increasing exposure of children to new commercial communication formats, the majority of the studies focused on television advertising, which raises the importance to study other advertising techniques and also that majority of advertising to children's studies are conducted in US (Eagle& Dahl,2018,Blades et al.,2014, Verhellenet al.,2014 and Liet al.,2014).

2. Literature Review

Children have been targeted by marketers since a long time as they are treated not only as a segment that purchase products directly but also as influencers who have an increasing effect on their parents purchase decisions (Hudders and Cauberghe, 2018). Children are targeted by marketers using advanced advertising techniques and sophisticated messages that include imagination and exaggeration of products' features in addition to using creative advertisements that depend on attractive appeals and images in order to create the highest impact on them (Blades, et al., 2014). On the other hand, advertising messages are not easily understood by children as they should have the needed cognitive abilities to comprehend the information provided in the advertisements and the children's ability to understand the advertising nature of what they are exposed to (Owen, et al, 2014). Similarly, many children trust what they see in the advertisements and accordingly want to own the advertised products and this increase if they see their favorite character or celebrity in the advertisements this encourages children to ask their parents to buy similar products (Bamfoet al., 2019). The advertising techniques developed to target children are encountering continuous developments whether by the creation of new advertising media such as online advertising platforms or new formats of product placements such as in game placements, or by increasing creativity in the advertisements' design to make them more attractive, memorable and effective (De Jans, et al., 2019).

2.1. Traditional versus New Advertising Formats used for Targeting Children

Traditional advertising formats represented in using TV advertising has been facing a decrease in their effectiveness resulted from the increasing clutter in the advertising environment that led to advertising avoidance by the audience, this in turn motivated marketers to look for new creative advertising formats to grab audience attention, break through the clutter and decrease advertising avoidance (Cauberghe and De Pelsmacker, 2007 and Eagle and Dahl, 2018). Advertising designed for children can take many forms from traditional TV, radio and print advertisements with TV being the most effective format when targeting children. (Nassar and Zein, 2012). New creative formats were developed to target children that merge creativity with advertising and placing the advertising messages in entertainment contexts like games and movies (Verhellen, et al., 2014).The new advertising formats are further developed by making use of the increasing children exposure and use of online media and technological devices such as smart phones, this provides a great opportunity to marketers to increase their reach to children through online platforms not only TV (Li, et al., 2014). The new formats are characterized by the longer exposure time than the old formats and the high integration between advertising messages and entertainment contents, which can lead to the creation of favorable attitude towards the advertised products (Hudderset al., 2016). The traditional advertising formats aim mainly at delivering product related information hoping that the multiple exposures to the advertisements will create positive responses, but the new formats such as product placement depend on entertaining the audience hoping that the interest in the format will be transferred to the advertised brand (De Pauw, et al., 2018)

2.1.1. TV Advertising

Watching TV is the main activity children do in their free time and the time spent on watching TV is bigger than the time they spend in studying which accordingly make children exposed to large number of advertisements (Nassar and Zein, 2012). Adding to this that TV is the first media used by children when they are very young even in their first year, and the time spent in watching TV increases with children age that can account for 25 hours per week when children reach the age of 6 (Castonguay,2014). This consequently made the majority of researchers about advertising to children focus on TV advertising more than other formats as it also had the largest advertising spending (Blades, et al., 2014). TV advertising allows for the use of music, visuals and other elements that grabs children's attention and by repetition their familiarity with the advertising and the advertised brands increases (Li, et al., 2014). Moreover, TV advertising has an edge over other traditional advertising formats as it allows for the use of visual effects, musical content and emotional appeals that increase its entertaining nature and makes it more attention grabbing and hard to avoid by children.

2.1.2. Product Placement Formats

Product placement is defined as the insertion of an advertising message in entertainment content such as television program, a movie or a game where the product can actively be used by the main character of the content or just passively inserted (Williams, 2015). Product placement is increasingly becoming a successful industry that increases by 30% in an annual basis in US and the products placed in movies and other contents are reaching audience from many countries around the globe, product placement is also developed to include new formats such as video games and to use online platforms such as Facebook and YouTube (Eagle and Dahl, 2018).Product placement has been widely used to target

children as when they see a brand while watching an interesting movie it grabs their attention and make them more involved with the brand (Blades, et al., 2014).

A flourishing format of product placement used by marketers is in-game placement which is the inclusion of the advertised brand in a game in order to create a highly entertaining context around the brand and this in turn creates link between the brand and the context of the game which can lead to the development of favorable brand image and this can be improved if the brand is used by a famous celebrity inside the game such as famous athletes in sports games (Waigunyand Terlutter, 2010).Product placement in games can take several forms from passive placement of the brand inside the game or by active placement in which the brand is an important part of the game whichincreases the children interaction with the brand,as well as the exposure time (Williams, 2015). In the same vein, due to the change in the children media consumption and their increasing use of online media, this led to the development ofnew creative way of in game placement which is called "advergame" which is an online game that is primarily designed around a brand, where children can play the brand game online and this reduces their ability to identify the advertising intent of this format, create high engagement with the brand and also reduce the advertising avoidance as the whole game is designed around the brand (Staiano and Calvert, 2014).Consequently advergames are effective in creating high levels of connections with the brand and it is gaining children likability more than other formats and in turn help marketers create positive effect on children, all these reasons make this format an interesting field for both marketers and researchers to better understand its effectiveness (De Jans, et al., 2019).

2.2. The Effect of Different Formats on Children's Attitudes towards the Advertised brands

Attitude is defined as an implicit combination of consumers' beliefs, emotions and behaviors towards specific stimulus it represents consumers' evaluations and is divided into three components the first component is the cognitive component which represents the way people think and their beliefs, second is the affective component, which represents the way people feel and the third component is the behavioral component which represents the way people act or behave towards a certain stimulus(Hawkins et al., 2018 and Razzaque, 2019). Previous researches on advertising to children found that exposing children to different advertisements affect their attitudes and behavioral intentions towards the advertised brand (Opree, et al., 2014). As the different advertising formats affect children's opinions and feelings which can be assessed by children's ability to recall the advertised brand, to what extent they like the brand and whether they will ask their parents to buy the advertised brand or not (Pauwet al., 2018 and De Janset al., 2019).

Previous studies found that watching TV advertisements affect children's brand preferences and their attitudes towards the advertised brand(Castonguay, 2014 and Blades, et al., 2014). This is explained by the fact that when children watch advertisements on TV, they allocate all their cognitive abilities to the advertisement itself as it is isolated from any content, they watch compared to other formats such as product placement (Vanwesenbeecket al., 2017). Moreover, the traditional TV advertising provides children with information about the products and also entertains them due to the creative ideas, pictures and design used for TV advertisements (Bamfoet al., 2019). As for the effect of using product placement formats, according to the excitation transfer theory, when children are highly engaged and excited in the product placement format (game or a movie), this excitement is transferred to the brand placed in this content and this affects children's attitudes towards the brand (Waiguny and Terlutter, 2010 and Staiano and Calvert, 2014).

Moreover,having the brand used by the main character in the movie delivers positive information about the brand and the positive emotions elicited from the movie is transferred to the brand placed in the movie (Gibson et al., 2014). As for product placement in games it helps increasing children involvement in and interaction with the brand and accordingly raises the brand recall in addition to that children are busy playing the game which leads to the decrease of advertising avoidance as the brand is an integral part of what they do (Staiano and Calvert, 2014).Different advertising formats are found to have different effects on children, but previous studies focused mainly on few formats and ignore the effect of other formats such as product placement in movies (Eagle and Dahl, 2018). Moreover, studies about the effect of creative media advertising revealed that using the new creative formats lead to more positive brand attitudes compared to traditional media in other words they lead to higher brand recall, better emotional responses and more positive behavioral responses (Rauwerset al., 2018).

3. Research Objectives

After reviewing the extant literature on advertising to children and the different advertising formats used to target children and the previously investigated research contexts. The researchers selected sports' brands to be the context of this research as this product category is intensively used by children, marketers of sports brands are using all types of advertising formats to target children and allocating huge budget to advertising and lastly this context has not been investigated before as most of the previous studies about advertising to children were applied on food products, accordingly, this research aims at achieving the following research objectives;

- RO1: To identify the different advertising formats children are exposed to for sports brands.
- RO2: To know the most preferred advertising formats for children and the reasons for their preference.
- RO3: To understand the effect of different formats on children attitude towards sports brands.

4. Methodology

A Qualitative study was conducted which is defined as an exploratoryresearch type which depends on small sample and its main goal is to provide consumers' insights and deep understanding of their behaviors, this design includes many approaches that allow the respondents to freely express their opinions in details such as in depth interviews and focus groups (Malhotra et al., 2017). The researchers applied a qualitative design that aims at gaining insights from children

about their advertising exposure, preferences and how advertising affects their brand attitudes. The researchers first conducted in-depth interviews with a convenient sample of 20 children from different genders and ages 12 boys and 8 girls, the age group of them are from (8 to 13) and second two focus groups were conducted with two groups of children. Before conducting the interviews, the researchers took parents approval for their children participation and the interviews were conducted in clubs in Cairo and Giza such as WadiDegla and El Ahly sports clubs. As for the focus groups they were conducted with two groups of children, consisted of 10 and 12 children from the age 9 to 14 from both genders. The children were recruited after getting their parents' approvals while they were participating in a summer program in a private university each group of children were encouraged to participate in a group discussion and opinion sharing experience. As for the sample size the researchers depended on the theoretical sampling guidelines, as the data that had been collected and analyzed guided the further sampling' recruiting until no new data revealed(Vogt et al., 2014).

5. Results

The researchers started the interviews and focus groups by asking children about the types of advertisements they watch, all children stated that they see advertising on TV but not for sports brands and the majority of the advertisements they see on TV are related to food products, most of children especially those from age 10 and above are watching advertisements online while they play games online or watching videos on YouTube. Children are motivated to watch the advertisements on TV if they found them attractive i.e. include songs, animated characters, and their favorite celebrities or if the advertisements are humorous. Children above 12 are not interested in watching TV and they prefer watching what they want online using their tablets or smart phones explaining this preference by stating that not all videos and programs they want to watch are aired on TV also they prefer to watch them at their preferred time. Accordingly for the type of advertisements children prefer, they mainly prefer online advertising whether traditional video advertising or seeing the brand in a game or used by a celebrity in a movie or program explaining that online advertisements give them the opportunity to skip the advertisements if they are not interested to watch them, on the other hand they are attracted to creative advertisements specially for sports' brands advertisements which feature their favorite celebrities like Messy or Mohamed Salah.

From the interviews the researchers found that children pay attention to advertisements if they are related to or part of something, they like to watch such as an interesting movie, game, program or featuring their favorite celebrities. On the other hand, only 6 of the interviewed children don't recognize that games can be a form of advertisements as the majority stated that they see many brands while playing and some of them complain from seeing the brand many times while playing and this makes them distracted from the game and this is not interesting as some brands are not related to what they experience in the games. All boys are attracted to and play sports games such as FIFA and NBA but for girls only three of them like sports games and they are not interested to play them as they like other types of games rather than sports. The majority of the children (14 children in the interviews and 20 in the focus groups) pay attention to what their favorite player or celebrity wears and like to own the same outfits or brands especially if they are their favorite athletes especially if they play the same sport for example; (a child, 11 years old) said that he plays basketball and he wears a certain brand (Under Armour) which is wore by famous players of this sport so he wants to wear it while playing.From the focus groups the most played games by children are; FIFA, Fortnight, Dream league, WWE and basketball and there is gender difference with regard to football games preference as it is preferred by boys not girls. The majority of the children are highly aware of the existence of advertising content in the game and they said that they see brands such as Nike, Adidas and New Balance while playing and 7 of them are aware of the context in which the brands are placed as they mentioned that celebrities like Messy and Salah wear certain brands in the FIFA game.

The majority of the children showed favorable attitude towards in- game placements as they think that it is interesting specially when they select the brand and its features while they are playing the game as one child said that he customized the design of Salah shoes before start the game. Children have varying opinions regarding whether they prefer the brand in the game or not and some of them really understand that it is advertising not a part of the game so they are not affected by this practice, other children believe that seeing brands in the game made them like it and remember it in the future and if it is related to their favorite player they would like to own it.When asking the children about whether they recognize sports brands like Nike in movies, the majority said no as they mainly concentrate on the movie and prefer superhero movies which do not include sports brands, on the other hand, the majority were paying attention to certain brands in movies which are mainly automobile brands specially when they are important part of the movie such as fast and furious movies.

The main results of the interviews and focus groups are that children preferences are shifting from traditional TV advertising to new formats especially in game placements and this increase when they interact with the brand in the game, children have wide exposure to brands through mainly the social media and this made them formulate their own criteria when selecting a certain brand such as the design, the use of the brand by their favorite sports player and also their parents and friends who help them in choosing what suits them. Moreover, children are attracted to creative advertisements regardless of the format and easily recall and like the brand if they like the advertisements.

6. Conclusion

The researchers concluded that Children are exposed to various formats of advertising such as TV, online advertisements and product placement in games and movies with TV being the least format children exposed to for sports' brands and the majority of children select what they want to see based on both entertainment and information benefits so the first research objective is achieved by knowing the different advertising formats children are exposed to for sports brands. Children are attracted to the entertaining features of the advertisements such as the music, song, celebrities and

funny ideas and are attracted more to advertisements using celebrities and are fond of the idea of using specific brand in a game or online video and majority of children are aware of the advertising nature specially of the TV advertising, but not all of them recognized product placement formats. Moreover children prefer creative media advertising such as product placement and advergames more than the traditional media and the higher the engagement with the brand the higher the liking of the advertising format, accordingly the second objective which is identifying the most preferred advertising formats for children and the reasons for this preference is achieved.

Finally regarding the effect of different formats on children attitude towards sports' brands, the results revealed that children are emotionally attached to certain brands and they recall these brands after seeing the brands used by their favorite players such as Mohamed Salah and they are mainly exposed to this by product placements in both games and TV shows and majority of the children stated that they usually ask their parents to buy the brand used by those celebrities, moreover children know new products from TV advertisements and if they like them they ask their parents to buy them which indicate that the different advertising formats affect children brand attitudes differently. A valuable insight is that children now are having an increased influence on their parents' decisions specially when they grows older as they are more exposed to information and experiences about several brands which make them formulate their own brand preferences and the characteristics of the brand they want to own in addition to that children above 12 years can formulate critical arguments about the advertising formats and messages by attacking the advertising messages or disregard them.

7. Implications and Suggestions for Further Research

This research provided insights about Egyptian children's exposure to different advertising formats and how they affect children's attitudes towards the advertised brands differently. Accordingly, marketing executives of sports brands can make use of this research when allocating their advertising budgets by focusing more on creative media advertising that are viewed online especially that the children use of online platforms increases after the Covid19 pandemic which resulted in shifting the whole educational process to e-learning platforms. Marketers also need to match the characteristics of the advertisements with the children preferences to create favorable brand attitudes by using attractive visuals to grab children attention to the advertising content, when using product placement in movies it is recommended to place it in an active scene and let the main character use the brand, when placing brands in games it is recommended to make the placement more interactive and create children engagement with the brand otherwise they may not recall or like it, finally when using traditional TV advertising format it is recommended to increase the creativity of the advertisements by using celebrities, songs or famous characters to make the children interested in watching the advertisement.

The exploratory nature of this research doesn't allow for generalization of findings to the whole children population in Egypt also limited to children from 8 years and above. Accordingly these limitations led to the recommendation of various areas for future research, future research can continue the same study by applying quantitative experimental design to measure the possible different impacts of the different advertising formats on children brand attitudes using large sample of children, researchers can investigate the effect of the advertisements' design on children brand attitudes by exposing children to different advertisements from the same format and measure their different effects. Other research can be conducted to compare between different types of traditional advertising formats such as TV and radio or to compare between different types of creative media advertising such as in game placement and advergames.

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